

## *Welcome Back to Hogwarts*

### **Table of Contents**

Chapter One.....	3
Chapter Two.....	21
Chapter Three.....	39
Chapter Four .....	60
Chapter Five .....	83
Chapter Six .....	107
Chapter Seven.....	139
Chapter Eight .....	167
Chapter Nine .....	198
Chapter Ten.....	219
Chapter Eleven .....	245
Chapter Twelve .....	275
Chapter Thirteen .....	293
Chapter Fourteen.....	324
Chapter Fifteen.....	353
Chapter Sixteen .....	382
Chapter Seventeen .....	410
Chapter Eighteen .....	444
Chapter Nineteen.....	471
Chapter Twenty.....	505
Chapter Twenty-One.....	527
Chapter Twenty-Two.....	556
Chapter Twenty-Three.....	590
Chapter Twenty-Four .....	619
Chapter Twenty-Five .....	646
Chapter Twenty-Six.....	682
Chapter Twenty-Seven.....	710
Chapter Twenty-Eight .....	745
Chapter Twenty-Nine .....	779

**Chapter Thirty..... 810**

## Chapter One

The mid-August sun was merciless. Hot and glaring off the surface of the clear water against his eyes behind his sunglasses. It was nothing like the heat of Britain, which was warm and gentle. No, this...this was an Ohio summer. Just like the past two months had been. Much too hot. Much too bright. Much too humid.

Sighing, he flipped the page in the latest copy of *American Wizard* and absently gazed at the moving advertisement for the latest model of Stallion, a broad-chested wizard zooming across the page and winking up from the glossy surface.

"Kurt, why don't you come swimming? You're being boring again."

Kurt sniffed and looked up from his magazine at the dark-skinned girl staring at him, her arms against the edge of the pool as she kicked lightly.

"I'm perfectly happy right here, Mercedes, thank you," he said, adjusting his sunglasses and turning his chair a little to move into the shade.

"All you do is sit under that umbrella all day. It's like you're scared of the sun."

Kurt glanced up at the Asian girl walking towards him around the pool and wringing her long, dark hair out.

"First off," Kurt said, sitting up in his chaise and cocking an eyebrow.

"It's a parasol, not an umbrella, Tina, there's a difference." Tina rolled her eyes as she picked up her towel. "Second, have you seen my skin? I burn like a piece of toast. The sun and I don't mix well, you know that."

Tina shook her head as she picked up her wand from her pile of clothes, glancing around briefly before flicking it and Conjuring a glass of lemonade, which she plucked from mid-air and sipped.

"Oh, I want one," Mercedes said, swimming to the ladder and climbing out of the pool, dripping water everywhere.

"Watch it!" Kurt hissed, drawing back as she walked passed him, flicking water at him from her hand with a smirk. "Also, I want one, too, Tina."

"Oh, don't bother saying please," Tina grumbled, flicking her wand and Conjuring two more lemonades, which she passed to them.

Kurt took a long drink of it, sighing and smacking his lips. "I'd rather have pumpkin juice," he said thoughtfully as he set the glass down. Both girls rolled their eyes.

"Hogwarts has ruined you," Mercedes said, sitting down in the chair next to him as Tina toweled herself dry.

"Yes, well, it does that," Kurt muttered, turning back to his magazine. "Did Blaine call you yet today?" Tina said as she flicked her wand to dry herself completely.

"Not yet," Kurt said, trying to sound as though he wasn't as anxious as he was. "He usually calls before he goes to bed."

"You just live for these Friday night phone calls, don't you?" Mercedes said, smirking again.

Kurt gave her a dead-panned look, lowering his sunglasses so she could see his blue eyes.

"Chill," she said, holding up her hands in surrender and laughing.

"You're going to see him Wednesday, aren't you?"

Kurt nodded, smiling at the thought. He'd been missing his boyfriend with a constant, horrible ache. But they'd been writing each other at least twice a week and Blaine called him every Friday night using the cell phone he'd begged his parents to buy him the day they'd left Hogwarts for the summer. Because of the cost of the calls, though, they were only granted a half hour conversation once a week.

"Going to see Mike?" Kurt said, looking up at Tina, who was wiggling into her shorts.

She nodded, smiling. "Mercedes, you should get ready if you want to see the movie, too."

Mercedes sighed heavily but stood up to get her things. "Sure you don't want to come, Kurt?" she called over her shoulder as she dried herself off and pulled her clothes over her bathing suit.

"Mhmm," Kurt said, wrinkling his nose as he turned the page to see a garishly colored advertisement for a new type of candy that Kurt was pretty sure were just a rip-off of the British wizards' Fizzing Whizbees.

"He'll be waiting for Blaine's call," Tina said, grinning.

"Of course," Mercedes said, slipping her wand in her purse.

Kurt pursed his lips and glared at both of them.

They laughed.

"Don't forget," Mercedes called over her shoulder as they moved around the side of the house. "We're staying over tomorrow for one last sleep-over before you go!"

"Couldn't forget if I tried, as many times as you two remind me," Kurt said.

They laughed again, shouting their goodbyes back to him as they disappeared from view.

Clucking his tongue, Kurt closed up his magazine and set it on the ground.

He stood, stretching and yawning, his bare chest and arms soaking in the warm sun as he picked up his lemonade and ambled into the house, draining the glass as he went.

His step-brother, Finn, was sitting on the couch, watching some football game he'd recorded from the previous night.

"Hey," Kurt said, walking past him towards the kitchen and setting his empty glass in the sink.

"Hey," Finn said, taking a bite from the sandwich he was holding. "Oh, you got a letter."

"What?" Kurt said, rounding on him and searching the counter.

"Yea, it's over by the sink," Finn said, glancing at him briefly before returning to his game.

Kurt turned and saw a thick envelope sitting on the counter beside the sink. His heart skipped happily when he recognized Blaine's handwriting.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Kurt snapped as he picked up the letter and slit the envelope open.

"You were busy," Finn replied, shrugging. "Sorry, dude," he mumbled as he caught the look on Kurt's face.

Kurt sighed, rolling his eyes as he pulled out the folded parchment. A photograph fluttered to the ground and he bent over to pick it up.

Turning it over, a broad grin split his face.

There was Blaine, his hazel eyes shining up at him as he laughed. His mother was standing next to him, hugging him tightly and occasionally kissing his cheek. Blaine was pointing to his chest, where a small badge engraved with the words "Head Boy" was pinned to his shirt.

Kurt let out a small squeal of excitement and turned to read the letter accompanying the picture.

*I'M HEAD BOY!*

*Sorry, I just really needed to let that out! Can you believe it? I just got the letter today. Mum and Dad are about ready to have a heart attack they're so excited. We're going out to celebrate tonight. Wish you could be here with us! But we can celebrate next week, right?*

*I still can't believe I get to see you Wednesday. WEDNESDAY! It's only six days away! Mum keeps having to tell me to calm down because I keep unpacking and repacking my bag (which has been ready in my bedroom for a week) to have something to do with myself.*

*Did Jeff and Nick send you that picture of them with the drummer of the Weird Sisters? I can't believe they actually got to meet him! I'm not a huge fan of the band, but still. And their hair...honestly, I don't know what's wrong with them. Ah, I'm becoming you now, love.*

*Have you gotten your letter yet for school? You should be getting it sometime today or tomorrow. I'm guessing it takes longer for overseas deliveries. I'm still going to call you Friday (It's Thursday now...hopefully you'll get this before I call, if not, ignore this) and I can't wait to hear your voice. I miss it so much and I wish we could*

*talk more. Those...what are they? Long-distance charges? Are ridiculous.*

*This is getting a bit long and Mum is yelling at me to hurry up so we can go out to eat.*

*I love you and I can't wait to see you Wednesday!*

*Blaine*

Kurt smiled, letting out another excited giggle as he looked at the picture again. If anyone deserved to be Head Boy, it was Blaine. He'd been through so much and still managed to stay put-together after it all.

"What's up?" Finn said, looking up at Kurt's laugh.

"Blaine's Head Boy," Kurt said, unable to stop grinning.

Finn gave him a blank look.

Kurt sighed. "It's just something for school. It's a big deal."

"Oh," Finn said, blinking. "That's...cool, I guess." He shrugged, returning to the television.

"Very cool," Kurt muttered, rolling his eyes.

Humming randomly, he climbed the stairs to his bedroom, moving to the bulletin board above his desk and pinning the picture of Blaine on it in the small amount of space that remained.

He smiled and paused to look over the pictures. There was one of Jeff and Nick, the two Ravenclaw Beaters, standing on either side of a man with wild-looking green hair. Jeff's blonde hair had been tipped in blue and Nick's brown hair was streaked with red. All three of them were pointing their wands at the camera and trying to look threatening, though they fell about laughing every now and then.

Next to this was one of his best friend Thad, the shy, quiet boy he'd barely known when he'd first started at Hogwarts the previous November who had become his closest confidant next to Blaine. Thad was standing next to his boyfriend, the Gryffindor Chaser Captain Flint—who Kurt had dated briefly the previous year.

Both of them were wearing sunglasses and swimming trunks, waves crashing on the beach in the background as Flint held Thad close under his arm and Thad blushed faintly, smiling as he rested his head against Flint's broad chest.

There were a dozen other photos of Blaine, Jeff and Nick, Thad and Flint, and one of Wes and David, the final two seventh-year Ravenclaws, with their girlfriends.

The photo album Jeff and Nick had given him earlier in the year was lying open on his desk to a picture of him and Blaine grinning and laughing at something Jeff and Nick had said.

Smiling, he touched the picture lightly, reaching up to finger the diamond pendant of the necklace Blaine had given him for Valentine's

Day, the small stone flashing brightly in the sun streaming through his window. His eagle owl, Pavarotti, was sleeping with his head under his wing in his cage by his bed.

He glanced down at the pocket-watch Flint had given him for his birthday and sighed. Blaine probably wouldn't be calling for another hour or two. It was four o'clock in Lima, which meant it was nine in Plymouth. Blaine usually called between ten and eleven.

Just as he was thinking he might take a nap to pass the time, his phone began ringing from his nightstand and he nearly knocked over his chair in his haste to answer it, stubbing his toe.

Jumping on one foot and swearing angrily, he picked up the phone, his stomach squirming when Blaine's name and picture flashed across the screen.

"Hey," he grunted, collapsing onto his bed and rubbing his foot.

"Bad time?" Blaine said, sounding nervous.

"No," Kurt said, wincing as he examined his toe. "I stubbed my toe."

"Aw, sorry, love," Blaine said. "I'd kiss it if I was there."

Kurt laughed, settling back on the pillows. "I know you would, you big sap."

There was a brief moment of silence where Kurt simply grinned and closed his eyes to listen to the sound of Blaine's breathing.

"I miss you," Blaine said softly, sounding morose. "I couldn't put off calling anymore. I just really needed to hear your voice."

Kurt smiled. "I miss you, too. Only a few more days though."

He could almost hear Blaine beaming through the phone. "I can't wait. I really can't, Mum is rolling her eyes at me for grinning like a complete pillock right now."

Kurt laughed. "So," he said after a moment. "Head Boy."

Blaine chuckled softly.

"I guess that means I'll have to listen to everything you tell me to do now, huh?" Kurt said in a mildly suggestive tone, smirking.

He heard Blaine moisten his lips and swallow. "Yea," he said in a suddenly low, rough voice. "It does.... Hold on."

Blaine covered the mouthpiece with his hand and said something to his parents. There was the sound of footsteps, the gentle opening and closing of a door, and the loud click of a lock.

Something rustled on the other line and Blaine was breathing in his ear again. "Are you alone?" Blaine muttered.

"Yea," Kurt said. "Why?"

"Do you want to try something?" Blaine breathed hoarsely.

"What?" Kurt said, frowning.

Blaine grunted softly. "I want you to imagine I'm touching you," he said, his breaths halting.

"W-what?" Kurt said, sitting up and glancing at the door.

Blaine let out a low groan. "Just do it," he hissed. "Trust me...it's bloody brilliant."

Kurt's eyes widened. "Blaine, are you...?"

"Mhmm," Blaine said, panting into the phone.

Kurt bit his lip for a moment before jumping up and hurrying to lock the door, closing his curtains and casting *Muffliato* so no one would hear him.

"Okay," he whispered nervously, lying down on his bed. "W-what should I do?"

Blaine laughed darkly. "I think you know," he said, his rough tone sending shivers down Kurt's spine. "Pretend it's me. Pretend I'm lying there with you, kissing your neck and rubbing you through...what are you wearing?"

"Swim trunks," Kurt said, feeling more nervous than he wished he was.

Blaine groaned at the thought.

"God, I can just imagine running my hands down that incredible chest of yours, all that pale, creamy skin. You're so fucking gorgeous." He let out a low moan. "And I'd just run my tongue down your stomach and wrap my hand around that amazing cock of yours and...Kurt, are you touching yourself?"

"Mhmm," Kurt gasped. How couldn't he with Blaine saying those things in that voice while Kurt knew he was touching himself on the other line? "Blaine, god, I...ugh...I wish it was you."

"Mmm, I know, love," Blaine grunted. "Soon, I promise. I'm going to spend hours just rediscovering that unbelievable body of yours. You're so sexy, I can't even stand it. I wish I had a photo of you."

"Blaine!" Kurt said, stilling his hand in disbelief.

"What?" Blaine said, his words becoming less steady as he neared his finish. "I do. You have...no idea how *hard* it's been without you here." The way Blaine said 'hard' made Kurt gulp and close his eyes as he started moving his hand again around himself, trying to imagine Blaine's strong, slightly calloused hand there instead.

"B-Blaine...oh, god, Blaine," Kurt whimpered, bucking his hips into his own hand.

"Go on, love," Blaine breathed shakily.

"I-I...Blaine...I'm..." He bit his lip to hold back the cry of ecstasy threatening to erupt from his chest as he came into his swim trunks. Blaine let out a low whine, calling Kurt's name as he too toppled over the edge at the thought of Kurt touching him on the other end of the line.



They both panted into the phone for a minute, a little stunned at what they'd just done. Which was strange given everything else they'd done together.

"That was amazing, love," Blaine gasped. Kurt heard the creak of bedsprings as he stood up and a muttered spell to clean himself off.

"Yea," Kurt whimpered. "I...why didn't we do this sooner?" It had been utter torture without Blaine simply being there, but without him to kiss or touch or hold...he'd been ready to explode for the past six weeks.

Blaine laughed as Kurt heard him collapse onto his bed.

"I didn't know if you'd want to or not," Blaine said, his voice a little muffled as Kurt imagined his face pressed against his pillow.

"Never actually crossed my mind," Kurt said thoughtfully as he reached for his wand to clean himself off. "Strangely enough."

Blaine let out a tired sigh. "I can't wait to see you Wednesday. I really do miss you. And not just for, you know, sex and all that."

"I know," Kurt said, smiling. "I love you."

"I love you," Blaine replied immediately.

Kurt stood up, flipping the phone on speaker as he moved around his room.

"Anymore thoughts as to what you want to do in London?" Kurt said as he slipped off his trunks and pulled on a pair of boxers and sweatpants. "My dad said we can pretty much roam around on our own after we have the first few days for 'family time'." He wrinkled his nose at the thought.

"Actually, I have something planned for Thursday," Blaine said, the smirk evident in his voice.

"Care to enlighten me?" Kurt said as he pulled on a t-shirt and lay back down, returning the phone to his ear and flipping it off speaker.

"No," Blaine said simply. "It's a surprise. But Finn isn't coming along."

"Hmm," Kurt said in a mock thoughtful voice. "Whatever could it be?"

Blaine laughed. "It's not that," he said. "But it *is* just for you and me. Besides, you still won't tell me what you have planned for Friday."

"Because it's a surprise," Kurt quipped, grinning as he picked up the three tickets lying on his bedside table.

*Tutshill Tornadoes vs. Appleby Arrows*

*Friday, August 30th, 7 pm*

*Crawley Stadium*

He'd written Blaine's parents and they'd helped him pay for the tickets for Blaine's birthday, which was on the twenty-ninth. He knew how jealous Blaine had been finding out that Flint had been to one of their earlier matches—he didn't tell Blaine that Flint had sent him a picture of him with the three Chasers of the team for fear he might die of

envy—and that he'd given up the chance to go to this one to spend time with Kurt.

As for bringing Finn, Kurt was sure he would enjoy it just as much seeing the wizarding side of the world. Plus, it would give their parents time to spend alone.

"Would it happen to have anything to do with my birthday present?"

Blaine asked, sighing.

"Oh, is it your birthday next week?" Kurt said, feigning surprise. "I must have forgotten."

Blaine chuckled. "You're a terrible liar, you know that?"

"I wouldn't say that if you still want your present, dear," Kurt said, smiling.

"My lips are sealed," Blaine said. He paused. "Until of course...well, you know." He laughed faintly, suggestively.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "You're such a teenage boy," he said, shaking his head.

"A teenage boy with repressed sexual urges that have been building up for six weeks," Blaine amended. "And don't pretend you haven't been suffering just as much."

Kurt sighed. "You know I have," he said. "I just don't have the strange need to talk about it every twelve seconds like you. Every time I get a letter from Thad about how he and Flint have done this or that I want to throttle him because I can't do the same with you."

"Have they...?" Blaine trailed off curiously.

Kurt snorted. "No," he said. "Thad still gets embarrassed any time they start moving beyond making out. And his mom walked in on them once kissing and I swear Flint wrote me a novel begging me to calm him down because he didn't want to do anything because he didn't want to get caught again."

Blaine cracked up on the other line. "How exactly did you become their sexual referee?"

"I have no idea," Kurt muttered, picking at his comforter absently. "I guess I'm just lucky like that."

Blaine laughed faintly.

They fell into comfortable silence, just happy to know the other was there on the other end of the line.

"I miss you," Kurt said, rolling onto his side and curling into a ball.

"I miss you, too," Blaine said heavily. "I...I didn't think it was possible to miss someone so much. It's like...I don't know...you know how people say their heart aches when they're away from the person they love? I thought it was kind of silly sounding but...it's true. It actually hurts when I think about the fact that I haven't kissed you in six weeks."

"I know," Kurt said, sighing. "Same here. And when I look out the window at night and I see my star...sometimes I end up just crying myself to sleep when I think about you."

Blaine let out a small sound of grief knowing that Kurt had been crying because of him. "Love, don't cry," he said gently. "I hate it when you cry and I definitely don't want you crying because of me. That's the opposite of what I should be doing to you."

"I know," Kurt said, sniffing as tears welled in his eyes. "I just miss you so much." He let out a stuttering breath as silent tears slid from his eyes onto the bed.

"Shh," Blaine said soothingly. "It's alright, love, don't cry. Just remember, I'm going to be holding you and falling asleep with you in six days. If your dad let's us sleep in the same bed, that is."

"I doubt he will," Kurt said miserably. "But I don't care, I need you to hold me like you did at school. It's horrible falling asleep without your arms around me. Everything feels colder and uncomfortable."

"I know," Blaine said, sighing. "I know, love, I hate it, too."

Kurt sniffed and wiped his eyes on the corner of his pillow. He heard a faint call on Blaine's end of the phone and Blaine cursed softly.

"I'm sorry," he said sincerely. "I have to go. Mum needs my help with something. It's been over half-an-hour, too."

"Okay," Kurt said, fresh tears springing to his eyes.

Blaine caught the slight shake in his voice. "Don't cry, Kurt, please," he said miserably. "I can't stand knowing you're crying."

Kurt sniffed. "I'm alright," he said even as he let out a low sob. "You need to go. I'll be okay."

"Love...don't, please," Blaine pleaded softly, sounding close to tears himself. "Just remember, I'll see you Wednesday."

"I know," Kurt said thickly.

"I love you," Blaine said firmly. "I love you so much, Kurt. More than anything."

"I love you, too," Kurt said, biting back another sob.

There was another call on the other line, a little louder this time. "I'm coming, Mum, hold on," Blaine cried in reply, holding the phone away from his mouth for a moment.

"Kurt?"

"Yea?"

"I'm so sorry, I really have to go, love," Blaine said, his voice trembling slightly.

"I know," Kurt said, nodding though he knew Blaine couldn't see him.

"I'll see you Wednesday," Blaine said.

"Okay," Kurt said, gulping.

"I love you," Blaine said, sounding desperate.

"I love you, too," Kurt gasped, shaking with sobs.

Blaine sighed sadly, sniffing faintly and then the line went dead.

Kurt burst into tears, throwing his phone across his bed and burying his face in his pillow. His whole body rocked with sobs.

He missed Blaine so much. Some days it wasn't too bad when he was distracted, though he was always thinking about him. Then there were times like this where his heart felt like it was breaking in his chest from lack of contact.

Despite their letters and calls, it simply wasn't the same as actually being together, as holding each other and kissing and touching and feeling Blaine's breath on his ear as he whispered 'I love you' while they drifted off to sleep together.

He didn't know how long he stayed like that, crying into his pillow until he was sure there was simply nothing left in him to cry out, but he must have fallen asleep because the next thing he remembered was waking up in the silent dark, moonlight streaming through the windows through his curtains as his phone beeped from the end of his bed.

Sliding down to pick it up, he rubbed his sore, itchy eyes, blinking painfully.

There was a text message from Blaine.

They didn't text often because it also cost a good bit of money, but whenever they had something they absolutely needed to tell each other without being able to call or waiting to write, they would text—though Blaine still had trouble with the keyboard. Kurt could only imagine how long it took him to type his message.

*I love you, Kurt. It breaks my heart knowing you're crying over me even though I know it's just because you love me and miss me. I miss you, too, more than you know, and sometimes I want to cry about it, it hurts so badly. But I don't because I look at the pictures I have of you next to my bed and I see your smile and it makes me smile seeing you happy like that.*

*Please, please don't cry, love. I can't take it when you're upset because I know I can't hold you and push your hair back off your forehead and kiss you and make it better.*

*I love you. I want you to smile and laugh and just remember that we'll be together again in a few days. I LOVE YOU, KURT HUMMEL AND I WILL NEVER STOP.*

There was a small heart icon at the end of the text and Kurt smiled faintly, clutching the phone to him and trying to imagine Blaine's smile.

Standing up, he moved towards his desk and took down the picture Blaine had sent him that day, lying back down on his bed and propping the photo up against his radio next to the Tornadoes tickets.

Curling up, he stared at the picture, glancing out the window through the curtains where he could see the star Blaine had given him for his birthday shining brightly in the night. Sighing, feeling faintly better, he closed his eyes, the image of Blaine smiling and laughing plastered against his eyelids. He smiled and snuggled a little closer against the pillow as he drifted off to sleep.

---

The following day, Kurt went with Finn to the local park where he was going to play football with a few of his friends from school. Mercedes and Tina were tagging along, Tina's boyfriend Mike walking with them as he had agreed to play as well.

"You should play, too, dude," Finn said, glancing at Kurt.

"I said no, Finn," Kurt grunted. "It's too bloody hot to play football."

"Picking up on his slang?" Mercedes said, quirking an eyebrow. "You've definitely been ruined."

Kurt rolled his eyes.

They entered the park, striding down the paved path through the trees and gardens to an open field where Finn's friends were already waiting, tossing a football around, shirtless.

"Oh, I'm definitely glad I came," Mercedes said, smirking.

"Pervert," Kurt muttered, rolling his eyes.

"What?" Mercedes said, knocking their shoulders together. "That Sam kid is hot."

Kurt shook his head as they plopped down together under the shade of an old oak tree. Tina gave Mike a quick kiss before joining them, practically drooling when he took off his shirt to reveal his well-toned abs.

"You two are so boy-crazy," Kurt said, clucking his tongue.

"Says the boy who hasn't stopped talking about his British lover since he came home," Mercedes said.

"Who said anything about him being my lover?" Kurt said, blushing faintly.

"You did," Tina said, grinning. "Just now. Blushing like that."

Kurt glared at them as they laughed. He turned back to see Finn high-fiving his best friend Puck before turning to Sam and the other boy who was turned away from Kurt and still wearing a t-shirt.

Kurt's stomach dropped when he turned around.

Karofsky.

Tina and Mercedes gasped. Kurt shook involuntarily.

"Do you want to go?" Mercedes said, placing her hand on his shoulder.

"N-no," Kurt said, shaking his head.

"What's he even doing here?" Tina muttered. "He doesn't go to their school."

Mercedes shrugged. "Do they know? Sam and Puck?"

"No," Kurt said, swallowing nervously as Karofsky looked in his direction, an unreadable expression on his face. "No, Finn didn't say anything to them. I asked him not to."

He saw Finn and Mike glaring at Karofsky. Finn said something, sounding angry and Karofsky muttered a reply.

"Oh, no, I hope he doesn't make a big deal out of it," Kurt said nervously. "That will just make him angrier."

"I don't want you near my brother!" Finn roared suddenly, shoving Karofsky hard.

"Fine!" Karofsky shouted back, throwing up his hands and storming off.

Puck and Sam exchanged shocked looks and Finn muttered something to them. They glanced over at Kurt in shock and Kurt groaned. This was not how he was hoping the day would go.

"Well, at least he's gone," Tina said timidly.

Kurt sighed heavily and lay back in the grass. "I guess," he murmured. Mercedes gave him a gentle pat on the shoulder as she and Tina turned to watch Puck, Sam, Finn, and Mike start their two-on-two game. Occasionally they would make a remark about the boys, giggling faintly. Kurt ignored them, his temporary good mood suddenly shot.

Sighing, he rolled on to his stomach, pulling out his phone and listening to the message Blaine had left him at the beginning of the summer, needing to hear his voice at that moment. He was tempted to call him but didn't know if he would be awake yet as it was still rather early in Plymouth. How was it that he could feel so alone even surrounded by his friends?

"I think I'm going to go home," he said, pushing himself up and brushing grass from his shirt.

"Oh, okay," Mercedes said, looking crestfallen. "Are you sure you're alright?"

"Yea," Kurt said, forcing a smile. "I'll be okay just...tired I think."

He saw her exchange a glance with Tina and knew they knew he was lying, but they remained silent.

"Are we still on for tonight?" Tina said.

"Of course," Kurt said, giving them a genuine smile. "I'll see you girls later."

He raised a hand in farewell as he strode off through the trees, feeling depressed. Seeing his old bully, the reason he'd been forced out of McKinley in the first place.

Scuffing his sandals along the ground, he turned onto the walkway leading back to his house, staring down at his feet. He wished there was a way to speed up time. To make the space between now and seeing Blaine disappear. All summer time seemed to be going by slower than it ever had in his life and he simply couldn't take it any more. He needed to see Blaine. Tears sprang to his and he hastened to wipe them away.

There was a harsh laugh. "Why are you crying, Hummel?"

Kurt looked up to see Karofsky blocking his path, his thick arms folded across his chest and a sneer on his face.

"What do you want?" Kurt said, straightening and trying not to look as frightened as he was. This was the boy who'd forced a kiss on him, his first kiss...who'd threatened to kill him....

"We've been missing you at McKinley," Karofsky said, leering. "Is that why you're crying, Lady, you been missing us, too?"

"Not at all," Kurt said stiffly. "In fact, now that I think about it, I should be thanking you."

Karofsky frowned in confusion.

"Without you," Kurt said, moving his hand casually towards his wand in his back pocket. "I would never have gone to Hogwarts and met Blaine."

"Who's Blaine?" Karofsky grunted, a faint light of sudden panic in his eyes. "Your boyfriend?"

"Yes," Kurt said, beaming.

Karofsky's face darkened in anger.

"And you know what?" Kurt said smugly. "I love him. And you know what else?" Karofsky's fists were balled at his sides. "We have *amazing* sex."

Karofsky growled and lunged at him.

Kurt whipped out his wand and cast a Shield Charm, throwing up a barrier between the two of them. Karofsky struggled to get at him but Kurt knew he couldn't.

"You're dead, Hummel," he growled, trying to run at him only to get thrown back, stumbling on his own feet and crashing to the pavement. Kurt laughed harshly as he fell. "See you around, Karofsky," he said smugly.

Checking to make sure they were still alone, he ran across the street, still pointing his wand at Karofsky, before taking off up the sidewalk towards his house. His knees shook as he ran, realization of what he'd just done sinking in.

He laughed out loud.

He'd just stood up to Karofsky, told him that he was in love with Blaine and that they were having sex, which no one else other than a few people at Hogwarts knew. He felt giddy and incredibly light.

Sure, it had been reckless and sure, it could have completely blown up in his face. But it hadn't and it was an amazing feeling, like something was swelling inside him. Because now Karofsky knew that he'd never have Kurt. Knew that he hadn't broken him completely and that Kurt had moved on with his life.

As he ducked into his house a few minutes later, he pulled out his phone and quickly texted Blaine what had happened, unable to keep a huge grin off his face even as his legs shook.

He went up to his room to find a large, tawny owl waiting for him on his bed, a letter tied to its leg as it exchanged a glare with Pav, who clacked his beak disapprovingly.

"Easy, you two," Kurt said, untying the letter with shaking hands and tossing it on his desk; it was his book list for school and he didn't think he'd be able to focus on it right now anyway.

He watched the tawny fly away for a moment then turned back to his room, glancing at his half-packed suitcase before plopping down on his bed and waiting for Blaine's reply. His phone beeped and he nearly dropped it as he held it up, his hands were shaking so badly.

*Are you insane? Honestly, I think it's brilliant what you did but, love, you could seriously have gotten hurt. I'm torn between wanting to scold you and laughing imagining the look on his face when you told him we have sex. You're crazy. I love you. :)*

Kurt laughed and fell back on his bed, still grinning. It was like a massive weight had been lifted from his chest, one that he didn't even realize had been there since November.

He jumped up, unable to sit still, and moved around his room, deciding he should finish packing as they were leaving the following afternoon and he knew he would be up all night with Tina and Mercedes watching movies and gossiping. His summer was finally starting to pick up.

That evening, Kurt was curled up in his basement in his pajamas with Mercedes and Tina, trying to decide which movie they wanted to watch.

"Something funny," Mercedes said from where she was seated on the couch, Tina on the floor in front of her as Mercedes braided her hair.

"Yea, I don't want to watch anything sappy," Tina agreed.

Kurt smiled as he thought of Blaine, who was truly the biggest sap he knew with his doting demeanor and romantic surprises. He had no doubt that whatever Blaine had planned for them Thursday would be



something that would just turn Kurt into a big puddle of goo as he was so good at doing.

"How about *The Princess Bride*?" he said thoughtfully, holding up the movie. "It's funny."

"Inconceivable," Mercedes said, giggling. "No, that's fine. I like that one."

"Even though it's dripping in sap," Tina said, grinning.

"Kurt!"

"Yea, dad?" Kurt called up the stairs in reply to his father's voice.

"Pizza's here!"

Tina and Mercedes leapt up in excitement, Kurt rolling his eyes as they ran up the stairs. He followed them slowly.

They were gathered around the island, sifting through the pizza boxes with Finn, Puck and Sam.

"Oh, hey, guys," Kurt said, ambling over to them. "I didn't know you were coming over."

"Halo tournament," Finn supplied around a mouthful of pizza. He waved a hand at his mouth, hopping around in an undignified manner.

"Hot," he gasped after he swallowed a few seconds later.

"No," Kurt said sarcastically as he moved to get himself pizza before the three boys ate it all. "Dad, I told you I don't like pepperoni," he said, wrinkling his nose at the pizzas. "Oh, wait, nevermind, I found the veggie one."

Mercedes shook her head as she popped a slice of pepperoni into her mouth. "You're so weird," she muttered. "It's like, the greatest."

"Isn't it, though?" Sam said, nodding in agreement. "It's like the Batman of pizza toppings. And Batman's totally better than Superman.... I'd say mushrooms are Superman."

Kurt snorted and Mercedes glared at him before turning back to Sam, grinning and batting her eyelashes a little more than necessary.

They all went down to the basement together, the boys groaning at their movie selection, though they knew they would have to watch it before they were able to play their videogames.

Much to everyone else's annoyance, Kurt quoted the movie religiously. Mercedes almost pulled out her wand to cast a Silencing Charm on him before she remembered there were Muggles in the room.

*"Since the invention of the kiss, there have been five kisses rated the most passionate, the most pure. This one left them all behind."* Kurt sighed happily as he said the final line, the other boys griping and grumbling the whole way through. He thought that every kiss he shared with Blaine was probably the greatest kiss in the world.

"Well, I'll just sit here and wait for my boobs to grow in, I guess," Puck muttered.

Kurt scowled at him and he fell silent.

Finn got up to switch over to the game console and Kurt quickly shut all of them up by beating them soundly in every videogame they played.

"How do you keep doing that?" Sam said, tossing away his controller as Kurt killed his character for the fifth time.

"I am pure awesomeness," Kurt sniffed smugly. Little did they know he'd spent countless hours playing the games with Finn since their parents had started dating the previous year. He'd had a crush on Finn at the time and had been trying to find a way to impress him. Oh, how his life had changed since then.

They ended up falling asleep scattered around the room, Tina and Mercedes on opposite ends of the couch with their feet curled up, Finn draped across his beanbag chair, Puck and Sam stretched across the floor randomly, and Kurt curled up on the armchair in the corner.

The next morning, Kurt woke to his father shaking him gently.

"Hey, kiddo," he said softly, smiling. "Time to get up. We're leaving in two hours, okay?"

Kurt grumbled and rolled over to bury his face in the seat of the chair.

"Come on, Kurt," his father said, shaking him again. "Get up.

Breakfast is upstairs."

Kurt groaned and sat up, rubbing his eyes and looking around as he yawned. Everyone else had already gone upstairs. He followed his father towards the kitchen, dragging his feet along the floor.

"Morning, sweetie," Carole said brightly as he entered the kitchen, Finn, Mercedes and Tina gathered around the table eating eggs and toast and looking only half-awake.

"Puck and Sam leave?" Kurt said, stretching and scratching his stomach absently.

Finn nodded sleepily, taking a drink of his orange juice.

"Carole, do we have any tea left?" Kurt said, opening up the jar he usually kept his tea bags in, which was empty. Since he'd started going to Hogwarts, he'd become addicted to the stuff.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Kurt," she said, hitting herself lightly on the forehead.

"I meant to pick some up! Since we're not going to be here for a week, I've been letting things get low until we come back."

"It's fine," Kurt said with a sigh. "I'll have coffee instead." He poured himself a cup and plucked up a piece of toast.

"You guys both packed?" Kurt's father said, looking at him and Finn.

"Yes," Kurt said.

"Er," Finn said, looking shifty. "I'll go finish now."

He stood up, draining his orange juice before hurrying up the stairs two at a time.

"We've got to go, Kurt," Mercedes said, standing with Tina. "Thanks for the breakfast, Missus Hudson."

"Of course, sweetie," Carole said, smiling.

Tina and Mercedes both hugged Kurt tightly.

"See you at Christmas," Tina said, smiling as she picked up her bag.

"Don't forget to write us. Lots," Mercedes said.

"And tell Blaine we're excited to meet him," Tina said, exchanging a grin with Mercedes.

"Alright, alright, I get it," Kurt said, rolling his eyes and laughing.

They called out their goodbyes as they left and he waved, smiling faintly. He *was* going to miss them. But the prospect of seeing Blaine in a few days made him squirm with excitement.

"Get your trunk down here, Kurt," his father called from the kitchen.

"We're leaving in an hour and a half. I've got to go pick up the Portkey."

"Okay," Kurt said, finishing his coffee.

His father turned on the spot and Disapparated with a faint pop.

Kurt had taken his own Apparition Test over the summer and passed with flying colors. The sensation was strange for him, though, so he rarely did it. Plus, he never had far to go that he couldn't simply walk to.

He went upstairs and got changed. "Alright, Pav," he said, opening the owl's cage and allowing the him to hop onto his arm. "You might as well head to Hogwarts, alright? I'll be there in a week." The owl nibbled his ear before taking off through the open window, winging away into the bright afternoon sun.

He watched him disappear for a moment before dragging his trunk, which was packed with his school things and clothes for the trip, downstairs. Pacing impatiently around the room, he waited for his father to return. Even though he knew he wasn't going to see Blaine until Wednesday, the fact that he was going to be in the same country, the same continent even, was a thrilling prospect.

His father returned an hour later holding an old, deflated soccer ball.

Finn had come downstairs carrying a duffel bag and a backpack before collapsing on the couch and flipping on the TV while waiting to leave.

"Alright, gang," Kurt's father said, clapping his hands together. He tossed the Portkey to Kurt. "I'll just get my suitcase. Five minutes, guys, got it?"

Kurt squirmed with excitement. "Come on, Finn," he said, gesturing for Finn to take a hold on the Portkey.

Finn stood and walked towards him, glancing at the soccer ball nervously. "Er, are you sure it's safe?" he said, frowning.

"Finn, it's a Portkey, it's not going to eat you," Kurt said impatiently, tapping his foot and holding out the ball.

Finn looked at it warily. "It's just, weird, dude," he said, frowning.

"How's it going to take us to London?"

"Magic, Finn, duh," Kurt said, sighing in annoyance.

"Kurt," his father said warningly as he appeared from the hallway with his suitcase.

"What?" Kurt said, throwing up his hands. "He gets tackled by three hundred pound linebackers every day in football but he's afraid to take a freggin Portkey? Honestly, Finn, I don't understand you."

Finn chewed the inside of his cheek thoughtfully before carefully reaching out to touch the Portkey, holding his breath. Kurt rolled his eyes.

"Okay," his father said as he and Carole each laid a hand on the ball as well, all of them gripping their luggage with their free hand. "Security Charms are set, everyone's got their bags. Ready?"

They all nodded, Finn looked somewhere between excited and terrified.

"Alright," his father said, checking his watch. "Three, two, one...."

## Chapter Two

Kurt felt the familiar sensation of being hooked behind his navel. He heard Finn and Carole gasp at the sudden pull. The whirl of color and sound flashed around them, their hands wrapped tightly around the old, deflated soccer ball.

They all crashed to the ground as they halted suddenly. Kurt's father was the only one who didn't end up sprawled across the cobblestone. Finn grumbled in pain as he got to his feet, rubbing his rear end and frowning as Kurt's father helped Carole up. He looked faintly sick and Kurt scooted back from him across the ground.

"Everyone alright?" Kurt's father said, looking around at them.

Kurt nodded, picking himself up and brushing dirt from his clothes.

"Well, here it is," his father said. "The Leaky Cauldron."

Kurt looked around to see they were standing in a small courtyard lined on three sides by brick walls. There was a door set in the fourth wall, propped open by a potted plant.

"Lovely," he muttered, grabbing the handle of his trunk and dragging it after his father, Carole, and Finn.

They walked into the bar, blinking at the sudden darkness compared to the bright sun outside.

"Reservations for Hummel," Kurt's father said, moving towards the bar, where a toothless old man was wiping out glasses.

"Two rooms?" the man said, checking his register. "You've got two and three. Just upstairs and to the left." He passed Kurt's father two keys, giving him a small smile. "Let me know if you need anything. Name's Tom. Dinner is served at seven."

"Thank you, Tom," Burt said, smiling before turning to Kurt, Finn, and Carole. He handed Kurt the key with a small number '2' on it. "I'm trusting you with this, Kurt, don't lose it, okay?"

"Yes, sir," Kurt said, rolling his eyes. "Come on, Finn, let's get unpacked."

Finn looked around excitedly at the witches and wizards gathered around the pub. He seemed to have gotten over the shock of the Portkey. "Kurt, is that a vampire?" he said, pointing to a man hunched in the corner with pale skin, a hooded cloak draped over his body.

"Finn, it's rude to point," Kurt said, slapping his hand down as they mounted the stairs to the second floor. "And yes, I think so."

"So cool," Finn said, grinning and hitching his bags higher on his shoulder. "Are there like, giants and stuff, too here?"

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Not here, Finn," he said as they reach the door labeled with a lopsided '2'. "They live in the mountains."

"Oh," Finn said, sounding faintly disappointed as they entered the room.

There were two lumpy-looking, double beds up against the wall, a tall wardrobe set against the opposite side of the room. A door leading to what Kurt assumed was the bathroom was set in the corner.

Finn dropped his bags onto the floor and leapt onto one of the beds, grinning at Kurt. "This is going to be great," he said. "I can't wait to see that...what's it called, Kwiddit?"

"Quidditch," Kurt corrected, putting his trunk at the foot of the other bed.

"Cool," Finn said, sitting up. "And it's going to be nice to meet this Blaine guy.... You really like him, huh?"

"Mhmm," Kurt said absently as he moved his clothes from his trunk to the wardrobe, running his wand over them as he hung them up to smooth out the wrinkles.

"That's...good," Finn said awkwardly.

"Finn, you don't need to try and talk to me about this stuff," Kurt said, giving him a dubious look.

"Oh, good," Finn said, sighing in relief. "I mean, I'm totally happy for you, dude, it's just...you know, you're my brother and it's a little weird."

"I understand," Kurt said, smiling faintly.

There was a knock at the door and they both looked up to see Carole standing in the doorway, smiling.

"We're going out to dinner around eight, okay, guys?" she said. "That's three hours. So, get unpacked and settled in and then we'll go. Stay here for now, we can explore Diagon Alley tomorrow."

"Okay," Kurt said, smiling.

He settled down on his bed, ignoring Finn, who was examining the portrait in the corner, leaping back in surprise when its occupant asked him what he was staring at.

*Just got to the Leaky Cauldron. Going out to dinner soon. Seeing the sites tomorrow. Can't wait for Wednesday! Love you.*

He sent the text to Blaine, laying down and tucking his hands behind his head. His phone beeped after a few minutes and he checked it with a smile.

*I didn't just start grinning like a prat, in case you're wondering. :) I can't wait, either, love, wish I could be there now. Have fun with the family! Call me later if you can. Love you!*

Kurt laughed as he read the message, slipping his phone back in his pocket and stretching with a yawn. He definitely hadn't gotten enough sleep last night and felt that a nap would at least help him pass the time.

Closing his eyes and draping his arm over them, he drifted off to sleep, smiling faintly as he listened to Finn talking with the portrait excitedly.

They went to dinner at a small Italian restaurant down the road, eating and talking about their plans for the next two days. Kurt wasn't at all tired when they got back to their room, so he pulled out his phone and dialed Blaine's number, fearing he might not answer after the fourth ring.

Then the line clicked and Kurt heard a small gasp.

"Hello, love," Blaine said in a low voice.

"Blaine!" Kurt hissed, glancing at Finn. "Are you seriously doing this now?"

"I can't help it," Blaine breathed. "Hearing your voice, knowing that you're so close to me.... What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to wait until Wednesday," Kurt said grumpily.

Blaine sighed. "Alright," he said, his voice returning to normal. "How was dinner?"

"Good," Kurt said. "How was your day?"

"Pretty boring," Blaine said. "Mum and Dad were working so I just hung around the house all day. Flew a little around the yard."

"You miss Quidditch?" Kurt said, grinning as he thought of the tickets in his trunk.

"Yea," Blaine said, sighing.

"Don't worry," Kurt said. "You'll be back around it soon."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Blaine said suspiciously.

"Just that you'll be playing again at school in a few weeks," Kurt said hastily.

"Right," Blaine said. Kurt could sense him frowning in confusion.

"So," Kurt said, looking to steer the conversation away from Quidditch before he gave away the surprise. "Any particular places I should check out in Diagon Alley?"

"The joke shop's cool," Blaine said. "And the bookshop is great, and you'll love the Apothecary. You know what, just go everywhere."

Kurt laughed. "You're no help at all."

"But you still love me," Blaine said, the grin evident in his voice.

"You know I do," Kurt said, feeling suddenly warm inside at being able to talk so easily to Blaine.

Blaine sighed happily. "I love you so much," he said, his voice softening. "I know it probably gets old hearing it so often but I mean it."

"It doesn't get old," Kurt said earnestly. "If that's all you ever said for the rest of our lives I think I'd be happy."

"Oh, who's the sap now?" Blaine said with a light laugh. He made a noise of contentment. "How do you do it?"

"Do what?" Kurt said, rolling onto his stomach and kicking his legs absently.

"Make me love you even more every day?" Blaine replied tenderly.

Kurt smiled, holding back a squeal of happiness. He felt like a lovestruck teenager. Oh...right, probably because he was one. But this wasn't just "love" like in the sentimental movies he watched with Mercedes and Tina. No, this was *love*, true and real and only strengthened by the pain they'd been through together.

They ended up talking for a full two hours about nothing in particular. Kurt tried not to think about the fit his father would throw at seeing the bill as he crawled under his covers when Finn turned out the light to go to sleep on the other side of the room.

"Will you get in trouble if you keep talking?" Kurt whispered into the phone. "I don't want to hang up."

"Me neither," Blaine said sadly. "I'll stay on the line if you want until you fall asleep."

"I'd like that," Kurt said, snuggling down into the pillows.

"Okay," Blaine said softly. "I can't wait to see you."

"Me neither," Kurt said, smiling sleepily. "Just a few more days."

"I know," Blaine said, sighing. "It's weird...all summer I've been waiting but it feels like the last few days have taken months and months to go by."

"Yea," Kurt said. "I know what you mean.... I wish we didn't live so far apart. I wish I could have just Apparated to see you."

"I know," Blaine repeated. "But magic had its limitations. Like when you were blind last year...it can't do everything."

"I guess," Kurt said, frowning. "I'd Apparate to see you right now if I could. My dad said I have to stay here though."

"It's okay," Blaine said, yawning. "I understand. I'll get to see you soon."

"Mhmm," Kurt said, feeling himself starting to drowse. "Will you sing to me?"

"Of course, love," Blaine whispered. "Whatever you'd like." He began humming gently, occasionally singing a random bar or two of the song, which Kurt had never heard. It was gently and sweet and Kurt tried to make a note to ask him what it was, though he was sure he would forget it as he was already half-asleep.

He closed his eyes, smiling as the sound of Blaine singing, and every now and then whispering 'I love you', lulled him to sleep.

---



The next morning, they all went to explore Diagon Alley. Kurt had never seen such a place before. It was packed with people shopping and talking excitedly. Kurt recognized a few students from Hogwarts but none that he was close to enough to stop and chat with. They stopped at the joke shop, Weasley's something or other, Kurt wasn't exactly interested in it, though Finn's eyes practically bugged out of his head as he explored the crowded shelves. Blaine was right about the Apothecary, which Kurt could have stayed in for hours, examining all the different Potions ingredients he'd never seen before. But he only had a few minutes before Finn said he wanted ice cream and they all stopped at the small shop across the street for sundaes, sitting out in the sun and watching people walk by. Finn looked like he might wet himself from excitement at any time.

After a long day of shopping and simply exploring the street, they went back to the Leaky Cauldron for dinner before they all collapsed onto their beds and immediately fell asleep after Kurt sent a quick goodnight message to Blaine.

The next day they explored Muggle London. They stopped at the usual spots, The Tower of London—where Finn spent a full fifteen minutes trying to get one of the guards to move; Buckingham Palace—Kurt did marvel at the beauty of the place; lunch in Greenwich Park followed by seeing the Tower Bridge and Westminster Abbey, taking a double-decker bus around to all the sights, which Carole was thrilled to see, though Kurt was just anxious for the day to end because the next day he was going to finally, *finally* see Blaine again.

He went to bed early that night, trying to force himself to go to sleep but not drifting off until well after midnight, Blaine's text of 'I'll see you tomorrow, love!' fresh in his mind and bringing a grin to his face.

---

He was having a wonderful dream about Blaine. They were just sitting, talking together under their tree at Hogwarts; the sweeping beech that Blaine had carved their initials and their love into before they'd separated for the summer. A leaf fluttered down, lightly touching Kurt's cheek and he snuggled further against Blaine.

Something brushed against Kurt's face again and he frowned as his mind began to recognize that he was sleeping. No. He didn't want to wake up. It was so warm and comfortable here in this dream. He rolled over in his sleep, groaning faintly. There was a hand on his shoulder.

"Go 'way, Finn," he mumbled. "'M sleeping."

There was soft chuckle and he froze, his eyes snapping open. He rolled over immediately and nearly screamed with happiness.

There was Blaine. *Real* Blaine. His hazel eyes twinkling with his fond smile. His dark curls loose on his head like Kurt loved them. His lean and muscled frame hugged by a dark t-shirt and jeans that made Kurt practically ache. He was *definitely* better than Dream Blaine.

"Hello, love," Blaine whispered, brushing Kurt's hair off his forehead.

Kurt stared at him for a moment, blinking in surprise that he was suddenly there. After seven agonizing weeks, he was finally with Blaine again. He let out a small whimper and lunged at him, throwing his arms around his neck and nearly knocking him onto the floor in his enthusiasm as he crashed their lips together.

Blaine made a small noise of surprise before readily returning the kiss, wrapping his arms tightly around Kurt's waist and holding him as though he'd never let him go. But Kurt would be okay with that. Blaine licked along Kurt's lips and he opened his mouth in response, moaning as their tongues slid against each other. Blaine scooted closer to him on the bed as they quickly made things heated.

It was like kissing Blaine for the first time all over again. He'd missed it so much, it almost felt unreal, like he was still dreaming and he was going to wake up to find out that it was July and he wasn't going to see Blaine for weeks.

But Blaine's tongue was moving against his insistently and they were groaning into each other's mouths and Blaine was pushing him down into the mattress and running his hands over Kurt's body and it was *most definitely real*.

"Merlin, I've missed you," Blaine growled, attacking Kurt's neck with his mouth and sucking hard. Kurt didn't even care if he left marks at this point, he just wanted Blaine to never stop doing whatever he was doing with his tongue. God, he'd missed that tongue.

"Blaine," he moaned, bucking his hips.

He was still half asleep, sure he had horrible morning breath and bed-head, but he simply didn't care about anything else but Blaine moving against him right now.

Blaine straddled his hips, their bodies flush against each other through the blankets still covering Kurt, and rocked down against him.

Kurt threw back his head at the wonderful, amazing, perfect touch.

Every moment, every breath and kiss and glide of fingers reminded him just how much he'd missed Blaine.

"Kurt, did you see that Bla—oh my god!"

"Get out, Finn!" Kurt shouted, turning to glare at his step-brother, who was standing in the doorway with his breakfast, eyes wide and mouth opening and closing silently like a fish. Blaine hadn't stopped kissing Kurt fervently, despite Finn's presence.

"Sorry!" Finn said, turning away quickly and running away, closing the door sharply behind him.

"I love it when you take control like that," Blaine growled, moving his hand down to grip Kurt through the blankets.

"There're too many layers between us," Kurt gasped. "Get under here with me."

Blaine quickly complied, kicking off his shoes and practically ripping off his t-shirt and jeans before crawling under the covers with Kurt, who pulled him immediately back into their kiss.

Fumbling with Kurt's pajama top, Blaine unbuttoned it impatiently, groaning when his hands reached Kurt's bare chest and exploring every inch of it.

"You're so damn perfect," Blaine gasped, pulling back for a moment to look down at Kurt's heaving chest. For a long minute he simply stared, running his fingers over Kurt's pale skin reverently.

"Blaine," Kurt whimpered. "Do something."

Blaine smiled, his pupils wide and dark with lust, though he suddenly slowed the pace as he ran his hands over Kurt lovingly. "Alright, love," he murmured, lightly squeezing Kurt's ass and pulling their hips together leisurely.

"Oh god, yes...touch me," Kurt whined. "Please, Blaine, I need you to touch me. Please."

"Yes, love," Blaine whispered, kissing him gently on the forehead. He slid his hand down Kurt's boxers, gripping him carefully and pumping his fist in long, languid strokes.

"Yes," Kurt gasped. He knew he wouldn't last long after having only their brief phone-sex session the previous Friday since they'd separated in June.

"That's it, love," Blaine breathed. "I love watching you fall apart. You're so gorgeous. It actually hurts looking at you sometimes, you're so beautiful. Every inch of you is just...perfect. I love you."

Kurt groaned. "I I-love you," he whispered, barely able to remain coherent. The air was hot and stuffy beneath the blankets, the light muted as it filtered through the worn fabric.

"You're unbelievable," Blaine choked, his voice tight with a combination of emotion and desire. "I still think I'm going to wake up sometime and find out that you never transferred to Hogwarts and that it was all just a dream."

Kurt met his eyes and caught the love shining behind them. He moved his head over the pillow to meet Blaine in a slow, tender kiss, even as he jerked his hips into Blaine's hand and gasped. He was going to be gone any moment.

Blaine seemed to have sensed that he was getting close. He pulled back from their kiss, increasing the speed of his movements slightly as he met Kurt's eyes steadily. "Just let go, love, let go."

Kurt threw back his head and moaned loudly as Blaine's careful touch sent him over the edge into bliss.

Blaine grunted and buried his face in Kurt's neck, kissing him gently as he came into his own boxers just from hearing Kurt lose himself.

They lay there, panting and exchanging sloppy kisses, for a long time.

"I love you," Blaine said, smiling as he ran his fingers down Kurt's chest absently. "You have no idea how much I've missed you."

"I'm pretty sure I do," Kurt said with a grin. Because he'd been missing Blaine just as much.

"Alright," Blaine said, shifting uncomfortably. "Let's get cleaned up and changed before your father comes looking for you."

"Good idea," Kurt said, slipping out of bed and moving to get fresh clothes. "I'm going to take a quick shower, okay?"

Blaine's look darkened momentarily and he looked like he was seriously considering trying to join Kurt. But then he nodded and sighed, pulling out his wand to clean himself off as Kurt stepped into the adjoining bathroom.

"I hope you haven't forgotten what I said in June," Blaine called as Kurt turned on the shower, the pipes groaning for a moment before water spurted from the spout sporadically.

"Which part?" Kurt said, peeling off his pajamas and boxers and cleaning them quickly with his wand.

"The part about you not leaving my bed for a week," Blaine replied.

"I feel like I might be missed in class," Kurt said with a laugh.

"Too bad," Blaine said. "You're mine until I say you can go."

Kurt laughed again. "We'll see," he said, rolling his eyes as he stepped under the hot spray with a sigh of contentment.

He stepped out of the bathroom a few minutes later, a towel wrapped around his waist.

Blaine looked up and groaned at the sight of him. "You're such a tease," he said, shaking his head and forcing his eyes away as Kurt got dressed, smirking.

"No," Kurt said. "You'll actually get the chance to touch me later. So don't complain."

Blaine chuckled, getting up and moving towards him to pull him into a long, slow kiss.

"I missed you so much," he breathed as he pulled away, eyes glittering.

"I know," Kurt said, hugging him tightly. "I've missed you, too."

They stayed like that for a few minutes, drinking in each other's love, before heading down to breakfast, their hands clasped tightly. Kurt thought he might want to glue their fingers together so he never had to let Blaine out of his sight again.

Finn, Carole, and his father were seated around the table together. Finn looked shifty, glancing nervously up at them, and Kurt gave him a look that warned serious consequences should he mention anything about what had happened. His father was flipping absently through a copy of the *Daily Prophet* and Carole was rifling through some brochures about different things to do in the city.

"What are you boys going to be up to today?" Kurt's father said, glancing up from his paper as Kurt and Blaine sat down.

"Not much," Kurt said, pouring himself a cup of tea while still trying to hold Blaine's hand. He nearly scalded himself and reluctantly unwound his fingers from Blaine's to eat. "Just going to hang around Diagon Alley, I think. Now that I've got my book list I need to buy a few things."

"Do you have enough money?" his father said, turning back to his paper.

"Yea," Kurt said, biting delicately into a crumpet and sipping his tea.

"What about you, Finn?" Carole said, looking at him. "Do you need anything?"

"Er, no," Finn muttered. "I'm fine."

"What's wrong, sweetie?" Carole said, frowning.

"N-nothing," Finn said, glancing at Kurt and hastily returning to his eggs and bacon.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Dad, where is Blaine sleeping?" he said, turning to his father.

"There's a fold-out bed underneath Finn's bed he can sleep on," his father replied. He looked up. "And I want him staying in that bed, Kurt, got it? None of this, sneaking into yours in the middle of the night, okay?"

"Yes, sir," Kurt said grumpily.

"As long as I don't have to walk in on you two making out again, I'm happy," Finn grumbled.

Kurt turned slowly to him, giving him such a glare that he was surprised his brother didn't simply burst into flames. Carole laughed and Kurt's father shook his head, frowning faintly.

"Alright," Carole said as Kurt's father finished his toast. "We're going to head out. You're sure you boys will be okay?"

"Yes," Kurt said, smiling stiffly. "We'll be fine."

Finn glanced nervously at Kurt, as though afraid that he'd turn him into a newt the moment their parents left. "Yea, we're good," he said.

"Nice to meet you Blaine," Carole said, smiling at him.

"The pleasure was all mine, ma'am," Blaine said, flashing her a grin. She smiled again before following Kurt's father from the pub. "Be good," they both called over their shoulders.

Kurt heard the door close and he rounded on Finn, whipping his wand out. "What's wrong with you?" he hissed. "I should just...just...turn your hair blue for the rest of the day!"

Finn let out a tiny whimper.

"Kurt," Blaine said, laughing faintly. "It's fine, love, let it go."

Kurt growled but stuffed his wand back in his jeans.

"So, what are your parents doing today?" Blaine said, rubbing Kurt's thigh under the table.

"I think my dad wants to see the Ministry," Kurt said, giving Blaine a pointed look as his hand strayed further up Kurt's leg.

Blaine sighed and pulled his hand away, pouting faintly.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Ready to go...Biscuit?"

Blaine glared at him.

"What?" Kurt said innocently. "I keep telling you it's an adorable name."

"Right, because 'adorable' is really what I'm going for," Blaine mumbled grumpily.

"Fine," Kurt said with a sigh. "I won't call you that ever again. Satisfied?"

Blaine leaned closer to him, his hot breath in Kurt's ear as he hissed, "You might need to make it up to me."

"You," Kurt said, turning to him, "need to calm your hormones." He glanced at Finn, who was watching in fascination as a witch in the corner refilled her juice with a flick of her wand.

Blaine squirmed in his seat. "I can't help it," he groaned. "Look at you." He gestured to Kurt's pale button-down and skinny jeans. "You look good enough to eat."

"And we'll get to that later, I promise," Kurt muttered. "Just...can we spend the day together first? I've missed you."

Blaine's expression softened immediately. "Of course, love, I'm sorry."

"It's perfectly alright," Kurt said, smiling. "Trust me, I want it, too. I just want to spend some time together first."

Blaine rested his head on his hand, giving him a fond look. "I love you."

"Love you," Kurt said, giving him a swift kiss on the cheek as he stood.

"Come on, Finn, let's go."

Finn gave him a nervous look but stood and pushed his plate away.

"We're going back to that diagonal place, right?" he said excitedly.

"Diagon Alley, Finn," Kurt corrected. "And yes."

"Sweet," Finn said. He turned to Blaine. "Dude, have you seen that joke shop? It's so cool; they have these—"

"Finn," Kurt said sharply. "He knows. He's been here before, remember?"

"Oh, yeah," Finn said sheepishly. "Sorry."

They went out through the back of the pub to the stone courtyard, Kurt tapping the third brick from the left with his wand and standing back as the wall opened into a wide archway.

"I can't wait until tomorrow," Blaine said as Kurt pocketed his wand.

"It sucks not being able to do magic."

Kurt smirked, pulling his wand back out and flicking it so that Finn's hair turned bright blue. "Like that, you mean?"

Blaine scowled. Finn caught his reflection in the window of the Magical Menagerie and his hands flew to his hair in panic.

"Relax," Kurt said, flicking his wand and returning his brother's hair to its usual brown.

Finn sighed in relief as Kurt steered them towards Quality Quidditch Supplies. He gave Finn a warning look as they entered, Blaine's face lighting up as he spotted the display of new brooms.

"Wow," Finn said, peering into a glass case that housed Golden Snitches on small velvet pillows. "This looks so cool. I can't wait til...you know." He glanced over his shoulder at Blaine, who was looking over the rack of Tornadoes gear with a sad expression.

Kurt moved towards him and picked out a shirt in Blaine's size—sky blue with dark blue double 'T's emblazoned on the front over the words "Tutshill Tornadoes, est. 1520, Five-time League winners 1908-1912".

"What are you doing?" Blaine said as Kurt moved towards the register.

"Buying this for you," Kurt said as he handed the young witch behind the counter a Galleon and received two Sickles back for change.

"Actually, grab me a hoodie and another shirt for Finn, he wears a large."

"Why?" Blaine said, his frown deepening as he did as Kurt asked.

"Just because," Kurt said airily, paying for the clothes.

Blaine eyed him suspiciously. "You're up to something."

Kurt hummed in reply as he accepted the bag of clothes and moved to leave, pulling Finn away from the miniature models of broomsticks zooming around in their boxes.

"Everything here is just so...cool!" Finn said, a slight tinge of longing in his voice. "I wish I was a wizard."

Kurt smiled and gave him a comforting pat on the arm as they stepped into Flourish and Blotts to buy his and Blaine's books for their final year at Hogwarts.

"*Standard Book of Spells Grade Seven* and *An Advanced Guide to Modern Muggle Technology*," Kurt said, glancing at his booklist. "Oh, and they have a book on Potioneer training at St. Mungo's I wanted to get, too."

They moved around the shop, browsing absently as they shopkeeper retrieved their books—Blaine also had a book for Herbology called *A Study of Carnivorous Plants in Europe*, which made Kurt infinitely glad he didn't take the subject.

Finn flipped through a few spellbooks with a looks of amazement.

"Woah, dude," he said, staring at a page in *Charm Your Way into Her Heart*, "did you know there are Love Potions? How cool is that?"

"They're also illegal, Finn," Kurt muttered, taking the book from him and setting it back on the shelf. "Besides, I thought you and Rachel were already in love?"

"Well, yea," Finn said, shrugging. "But still."

Kurt rolled his eyes and moved to the register with Blaine to pay for their books.

They went to the Apothecary next, Kurt and Blaine buying refills for their Potions kits while Finn poked curiously at the barrel of flobberworms in the corner with a looks of mingled interest and disgust on his face.

They stopped for sundaes at the little ice cream parlor, once again sitting at one of the tables outside in the sun. They wiled away the rest of the day exploring the shops as they'd done Monday, Kurt nearly losing Finn when he wandered down Knockturn Alley in search of a bathroom.

When they returned to the Leaky Cauldron that evening, Kurt's father and Carole were already there, waiting to eat.

"How was the Ministry?" Kurt said, sitting down between Blaine and Finn.

His father shrugged. "Not bad. Government's government," he said as Tom set a plate of roast chicken and a dish of potatoes and green beans down on the table before ducking out of the parlor.

"It's a lovely building, though," Carole said. "There's a huge statue of two wizards and a witch in the lobby. It looked like it was made of solid gold."

Finn gaped at the idea. "Who's that important?" he said as he accepted the bowl of potatoes from Blaine.

Carole frowned in thought. "Harry something," she said. "I don't remember, really, but they apparently helped in some war a few years back."

Blaine snorted and they all stared at him.



"Sorry," he muttered, blushing faintly. "It's just, they're pretty famous...nevermind."

Kurt cocked an eyebrow at him but he remained silent, chewing his chicken and looking mildly embarrassed.

"So, Blaine," Carole said, breaking the awkward silence. "And big plans for tomorrow?"

"Yes, ma'am," Blaine said, looking up and smiling. "But I can't say what. It's a surprise for Kurt. I hope you won't mind having Finn around tomorrow evening."

"Wait," Finn said, frowning. "Isn't it your birthday? Why are you giving stuff to Kurt?"

"Because I love him," Blaine said, squeezing Kurt's hand under the table.

Carole smiled, looking touched; Kurt's father looked faintly awkward. They chatted about their day as they ate. Yawning and stretching as they finished their desert of bread pudding an hour later.

"Time for bed," Kurt's father said. He looked at Kurt warningly. "Don't forget, Blaine stays in his bed and you stay in yours."

"Okay, dad, I get it," Kurt said in annoyance.

"Alright," his father said, frowning faintly and looking awkward again.

"Just...remember that."

"I will," Kurt muttered as he stood with Blaine and Finn, all of them making their way to their room, dragging their sore feet.

"Ah, that's better," Finn said as he kicked off his shoes and collapsed onto his bed. He wiggled his toes contentedly.

Blaine pulled the small cot out from under Finn's bed, struggling to get it to open up for a moment as the legs were rather rusted.

"Here," Kurt said, flicking his wand, a thick, clear liquid pouring onto the hinges.

Blaine smirked at him, winking, and Kurt rolled his eyes, pushing the trundle bed up against his own mattress. If he wasn't able to sleep in the same bed as Blaine, he was going to at least stay as close as possible.

They all changed into pajamas, yawning as they climbed into their beds. Finn was out like a light. Kurt scooted to the edge of the mattress so his face was only a few inches from Blaine's, slightly higher up than him.

"Hey," he said, grinning.

"Hey, yourself," Blaine said, moving his hand to hold Kurt's under the blanket.

"I'm glad you're here," Kurt whispered as Finn rolled over in his bed, mumbling something in his sleep.

"Me too," Blaine said, squeezing his hand. "I missed you so much."

Kurt smiled and leaned forward to meet him in a slow kiss.

"Love you," he breathed.

"Love you," Blaine replied, stroking Kurt's hand with his thumb.

"Goodnight," Kurt said, moving a little closer to him.

"Night, love," Blaine said sleepily.

Kurt closed his eyes and drifted off almost immediately, his fingers still intertwined with Blaine's under the blanket.

---

They slept in the next morning, all still exhausted from the previous day, though Kurt knew his father and Carole were planning on leaving early in the morning.

Kurt woke before Blaine, hurrying to shower and get dressed before shaking Finn awake.

"Whazzat?" Finn grumbled, rolling over and falling off his bed with a yelp.

"Shh!" Kurt hissed, glancing at Blaine, who shifted in his sleep.

"What's wrong?" Finn mumbled, looking around blearily. "Is the house on fire?"

Kurt rolled his eyes. Those muscles got quite the workout around Finn.

"I need you to get out," Kurt whispered, hauling Finn to his feet.

"Why?" Finn said, blinking owlishly.

"Because, Finn, it's Blaine's birthday," Kurt growled, pushing against him fruitlessly.

"Why do—" his eyes widened and he blushed faintly. "Oh,er, right, okay, I'll just...go...."

"Best idea you've ever had," Kurt muttered, forcing him into the hall and closing the door behind him, locking it.

Grinning, he moved to Blaine's small bed, slipping under the blanket next to him and wrapping his arms around him, kissing and nibbling at his ear. Blaine made a noise of contentment, rolling towards Kurt to kiss him a little messily in his drowsy state.

"Happy birthday," Kurt muttered against Blaine's lips.

"Mmm, best was to wake up," Blaine murmured. "Well, maybe not the *best* way, but it's close."

Kurt sighed. "Alright, I get it," he said, smirking as he threw off the blanket and slid down so he was perched on Blaine's shins.

"Oh, love, no, you don't have to—ahh." Blaine let out a love groan as Kurt pulled his erection free from his pajamas and wrapped his mouth around it, sucking hard.

"Oh, love, that's fantastic," Blaine moaned, closing his eyes and running his fingers through Kurt's hair.

Kurt hummed around him and Blaine arched his back, letting out a low whine.

Kurt licked and sucked carefully, watching Blaine, who was staring down at him through hooded lids, looking rumpled and still sleepy. Every now and then he would close his eyes as Kurt hit a particular spot.

"Love," he said after a few minutes. "Love, you need to move."

He tried to push Kurt off but Kurt shook his head, giving him a steady look.

Blaine gave him a wide-eyed look of surprise. "Are you sure? Kurt, you don't have to—ah, a-alright," he gasped out the last word as Kurt gave a particularly hard suck.

Blaine closed his eyes and groaned contentedly.

After another minute or two, he tightened his grip in Kurt's hair, calling his name softly as he came into his mouth.

Kurt gagged at the bitterness and sudden rush of liquid. But he'd promised himself he'd do this for Blaine, who always did if for him.

Then he thought about the fact that it was Blaine he was tasting and suddenly it didn't bother him nearly as much as he swallowed hard.

He pulled away from Blaine, licking his lips absently.

Blaine groaned at the sight. "That's unbelievably sexy, love," he muttered. "I can't believe you did that." He leaned forward and pulled Kurt down into a deep kiss, forcing his tongue into Kurt's mouth and running it everywhere, moaning faintly at the fact that he was tasting himself in Kurt's mouth.

He fell back onto the bed, grinning faintly.

"God, I love you," he said, stretching as he got to his feet.

"Let's hope," Kurt muttered, standing and moving to fix his hair. "I guess you'll be wanting your present?"

Blaine froze where he was standing over his trunk picking out his clothes. "There's more?" he said in a tone of disbelief.

"Of course there's more," Kurt said with a laugh. He moved to his trunk, shifting his books aside to pull out the envelope containing the Tornadoes tickets.

"Here," he said, handing the envelope to Blaine and biting his lip nervously.

Blaine gave him a curious look before slitting the envelope open and pulling out the three slips of paper inside.

He stared at the tickets for a full minute in silence.

"Er," Kurt said, "Blaine? Is...are they alright? I got the best seats I could afford and—"

He yelped in surprise as Blaine grabbed his arm and pulled him into a kiss, forcing their bodies together and gripping the back of Kurt's head.

"I love you so damn much," Blaine growled into his mouth.

He released Kurt after a minute, panting lightly.

"So," Kurt said, stumbling a little in shock. "You like them?"

"Yea," Blaine said with a laugh. "Yea, I like them. This is the best present ever. Thank you, Kurt."

"Mhmm," Kurt said, still a little flustered.

He fixed his hair again as Blaine showered and got dressed before going downstairs together. Finn was sulking in the parlor, picking at a crumpet. He turned when they approached, giving them an anxious look.

"Am I allowed in the room again?" he muttered.

"Yes," Kurt said with a sniff as he sat down with Blaine and pulled the teapot towards him.

Finn wrinkled his nose faintly as he passed them, mumbling something about them staying off his bed.

They spend the day walking around the city aimlessly, stopping at a few shops and having lunch at a tiny pub that served the most delicious shepherd's pie Kurt had ever tasted—though Blaine claimed his mother's was better.

They returned to the Leaky Cauldron that evening around dinnertime, Kurt's father and Carole already sitting in the parlor looking faintly sunburnt but laughing happily.

"Don't eat, love," Blaine said as Kurt moved to sit next to Finn. "I have dinner for us."

Kurt gave him a suspicious look but sighed and accepted the hand he was holding out.

"Don't be back too late, boys," Kurt's father called out as they left the pub.

"Okay, Dad," Kurt shouted in reply as they stepped out onto Charing Cross Road.

"This way," Blaine said, pulling him down the street, where the Muggles passing them completely ignored the Leaky Cauldron, going instead into the book shop on one side or the music store on the other.

"Care to tell me where we're going?" Kurt said, quirking an eyebrow.

"You'll see," Blaine said cryptically.

Kurt huffed in annoyance but followed after him in the light of the setting sun streaming through the buildings lining the streets.

They walked for twenty minutes, Blaine smiling softly and not giving a thing away despite Kurt's questioning and threats to leave him there alone and go back to the pub.

"Alright, love," Blaine said as they stepped out onto a street across from the River Thames. "Here we are."

They waited for a break in traffic before running across the street towards the bank. The London Eye was almost directly across the river from them, glowing a warm blue in the evening light.

There was a small boat docked along the bank where they were standing, bobbing gently in the water.

"W-what?" Kurt said, blinking in astonishment.

"I rented it," Blaine said, leading him down the steps to the dock.

Kurt stumbled a little in his surprise, stopping on the dock as Blaine leapt lightly onto the boat, turning and offering his hand to Kurt, who simply stared at him.

"Kurt?" Blaine said, sounding nervous. "What's wrong? Don't you like boats?"

Kurt shook his head lightly to clear it. "No, I mean, yes, I don't...I don't have a problem with them," he said. "Blaine this is...why are you doing this for me? It's *your* birthday."

"I know," Blaine said, smiling. "I wanted to spend it with you and I thought a picnic dinner on the river would be a perfect way to end it."

Kurt blinked back the sudden tears welling in his eyes and allowed Blaine to help him onto the boat.

There was a thick blanket stretched across the seats. Kurt sat down and Blaine glanced around before tapping the ignition with his wand. The boat sputtered to life and Blaine untied it from the dock before waving his wand again as he settled next to Kurt.

The throttle pushed forward lightly and the boat steered itself out into the middle of the nearly empty river, gliding gently along in the pale twilight.

Blaine waved his wand and a small basket appeared, several wrapped dishes inside and a bottle of Butterbeer sticking out of it. He uncorked the Butterbeer and poured them each a glass before unpacking a bowl of pasta.

He leaned back in the seat next to Kurt, twirling a little of the pasta on his fork and blowing on it lightly before holding it to Kurt's mouth.

Kurt sighed but allowed Blaine to feed him lovingly, the boat continuing down the river, which sparkled in the moonlight.

"When exactly did you set all this up?" Kurt said as Blaine took a bite of pasta.

He swallowed, licking a little sauce from his lips and smiling.

"Yesterday morning," he said. "My parents dropped me off at the Leaky Cauldron and I went down the street to find a phonebook and called the rental place. Asked them to leave it docked here this afternoon and then I had Tom have the dinner ready." He frowned faintly. "Sorry I couldn't make you something myself. I promise I will make dinner for you one day."

Kurt smiled. "You don't have to do that," he said, accepting another bite.

"I want to," Blaine said, his gaze so full of love Kurt almost had to look away from the intensity.

When the pasta was gone, Blaine pulled out a dish of strawberries, again feeding Kurt with a fond smile on his face.

"What are you so perfect?" Kurt blurted out as Blaine put down the empty bowl and settled his arm around Kurt's shoulders.

"I'm not," Blaine said, smiling. "I just love you." He took a drink of his Butterbeer before setting his glass down to turn the boat around with a flick of his wand.

Kurt stared at him. He *was* perfect. He was smart and funny and gorgeous and the sweetest, most loving person Kurt had ever met. Blaine moved to wrap the blanket around them as a faint chill breeze blew over the water.

"Warm enough?" he said, kissing Kurt's temple lightly.

Kurt nodded and snuggled against him. "I love you."

Blaine smiled and kissed his hair softly. "I love you, too."

They glided along slowly in the silvery moonlight flashing across the small wake the boat left.

Blaine squeezed Kurt lightly and Kurt squeezed him back. This was truly the most romantic, amazing thing anyone had ever done for him and, yet, he knew Blaine was just going to top it with something even more incredible as their lives together went on.

That's when it really hit him for the first time. He wanted to spend the rest of his life with Blaine. He'd known it for awhile but it hadn't seemed really *real* until just now. He wanted to come home to him every night and talk about their days and complain about work and...who knew what else.

It was like someone had hit him over the head with a mallet. He felt dazed and weak-kneed at the thought of everything they'd shared and were going to share.

He tilted his head up to look at Blaine, who was watching him. Kurt shifted a little to kiss him, their lips moving softly against each other as they always did, like they were meant to be that way, to glide together with gentle sighs and breathless gasps passing between them in the night.

There was no way he'd ever love anyone else like he loved Blaine. He never wanted to. They were made for each other. Made to love and laugh and, yes, sometimes even hurt together. And he wouldn't have it any other way.

### Chapter Three

"Finn! Get back here! I swear I will tether you to my wrist!"

Finn turned around and ran back to them, looking sheepish.

"Sorry," he muttered. "It's just, everything's so cool!"

"You're starting to overuse that sentiment," Kurt said, rolling his eyes as they moved through the crowd towards the brightly lit stadium set up in the field they were walking across in the early evening.

After another morning of simply wandering around the city together, they'd ridden the Underground to Morden before taking to a taxi to the outskirts of Crawley, where the Tornadoes and Arrows were set to play within the hour.

Blaine squirmed in excitement as Kurt passed the tickets to a bored-looking wizard at the gate, who scanned them with a Secrecy Sensor before tearing them and handing Kurt his half back with a muttered, "Enjoy the match."

"I can't believe I'm really going to get to see them play!" Blaine said as they climbed the stairs to their seats.

"Believe it," Kurt said, grinning.

"You're brilliant," Blaine said, slipping his hand in Kurt's and kissing him on the cheek.

"I know," Kurt said as he checked their tickets and led them down one of the rows of seats in the middle of the Tornadoes section.

They were all wearing the clothes Kurt had bought for them

Wednesday and Blaine had bought them each pennant flags from one of the vendors outside the stadium.

The emerald green pitch far below them was lit by hundreds of bright lights, the six goal hoops gleaming in the glare. It was at least ten times the size of the Hogwarts stadium, the seats already filling on both sides with fans. Those on the Arrows side were wearing pale blue emblazoned with a silver arrow.

Kurt settled in between Blaine and Finn, both of whom were looking thrilled beyond belief.

"First time to a match?"

They turned to see a witch who looked to be in her mid-twenties who was sitting next to Blaine leaning forward and smiling at them. She had long, blonde hair and bright blue eyes. There was a young boy of three or four sitting next to her, jumping up and down in his seat and saying "Daddy's playing, daddy's playing, daddy's playing!" excitedly. They all nodded and she smiled a little wider. "Big Tornadoes fans?" she said, taking in their clothes and flags.

Blaine nodded enthusiastically.

"He is," Kurt said, nodding to Blaine. "I'm not a big Quidditch person and my brother here is a Muggle and has no idea what's going on." He glanced at Finn, who was staring around the stadium with a huge grin. "Americans, eh?" the woman said. "What brings you to Crawley?" "They're American," Blaine said, pointing to Kurt and Finn. "The two of us go to Hogwarts."

"Really?" she said, smiling. "What year will you be in?" "Seventh," Kurt answered. "Both Ravenclaws."

"Ah," she said, nodding. "I was a Ravenclaw when I went to Hogwarts. My husband was a Gryffindor, though."

"Who's your husband, if I may ask?" Blaine said curiously. "Roger Trenton," she replied. She held out her hand. "I'm Silvia." Blaine stared at her wide-eyed. "R-Roger Trenton? *The* Roger Trenton? As in, Captain of the Tornadoes Roger Trenton?" Silvia laughed as Kurt shook her hand before he forced Blaine to do the same. "Yes, that's him," she said. Blaine looked like he might pass out. "I...your husband's brilliant," he croaked. "He's the reason I started following the Tornadoes. He's the reason I started playing Quidditch."

"Oh, you play?" Silvia said, turning to him. Blaine swallowed and nodded nervously. "What position?" she said curiously. Blaine opened his mouth but no words came out. "He's a Keeper," Kurt said, leaning forward and biting back a grin. "And he's absolutely amazing. He's the Captain, too. He's going to try out for the Tornadoes next year, aren't you, dear?" Blaine jerked his head in an attempt at a nod. "Well, I'll put in a good word," she said, laughing. "What's your name?" "B-Blaine," Blaine finally forced out. "Blaine Anderson." She smiled again before turning back to her son, who was climbing on his seat. "Bradley, sweetheart, you need to get down." "But Mummy, Daddy's playing soon!" the little boy said, squirming against her grip. "I know, darling, but you need to sit down, okay?" Silvia said, pulling her son into her lap and passing him a Chocolate Frog from her bag. Blaine turned to Kurt, looking pale and excited. "Can you believe it?" he breathed. "Roger Trenton!" "Yes, dear," Kurt said, smiling and squeezing his hand. "Now calm down before you have a heart attack." Blaine nodded absently, staring across the pitch. The stands were completely packed now with fans, excited chatter echoing around them.



There was a sudden upswing in noise as a loud voice echoed around the stadium.

"Welcome, Ladies and Gentlemen to the second game in the series of the Tutshill Tornadoes—" the crowd around them roared in approval, "—and the Appleby Arrows!" the stands on the opposite side of the pitch erupted in applause while Blaine and those seated around them booed loudly. "I'm Brandon Davies and I'll be your commentator this evening! Now, let's bring out those teams!"

Fourteen men and women strode onto the pitch, seven from each side. The ones nearest Kurt were dressed in sky-blue robes emblazoned with the same logo on Blaine and Finn's shirts and Kurt's hoodie. Those on the opposite end of the pitch were wearing a much paler blue robe with silver arrows across the chests. The players' names were splashed across their shoulders.

"For the Tornadoes, we have Johnson, Everett, Simmons, Paige, Trenton, Ames and Gregory!"

Kurt didn't hear the names of the Arrows players because of the explosion of sound that had occurred around him after the Tornadoes players had been announced. He stuffed his fingers in his ears and waited for the noise to subside.

"This is insane!" he shouted to Blaine, whose face was practically glowing with excitement.

"I know!" he said, beaming.

Finn looked a little alarmed by the amount of noise, but let out a shout of enthusiasm when the referee released the Snitch and Bludgers and the players mounted their brooms.

"Kurt, did you see that?" Finn shouted, pointing excitedly. "They totally flew on their own!"

Kurt shook his head, laughing. "Just wait!" he called back.

The referee blew his whistle and fifteen brooms shot into the air as the match began.

Finn's mouth was hanging open. He turned to Kurt, grinning and laughing. "This is awesome!" he cried, waving his flag as he tried to understand what was happening. Kurt had given him a quick overview of Quidditch, but he didn't think Finn had taken much of it in as he was still trying to get over the idea of flying broomsticks at the time.

The Tornadoes Chaser Paige had the Quaffle and was zooming towards the goalpost; she passed to Simmons, who passed to Trenton, who passed back to Paige, who scored through the left hoop.

He clapped his hands to his ears again as the crowd cheered around him, Blaine and Finn joining in whole-heartedly. The commentary was lost half the time in the noise and Kurt spent most of his time simply trying to keep up with the Quaffle.

He'd always thought that Blaine and the rest of the Ravenclaw team were amazing, and they were, but this was on a whole different level. The players moved seamlessly, passing the ball without even looking at each other as they moved around the pitch.

Within ten minutes, the Tornadoes were up sixty to ten and Blaine and Finn were shouting themselves hoarse.

"Are you okay, love?" Blaine cried, turning back to look at Kurt from where he was standing, waving his pennant over his head.

"I'm fine!" Kurt called in reply. "It's just really loud!"

"What?" Blaine said, cupping a hand to his ear.

"I said it's really loud!" Kurt shouted.

"Oh, right, sorry!" Blaine called, looking a little upset. "We can go if you'd like?"

"I'm fine," Kurt repeated, smiling, though he was starting to get a headache from all the noise. He ordered frozen Butterbeers from a passing vendor and passed them around, the chill easing his headache slightly.

"This stuff is awesome!" Finn shouted, staring at his Butterbeer with wide eyes.

Kurt laughed and stood up with him and Blaine as the pounding in his head subsided. The match had become more heated now. The Arrows had apparently lost their game the previous Monday against the Tornadoes and losing this would mean losing the three-game series. Their Beaters were hitting Bludger after Bludger at the Tornadoes Chasers.

They all let out a roar of anger when the Chaser Paige was hit in the back with a Bludger, nearly knocking her off her broom, but cheered when she scored her penalty with ease. Soon the Tornadoes were up by a full hundred points.

"He's going for the Snitch!" someone shouted.

They turned to see the Tornadoes Seeker Gregory zooming through the air towards his own goalpost, where Kurt could see the faint glint of gold reflecting in the lights of the stadium.

"Go!" Kurt shouted, jumping up and down as much as Blaine and Finn and clutching his pennant tightly.

The crowd burst into screams of delight as Gregory beat out the Arrows Seeker and snatched the Snitch from mid-air, holding his fist high and beaming around as his teammates crashed into him and enveloped him in a massive hug.

Kurt was cheering so loud he knew he'd barely have a voice tomorrow. He turned to Blaine, grinning from ear to ear and Blaine suddenly stopped cheering to pull him into a heated kiss, sliding his arms

around Kurt's waist and making a noise of longing—which Kurt knew was there by the way Blaine's lips vibrated against his own. Blaine pulled back after a long minute, his face alight with excitement and love.

"I love you!" he shouted.

"I love you!" Kurt replied happily. He saw Silvia smiling softly at them, standing up and holding her giggling and cheering son in the air.

The crowd began moving towards the stairs and Kurt turned to follow them.

"Wait!"

He turned to see Silvia with her hand on Blaine's shoulder. Kurt and Finn stopped.

"Would you like to meet them?" Silvia shouted over the noise. "The team. Would you like to meet them?"

Blaine stared at her for a moment before giving Kurt a pleading look.

"We'd love to," Kurt called in reply, smiling.

"Follow me," Silvia said, turning to move in the opposite direction of the crowd.

They moved along the row towards another set of less crowded stairs, which led to a gate to the pitch. The muscled man at the gate wearing dark red robes with "Security" across the front, let them through with a nod to Silvia.

"Now, keep in mind," Silvia said, smiling back at them, Bradley clutching her hand and skipping at her side. "They're going to be acting a bit mad as they've just won."

Blaine was shaking with excitement and Kurt reached out to take his hand, which was sweating. Blaine gave him a strained and nervous smile.

"Calm down," Kurt said, squeezing his hand. "They're just people."

Silvia led them into the changing room, which was echoing with cheers and laughter.

"Daddy!" Bradley screamed, releasing his mother's hand and running towards a tall man with shaggy brown hair—Kurt recognized him from the picture Flint had sent him—who swept him up and spun him around, laughing.

"Well, hello, you!" he said, tickling his son lightly. "And you brought Mummy, too, eh? Good lad."

"Hello, darling," Silvia said, kissing her husband on the cheek. "I have some boys who'd like to meet you."

Roger looked over her shoulder at the three of them, smiling brightly.

"Well, hello," he said, moving towards them and holding out his hand.

"Big fans, are we?"

Kurt and Finn both shook his hand. Blaine simply stood there, holding his breath and looking completely star-struck.

"Sorry," Kurt said. "He's in love with your team. Honestly, in love. He might leave me for you if he had the chance."

Roger chuckled.

Blaine blinked, shaking his head slightly and briefly gripping Roger's hand, blushing faintly.

"It's alright, lad," Roger said, clapping him on the back. "I know I acted the same way when I met my favorite team a while back. Actually, I think I may have fainted."

"You did, dear," Silvia said from where she was seated on one of the benches with Bradley.

Roger laughed again and shook his head. "Keeps me sane, that one."

"Blaine is looking to try out for the team next spring, darling," Silvia said, smiling faintly. "He's the Captain of the Ravenclaw team. Plays Keeper."

"Keeper, eh?" Roger said, frowning as he looked Blaine over. "You're built for a Keeper. So, you'd like to try out for the team? Well, I'll be watching for you application."

Blaine made a small noise in the back of his throat between a whimper and a laugh.

Kurt shook his head, biting back a grin.

"Could I get your autograph?" Blaine blurted out suddenly.

Roger grinned and nodded. "Of course. One mo', lads. Silvia have you got a, ah, thank you, dear." He accepted the quill from his wife.

Blaine held out his shaking arm, allowing him to sign the sleeve, which he stared at reverently. "Thank you," he breathed.

"Not at all, lads, not at all," Roger said, smiling. "Well I really must be going, but it was lovely to meet all of you. Blaine, I hope to see your application come spring." He winked and moved towards Silvia who waved at them before following her husband.

"Come on," Kurt said, pulling Blaine and Finn towards the exit.

"I can't believe it," Blaine croaked. "I can't believe I met...I can't believe it!"

"Blaine, can you believe it?" Kurt said sarcastically.

Blaine let out a shaking laugh. "I'm sorry, love, I'm raving right now, I know."

"It's fine," Kurt said, smiling at him. "I understand. And I'm glad you got to meet him."

"I'm never washing this shirt," Blaine said firmly.

Kurt laughed.

"Man," Finn said, shaking his head. "This is so much cooler than football."

---

They took another taxi back to the Leaky Cauldron, Finn and Blaine staying up for two more hours discussing Quidditch while Kurt laid his head in Blaine's lap, Blaine stroking his hair gently.

They ended up falling asleep, all three of them still stretched across Kurt's bed, around three in the morning.

Kurt was rudely awakened by loud screams of "Wake up, Kurtsie!" and two pillows being pummeled against his face. He sat up suddenly, staring around at the two grinning faces inches from his own.

"Jeff, Nick, how many times do I have to say it!" Kurt shouted.

"Screaming is not an appropriate method of waking someone!"

The two boys, one tall with blonde hair that fell over his eyes and the other shorter with dark, tousled hair, sniggered and slid off the bed, going to sit on Finn's instead.

Finn was blinking blearily around and yawning, frowning at the new arrivals. "Who're you?" he mumbled.

"We're your fairy godmothers," Jeff said airily.

"Now go back to sleep or you don't get your three wishes," Nick said, smirking.

"Stop it, you two," Blaine grumbled, rubbing his eyes as he stood, stretching.

"You must be Kurt's brother," Jeff said, tilting his head as he looked at Finn.

"Yea," Finn said, still looking confused.

"We're Kurt's favorites," Nick said simply.

Kurt snorted. "Finn, this Jeff and Nick. They're insane."

"I resent that," Jeff said, folding his arms across his chest.

"Yea, just because we hunted down where your room was and then broke into said room and possibly sat for ten minutes contemplating how to wake you up as we watched you all snore like wild boars does not make us insane," Nick said with a sniff.

Kurt rolled his eyes and moved to his trunk. "Have you seen Thad or Flint yet?" he said, glancing at the two Beaters.

"No," Jeff said, narrowing his eyes. "They have eluded us thus far."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Blaine said as he pulled on a clean t-shirt, carefully tucking his signed one away.

"They're here," Nick said. "In Diagon Alley. I saw Thad's mum leaving but she didn't know where he was."

"For some reason she got annoyed when we asked her where the lion was taking her wildcat," Jeff said, frowning.

"Hmm, wonder why," Kurt muttered, slipping on a fresh pair of jeans.

"No idea," Nick said, shrugging.

"I always thought she was odd," Jeff added thoughtfully.

Finn was staring at them open-mouthed, a look of utmost confusion on his face. Kurt remembered when he was first adjusting to them and their insanity. They did take some getting used to.

"Finn, why don't you go get some breakfast," Kurt said, patting him on the arm.

"Wha-? Oh, yea, breakfast...right," Finn said, standing and leaving, shaking his head a little.

"Such a lovely brother you have, Kurtsie," Jeff said.

"He's not bad," Kurt said. "There's a lot fewer random fires with him around than with you two."

"Oh, don't act like you didn't miss us," Nick said, shaking a finger at him.

"Ohio *was* a bit dull without you," Kurt admitted fairly. "But it was nice to have peace and quiet every now and then."

"Quiet it boring," Jeff said, waving him off.

"Yea, Thad used to be quiet and he was boring then," Nick said, nodding in agreement. "Now look at him. He's turned into a sexual deviant and it's all *you're* fault, not ours."

"So there," Jeff added childishly.

Kurt shook his head, laughing. No matter what he told the, he *had* missed their hilarious back and forth. He would never admit it, though.

"Did you guys eat already?" Blaine said, glancing at them.

"Yes," Jeff said.

"Why? Are you offering to feed us?" Nick said, cocking an eyebrow in disbelief.

"I'm not crazy," Blaine muttered. "Besides, it would be Kurt's parents feeding you not me."

"Do we have to wait for you two to eat then?" Jeff said, sulking.

Kurt gave them a dead-panned look.

"Alright, *fine*," Nick said, sounding thoroughly put out. "Honestly, you two. Next you'll be saying how you want shelter and love, too."

"So needy," Jeff muttered as they moved towards the door.

"I know," Nick said, shaking his head disbelief.

Kurt started laughing as soon as they'd left. "Wow, why did I miss that so much?" he said.

"They have strange powers over normal people like us," Blaine said, grinning. "So, breakfast?"

"Yea," Kurt said, taking his hand. He coughed a little. His throat was sore from all the cheering he'd done last night as he was sure Blaine's and Finn's were, as well. "I need tea, like, now."

Blaine smiled as he walked with him down the stairs into their usual parlor, where Finn was sitting, eating his breakfast and occasionally

glancing up warily at Jeff and Nick, who were sitting across from him, beaming at him unblinkingly.

"You're scaring him, guys," Kurt said, moving to pour himself a cup of tea and picking up a slice of toast from the stack in the center of the table.

"Are you coming with us today, Finn?" Blaine said, sitting next to him and dolling eggs and sausages onto his plate.

"Nah," Finn said, shaking his head. "Mom and Burt are making me go sightseeing again so Kurt can have time with you guys." He saw the stricken look on Kurt's face and hastily added, "It's fine, really. There's stuff I still wanted to see anyway and it will give you a chance to hang out with your...er...friends." He glanced up again at Jeff and Nick, who were now racing slices of bacon around the table with their wands, cheering them on excitedly.

Jeff threw up his hands in celebration as his bacon reached his mouth first, Nick throwing down his wand angrily and scowling.

"I am brilliant!" Jeff said around his mouthful of bacon. "Truly all awesomeness stems from me."

Kurt exchanged a glance with Blaine, who shook his head, chuckling softly. "Have you two done your shopping yet?" he said, glancing at Jeff and Nick.

"Finished it before we came to get you two," Jeff said.

"Yes, we want this time together to be unspoiled by such things as school shopping," Nick said, wrinkling his nose in distaste. "Plus, we need to hunt down Thad."

"Thad," Jeff said in a low hiss, shaking his fist and narrowing his eyes.

"We will find you."

Finn stared at him, looking faintly frightened.

"Alright," Blaine said, pushing his empty plate away as Kurt drained his tea. "Let's go." He clapped Finn on the back. "See you later. I'll get you that book on Quidditch when we get back."

"Cool," Finn said, grinning as they all got up to leave. "See you guys tonight."

"Bye," Kurt said, waving briefly as he moved to take Blaine's hand, both of them following behind Jeff and Nick into the yard behind the pub.

Jeff opened the archway and they set off down the street together, keeping their eyes peeled for their quiet, shy friend and his boyfriend.

---

Flint swallowed nervously as he stared across the table at his boyfriend, who was happily licking his ice cream cone, watching people walking passed and kicking his legs absently under the table, not even

realizing when he was doing to Flint. Oh, the things that tongue could do.

Forcing himself to look down at his own sundae, Flint took a steadying breath.

"Everything alright?" Thad said, catching his anxious expression.

Flint looked up and smiled, nodding. "Everything's fine," he said, reaching across the table to hold Thad's free hand. "I love you."

Thad blushed faintly, looking pleased. "You, too," he said in a small voice. He bit his lip before ducking his head, looking up at Flint through those wide dark eyes and adding, "Lover."

Flint shivered at the tone of his voice and the word itself. Thad had randomly called him that during one of their heated sessions on Flint's bed over the summer and Flint had been practically begging him to use it again. There was something about the way he said it, in a careful, nervous and loving way with the slightest undertone of desire that was so very *Thad*, that sent Flint's imagination into, a rather inappropriate, overdrive.

"You can't say that here if you don't want me to do something about it," Flint said offhandedly.

"Who said I didn't want you to do something about it?" Thad quipped in an equally casual air, running his tongue along his ice cream and watching Flint closely.

Flint gaped at him. Thad smiled faintly, turning pink but keeping his eyes on Flint as he lapped at his ice cream.

Flint suddenly couldn't help but imagine Thad's tongue doing other things. Things they'd never yet progressed to and that he now found himself desperately wanting to happen, though he was happy with the status of their relationship.

It was at least better than it had been three months ago when they'd never advanced beyond careful kisses and Flint had been walking around in a constant state of mingled frustration and desire. But he let the advancement up to Thad, because Thad was the one most nervous about it.

Flint knew that neither of them were ready for...well...sex—he blushed at the thought—but lately he'd been hoping they'd take another step together. Thad was starting to slowly—very, very slowly—open up...sexually. They hadn't taken any more major steps since leaving school, but still...just having those moments together when they would be in one of their beds, Thad sitting on his lap and letting out those tiny whines as he rubbed against him and kissed him carefully, was unbelievable.

He groaned faintly as Thad swirled his tongue over the melting ice cream before wrapping his lips over it so it vanished into his mouth up



to the top of the cone. He was blushing furiously at what he was doing but Flint barely noticed. He was much too busy focusing on the way Thad slurped hungrily at the ice cream, the way the pink tip of his tongue darted across his slightly chill-reddened lips, and the way his eyes never left Flint's.

"You need to stop," Flint said in a constricted voice, crossing his legs and squirming uncomfortably.

Thad giggled nervously. He stood up and tossed the remainder of his ice cream into the trash, holding his hand out expectantly to Flint and biting his lip.

"I, er, can't really stand right now," Flint muttered. "Give me a minute." He closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths to calm himself.

He stood and slipped his hand into Thad, smiling fondly at him and kissing the top of his head. "You're a torturer, you little wildcat," he murmured.

Thad giggled and gave him an unreadable look, pulling lightly on his hand and leading him towards Flourish and Blotts down the street.

"Where are you taking me, pet?" Flint said, hurrying after him as Thad picked up his pace to a light jog.

Thad glanced at him over his shoulder as he turned into the bookstore, dragging Flint into the cool shop with him, the bell tinkling overhead. The place was packed with students and their parents as everyone was doing last minute shopping for their return to Hogwarts the next day.

A few people called out to Flint and he raised his free hand briefly in greeting as Thad led him towards the back of the store, where they turned into the empty shelves labeled "Runic Texts".

Glancing around briefly, Thad pressed Flint gently back against the shelves and kissed him tentatively.

Flint slipped his arms around Thad's middle and returned the kiss eagerly, Thad laying one hand lightly on Flint's chest and the other on the side of his neck.

Thad whimpered and Flint tightened his hold on him, leaning slightly to reach Thad's neck and move his lips along it carefully. He could feel Thad's pulsing racing against his tongue and felt buoyed knowing he could make it go that speed.

"Mah tiuhan," Thad whined. "Tiuhan, yey. No. Tah boniz."

Flint fisted his hands in Thad's shirt. He didn't know why he found it so sexy to hear Thad speak in runes that way as he'd started doing recently. He supposed it was the fact that he could make Thad so impassioned that he actually started speaking a different language. It was extremely encouraging.

"Minaz leubha," Thad gasped. "Mah tiuhan!"

Flint returned his lips to Thad's and complied with what he was telling him to do, sliding his hand between them and rubbing gently at the front of Thad's jeans.

Thad let out a small cry into Flint's mouth, dragging his fingernails down his neck and chest as he thrust his hips into Flint's hand. Flint moved his hand to untuck Thad's shirt before unbuttoning his jeans and slipping his hand down them to wrap his fingers around Thad and squeeze. Thad had only recently allowed Flint to touch him beneath his clothes and he still wouldn't allow him to see him in less than his boxers or, in one very memorable occasion on the beach that summer, his swim trunks.

Thad tossed his head back, his chest heaving and his neck gleaming with the sheen of sweat.

"Flint," he breathed. "M-minaz...leubha. Yain endijoin saeno. Ekan leubhan iuwiz."

"I love you, too," Flint whispered as Thad suddenly trembled against him and threw back his head with a silent shout. Damp warmth spread over Flint's hand but he didn't stop his movement until he was sure Thad was completely finished.

Thad whimpered as he fell against Flint, clutching his chest and breathing heavily.

"You alright, pet?" Flint said, pushing Thad's hair gently off his forehead with his clean hand.

Thad nodded against his chest and murmured something. He pulled his wand from his pocket and took a step back, wrinkling his nose as he muttered, "*Sourgify*." He looked sheepishly up at Flint. "I'm sorry," he said, blushing. "I meant that to be for you."

"I'm fine," Flint said, kissing him lightly on the top of the head. "Maybe later."

"Y-yea," Thad squeaked, swallowing. "Okay."

"We should go," Flint said, glancing down the next row of shelves and breathing a sigh of relief that it was still empty before pulling Thad with him gently.

"No one ever comes back here," Thad said, running his hand along the spines of the books as they passed them. "I'm probably the only one who actually buys anything here anymore."

Flint smiled and squeezed him fondly as they pushed their way through the crowd at the front of the shop and moved back into the brightly lit street.

"Come on, pet," Flint said, pulling Thad across the street. "I want to go in here for a bit."

"The Magical Menagerie?" Thad said, frowning. "Why?"

"I want to get you something," Flint said, grinning.

Thad blushed faintly. "Flint, you don't have to—"

"Yes, I do," Flint said, cutting across him as they ducked into the dimly lit shop full of meows, hoots and the rustle of wings.

Thad looked faintly pleased but remained silent.

"Okay," Flint said, gesturing around at the cats, owls and other various animals around the room. "What would you like?"

"Why are you so keen on buying me a pet?" Thad said, wrinkling up his nose adorably.

"Because," Flint said, smiling faintly. "You're always talking about how much you're going to hate being in different Houses at school and how you'll be lonely even with Kurt and everyone so I thought...I thought if you have a pet there with you it wouldn't be so bad. You can think of me when you see it."

Thad blushed but rocked up on his toes to give him a short kiss. "I love you," he muttered softly.

"I love *you*," Flint said, wrapping his arm around his shoulder and squeezing as he kissed the top of his head. "Now, which one?"

Thad ducked from under his arm, moving around the shop and peering into cages and tanks curiously. He reached the front of the room again, where there was a large wooden crate sitting on a chair next to the till.

"Aw, Flint, look here," he said, smiling into the crate.

Flint moved to stand beside him and looked down into the crate at the cat curled up with three small kittens sleeping against her stomach.

There was a fourth kitten, light brown with dark stripes and thick, fluffy fur and bushy tail, curled up on the opposite side of the crate.

Thad frowned and glanced up at the middle-aged wizard behind the counter. "Why's this one separate from the others?" he said, pointing at the fourth kitten, which had rolled over in its sleep to reveal a patch of white fur on its neck and stomach.

The man glanced into the crate before returning to his magazine. "Oh, that one's the runt," he said. "Sometimes the mothers don't take well to the runts."

Thad tilted his head to the side, his dark eyes staring down at the tiny kitten in contemplation. He glanced up at Flint. "What do you think?"

"You like that one?" Flint said, smiling softly and rubbing Thad's back.

Thad nodded, reaching into the crate to scratch the kitten on the chest lightly. It immediately stretched out, yawning and extending its paws over its head. Thad giggled as the kitten opened its wide, dark blue eyes and stood up, rubbing its head insistently against Thad's hand.

"Alright," Flint said, turning to the shopkeeper. "We'll take that one."

The man mumbled a reply, closing his magazine and looking faintly annoyed that they were disturbing him.

Thad carefully lifted the kitten from the crate, laughing as it nuzzled into his neck, purring loudly.

"So, what do you want to name him, pet?" Flint said as he paid the man. "Any ideas?"

Thad wrinkled up his nose in thought, scratching the kitten absently behind his tufted ears. "Acorn," he said at last.

Flint smiled. "Cute," he said, slipping his arm around Thad's shoulders and wiggling his fingers at the kitten lying on its back in Thad's arms. Acorn swatted playfully at him. "Why Acorn?"

Thad blushed faintly. "Well, just...just because he's really small now but maybe he'll grow up to be a lot bigger and stronger. And then I bet his mother wouldn't care that he was the runt." He said the last sentence more to himself than Flint, his voice a little harsh.

"Pet, are you, er, okay?" Flint said cautiously.

"Hmm?" Thad said, looking up at him. "Oh, yes, I'm fine." He turned back to petting Acorn, smiling fondly at him. "Can we go find Kurt? He should be here somewhere. If not, he said he was staying in the Leaky Cauldron."

"Alright," Flint said, kissing him on the forehead and smiling at the way he was playing with his new kitten, giggling happily.

He truly did love Thad. But his mother was perhaps the most distant, cold woman he'd ever met. She simply didn't care about anything Thad did. Yes, Flint knew she loved him, but she was indifferent. She'd barely said three words to Flint in the four times he'd been to Thad's over the summer—one of which had resulted in the disastrous experience of being walked in on while Thad was straddling his lap and sucking at his neck insistently, which had resulted in a full week without so much as a peck on the lips until Kurt had finally said something to calm Thad down. But they'd at least seen each other plenty of times over the summer, for which Flint was eternally grateful.

"Do you see him?" Thad said, standing on his tip-toes and peering around. "I don't...wait, Flint, is that...Kurt!" He dropped Acorn gently into Flint's hands and sprinted off through the crowd towards the group of four boys walking down the street towards them.

"You, my little friend, are going to have a very interesting life," Flint said, holding up Acorn, who simply licked his hand, purring happily.

---

"Kurt!"

Kurt looked up to see the dark-haired boy pushing through the crowd towards them.

"Thad!" he shouted in reply, waving a hand in greeting as Thad approached, grinning broadly and flushed with excitement.

Kurt nearly toppled over and Thad slammed into him, pulling him into a tight hug.

"Oof, hey, Thad," he gasped, laughing as Thad squeezed him. "Miss me?"

Thad beamed up at him as he released him, blushing pink.

"Oh, don't mind us, Thad," Jeff said airily.

"Yea, we didn't miss you either," Nick said with a scowl.

Thad giggled and hugged each of them before giving Blaine a brief hug as well as Flint appeared through the crowd, tall and broad-chested as ever. The strangest thing was that he was holding a tiny, fluffy kitten in his hands. It looked very out of place.

"What is that?" Jeff said, leaping back from the kitten.

"That would be a cat, Jeff," Kurt said, cocking an eyebrow. Jeff eyed the kitten suspiciously.

"What?" Blaine said with a laugh. "Are you afraid of it?"

"No," Jeff said hastily. He tried to look casual. "It's just, we don't need any more wildcats around."

"Well, too bad," Thad said, taking the kitten from Flint and smiling as it purred happily. "He's living with us."

Jeff's eyes widened anxiously and Nick snorted.

"Aw, what's his name?" Kurt said, scratching the kitten under the chin.

"Acorn," Thad said proudly with a fond look at Flint.

"Sweet," Blaine said, chuckling. "So, what do you guys want to do?"

"Weasley's," Jeff and Nick chorused.

"I've already been there twice this week," Kurt said, putting his hands on his hips. "I'm not going again."

They both pouted, crossing their arms over their chests and looking sour.

"I still need to get new robes," Thad piped up. "Why don't Jeff and Nick go to the joke shop with Blaine and Flint and Kurt and I will go to the Madam Malkin's?"

Kurt cocked an eyebrow at Thad curiously and received a pointed look.

"Alright," he said, shrugging. He kissed Blaine on the cheek. "We'll find you when we're finished, okay?"

"Sure," Blaine said, frowning faintly. Then he seemed to remember something and turned to Flint excitedly. "Oh! You'll never guess, Kurt bought me Tornadoes tickets! We saw the match last night and met Roger Trenton!"

Flint grinned. "He's a really nice bloke," he said, nodding. "How was the match?"

"Brilliant," Blaine said, launching into a play-by-play telling of the previous night as he and Flint followed Jeff and Nick through the crowd.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Those boys and their Quidditch," he muttered. Thad beamed at him. "So," he said, snuggling Acorn. "How was your summer?"

"Boring and hot," Kurt replied as they set off in the opposite direction the others had gone. "But my letters said that enough, I'm sure. Anything happen to you in the last week?"

Thad shrugged. "Not really. Well, Flint just bought me Acorn but you know that." He got a familiar, dreamy look in his eyes at his own mention of Flint and Kurt laughed.

"Still just as crazy about him, I see," he said, knocking their shoulders together lightly.

Thad nodded, turning pink again and snuggling his kitten to his chest. "So," Kurt said as they stepped into Madam Malkin's Robes For All Occasions. "What did you want to talk about that demanded the absence of our boyfriends?"

Thad ducked his head, mumbling something.

"Thad," Kurt sighed impatiently.

"I need to know what to do next," Thad muttered a little louder, his face scarlet. "With Flint."

"Oh," Kurt said, blinking in surprise as he accepted Acorn from Thad, who moved towards the little witch waiting to fit him for robes.

"Hogwarts, dear?" she said in a wavery voice.

"Yes, ma'am," Thad said, stepping up on the pedestal and pulling on the set of too-large robes he was handed. "Ravenclaw."

"Okay," Kurt said, sitting down in one of the chairs up against the wall opposite the mirrors Thad was scrutinizing himself in. "So, have you two done, you know, *more* since you left school?"

"No," Thad said with a small sigh. "Do you think he'd want to?"

"Um, yes," Kurt said, rolling his eyes and running his hand down Acorn's back. The tiny kitten curled happily into his lap, purring loudly.

"Are you sure?" Thad said anxiously as the little witch pinned up the hem of the robes to the correct length.

"How many times do I have to say it, Thad?" Kurt said, giving him a dubious look in the mirror.

Thad bit his lip. "Okay, so, what should I do to...you know, let him, er, know that I, um, want to, uh, do stuff?"

Kurt bit back a smile at the way Thad was dithering. "Well, is there anything in particular that makes him, ah...that he enjoys when you're, you know...?" He couldn't exactly elaborate with the seamstress moving around Thad and making adjustments to his robes with her wand.

"Oh," Thad said, gulping and avoiding Kurt's eyes in the mirror. "Well, uh, he likes when I speak in runes when we're...yea..."

Kurt raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Really?" he said thoughtfully. "I should try that with French with Blaine." He paused as he considered it, making a mental note for later before turning back to Thad.

"Alright, so, why not leave him a note in runes or something if you're not comfortable with telling him to his face?"

"You think that will work?" Thad said, chewing his lip anxiously.

"Of course it will," Kurt said, nodding. "That way you can say the things you're too nervous to say out loud."

The seamstress seemed to have caught on to what they were talking about and coughed awkwardly, her wrinkled cheeks dusting with pink. Well, in for a penny...

"Tell him you want him to ravish you in the library amongst the runes dictionaries," Kurt said with a smirk.

"Kurt!" Thad said, eyes widening in shock as he glanced at the seamstress, who looked incredibly uncomfortable.

Kurt laughed lightly. "I'm only saying it because it's true," he said with a sniff. "You want Flint's—"

"*Kurt!*" Thad practically shouted, both him and the little witch beet red.

Kurt smirked, humming and scratching Acorn lightly along his back.

Thad's robes were finished within the next ten minutes, the seamstress looking relieved when they paid and turned to leave, Kurt still holding Acorn as Thad had his heavy bags of robes.

"You're mental," Thad grumbled as they stepped out into the street.

Kurt grinned. "I'm your best friend, it's my job to embarrass you," he said, scratching Acorn behind the ears.

They hunted down Jeff, Nick, Flint and Blaine in the loud, crowded joke shop—where Kurt got badly scratched when Acorn clawed at his shirt at the bangs and pops filling the space—pulling Jeff and Nick away from a tall man with red hair who was missing an ear, who they were watching reverently, with difficulty.

They all ate dinner in the Leaky Cauldron, chatting and laughing in the parlor until Kurt's father declared they needed to finish packing for the train the next day.

"See you tomorrow!" Kurt called, waving to Jeff, Nick, Thad—who was clutching a sleeping Acorn—and Flint as they left, turning on the spot and Disapparating with loud pops.

"That's awesome," Finn said enviously, staring at the spot where they'd disappeared.

Blaine was looking faintly jealous as well. Since he'd only just come of age, he hadn't had time to take his Apparition test and was planning on taking it over the Easter holidays the following Spring.

"Alright," Kurt said, standing up and draining his pumpkin juice. "Come on, Blaine, we need to pack." He gave Blaine a pointed look and Blaine

hastened to follow him up the stairs, Finn pulling a second serving of lamb chops happily onto his plate.

They ran lightly up the stairs to their room, locking the door behind them.

"How much time do you reckon we have?" Blaine murmured as he shoved Kurt up against the wall and latched onto his neck, biting lightly and working at the buttons on Kurt's shirt.

"Fifteen minutes," Kurt replied, gasping as Blaine sucked at his collarbone.

Blaine growled in annoyance. "I'll make it work," he said in a low voice. He fumbled with Kurt's belt with one hand, grabbing the collar of Kurt's shirt and pulling him back towards Kurt's bed.

"I can't wait to get to school," Blaine muttered as he pushed Kurt back onto the bed and slipped off his shoes, Kurt straightening his legs so Blaine could pull his jeans off.

"Why?" Kurt said as Blaine kicked off his own shoes and slid out of his jeans.

"Because we can kick everyone out of the room and have it all to ourselves," Blaine said, grinning as he moved onto the bed, nudging Kurt's legs apart with his knees and settling between them.

"I think they might be getting sick of that," Kurt said thoughtfully as Blaine trailed wet kisses down his chest.

"Mmm, too bad," Blaine said. "I'm Head Boy, they have to listen to me."

Kurt laughed and grabbed Blaine's shoulders, pulling him up into a kiss and down against his chest at the same time.

They both groaned at the sensation of skin on skin that they hadn't had since June. Blaine pushed himself up on one elbow. "One moment, love," he said as Kurt tried to pull him back down. "I just want to look at you for a minute."

Kurt relaxed back against the pillows, closing his eyes as Blaine ran his fingertips lightly down Kurt's breastbone, his eyes roving his skin as though he was trying to memorize it. His hand trailed along one collarbone, then the other, before he splayed his fingers across Kurt's chest over his heart.

Dragging his nails down his pale torso, he leaned down to plant a tender kiss on the crook of his neck before trailing soft pecks up his jaw. Kurt shivered as Blaine brushed his lips over his own, though not actually kissing him.

"I want you," Blaine breathed, his hot breath hitting Kurt's lips. "So badly."

"Then take me," Kurt gasped, opening his eyes to catch the look of desire in Blaine's hazel ones. "Please."



Blaine pressed his lips firmly against Kurt's, groaning as he grabbed the side of Kurt's face and bit at Kurt's bottom lip. Kurt opened his mouth and pulled Blaine's tongue into it, sucking on it lightly. Blaine lowered himself down onto Kurt again; Kurt thought he could almost feel Blaine's heart racing against him.

Blaine lifted his hips and grunted as he pulled his boxers down, still kissing Kurt insistently. He pulled Kurt's own briefs down his thighs partway before dropping against him again, grinding their hips together.

"Oh, god, Blaine," Kurt moaned, pulling back from their kiss as he tossed his head back. "Oh, wow, I missed this."

Blaine chuckled and rolled his hips again, their cocks slicking up with their pre-cum and sliding against each other with that unbelievable sensation that Kurt knew he'd never get tired of.

The air was thick with their heavy, panting breath. They weren't talking or muttering "I love you's" as they often did. No, this time they both just needed the feel of sweat-slicked skin and the sound of low moans that they'd been missing for so long.

Kurt arched his back and called Blaine's name as he came between them after several minutes of that magnificent frottage, Blaine grunting and shaking against him seconds later, gliding his body along Kurt's one final time before falling against him heavily.

Blaine panted in his ear for a moment before rolling off of him. Kurt grinned over at him, searching for his hand on the bed and clasping it tightly.

Blaine winked and wet his lips distractedly. "Love you," he said, kissing Kurt lightly on the forehead before standing up and searching for his wand to clean them both off.

Kurt closed his eyes contently, allowing his pulse to settle for a moment before standing up and pulling on his pajamas.

"We really should pack," he said reluctantly as he looked around at their scattered clothes and books. "We're going to be leaving at ten, my dad said."

Blaine sighed heavily, frowning at the mess they'd made over the past few days. "You're probably right," he said, unlocking the door with a flick of his wand for when Finn returned.

They slowly gathered up their things, tucking them away in their trunks. Kurt emptied the wardrobe of everything but his outfit for the next day. He caught Blaine staring reverently at his autographed shirt and smiled.

"You know you're going to play for them next year," Kurt said as he packed his new books on top of his robes.

Blaine looked over at him, grinning. "You think I'd do alright on the tryout?"

"You'll do perfectly," Kurt said, closing his full trunk and moving to wrap his arms around Blaine's neck. "As always. You're a wonderful Quidditch player."

"Nothing like *them*," Blaine said, jerking his head in the direction of his Tornadoes shirt.

"Hush," Kurt said, touching their foreheads together and giving him a stern look. "You're absolutely as good as them."

Blaine made a noise of disbelief and Kurt silenced him with a kiss.

"I don't want to hear it," he said as he pulled away. "You're amazing and that's that, got it?"

Blaine laughed. "Whatever you say, love."

"That's right," Kurt said, ticking him lightly on the chest as the door opened behind them and Finn wandered in, yawning and stretching drowsily. Kurt grudgingly moved away from Blaine to sit on his own bed.

Finn ambled into the bathroom to shower and Blaine plunked down on Kurt's bed, stretching back across Kurt's lap and sighing happily.

"Can you believe we start seventh year tomorrow?" he said, staring at the ceiling as though he couldn't quite comprehend it himself. "It's crazy. I feel like just yesterday I was getting my letter telling me to go to King's Cross for my first year."

Kurt smiled, brushing his fingers through Blaine's dark curls. He, too, loved Hogwarts, but he'd been there for less than a year. He couldn't imagine what it was like for Blaine, who'd spent a full six years of his life there.

Blaine yawned hugely, stretching his arms back across the mattress.

"I'm going to just sleep right here, okay?" he said, snuggling into Kurt's lap a little further.

"Like hell you are," Kurt said. "I can't sleep like this. And you know how I get without my beauty sleep."

Blaine leapt up away from his lap immediately and rolled onto his own bed.

"Screw you," Kurt said, laughing and hitting Blaine good-humoredly on the arm.

Blaine smirked and climbed under his blankets, peering out at Kurt from underneath them so that only his eyes were visible.

"And there you are, complaining about not being an adult until Thursday," Kurt said, rolling his eyes as he crawled under his own covers.

Blaine wiggled towards him to the edge of his mattress, holding out his hand hopefully.

Kurt laughed and moved to the side of his bed, taking Blaine's hand under the covers. They smiled softly at each other, Blaine running his hand gently up and down Kurt's forearm before taking his hand again. "Goodnight, love," Blaine whispered as Finn returned from the bathroom, his hair damp, a towel around his neck and wearing his Tornadoes shirt as a pajama top. "Mmm, goodnight, Biscuit," Kurt muttered, closing his eyes and smiling as he could sense Blaine's scowl. He squirmed excitedly under the blankets, pulling them a little tighter around his body as he thought about what the next day held. Tomorrow they were going back to Hogwarts.

## Chapter Four

"Do you have Pav's cage?"

"Yes, Dad, I have his cage!"

"Calm down, love."

Kurt huffed angrily as he climbed into the taxi between Blaine and Finn, Pavarotti's empty cage clutched in his lap. The morning had risen cold and dreary, with a chill drizzle falling on them as they lugged their trunks out into the street to the Muggle taxis Kurt's father had called for them.

"I just want to get on the damn train," Kurt grumbled, scowling over his shoulder at where his father was climbing into the second taxi behind them.

Blaine gave his leg a comforting squeeze as the taxi pulled out into the street to take them to the station.

They rode in silence, watching the rain wash against the windows and listening to the faint rumble of traffic and the squeak of the windshield wipers.

They reached King's Cross half an hour later, heaving their luggage from the trunk of the taxi and wheeling it across the rail-slicked pavement into the station.

Blaine stopped them between platforms nine and ten and looked at Kurt. "You haven't done this before, have you?" he said.

"No," Kurt said, shaking his head and feeling faintly nervous.

"You'll be fine," Blaine said, grinning.

Kurt moved to hug his father, Finn, and Carole goodbye.

"You be safe, kiddo," Kurt's father said, his eyes over-bright.

"I will be," Kurt said, smiling. "Don't worry about me, Dad."

"Have fun, sweetie," Carole said, hugging him tightly. "Let us know if you need anything at all, okay?"

"Okay, Carole, thanks," Kurt said, turning to Finn, who looked awkward, shuffling his feet and clutching *Quidditch Through the Ages*, which Blaine had lent him to read.

"So...I guess I'll see you at Christmas, then?" Finn said, glancing up at Kurt.

Kurt rolled his eyes and gave him a firm hug. Finn looked relieved and hugged him back, grinning.

Finn turned to Blaine when they parted and held out his hand, which Blaine shook, smiling.

"Cool meeting you, dude," Finn said, glancing at Kurt. "I'm...glad you guys make each other happy."

Carole gripped Finn's arm, looking proud and on the verge of tears.

"Me, too," Blaine said, smiling at Kurt. "We'll see you in December."

"Yea," Finn said, grinning and nodding.

"And Jeff and Nick will be there, too," Kurt said airily, biting back a laugh as Finn's eyes widened.

"You boys better get going, the train leaves in ten minutes," Kurt's father said glancing at his watch. He gave Kurt another brief hug.

"Love you, kid."

"Love you, too, Dad," Kurt said, trying not to think about the fact that he wouldn't see any of them for three months.

"Bye!" Finn said, waving over his shoulder as they turned to leave.

Kurt waved goodbye to them, promising plenty of letters and telling them he'd see them at Christmas before turning back to Blaine as they left.

"Just be confident," Blaine said, taking his hand. "Follow me."

Kurt squared his shoulders and walked with Blaine towards the solid brick wall between the two platforms, picking up speed as Blaine broke into a light trot.

He closed his eyes and held his breath moments before hitting the wall. Except he didn't hit the wall. There seemed to be a gentle pressure, as though the air had thickened around him, and then the sound hundreds of voices hit his ears and he opened his eyes to find himself on Platform Nine and Three-Quarters. The Hogwarts Express belched thick clouds of white steam through the air, obscuring their view of the surrounding platform in a thin fog.

"See?" Blaine said, squeezing his hand. "It's not so bad."

Kurt smiled and followed him towards the train. "So, should we look for the others or do you want to just find a compartment and wait for them?"

"Oh," Blaine said, looking sheepish. "Well, er, I've actually got to go to the front compartment. Since I'm, um, Head Boy."

"Oh...right," Kurt said, feeling mildly disappointed. "I'll just...hunt the others down then."

"I'm sorry," Blaine said, looking genuinely so. "I promise I'll come back as soon as I'm finished meeting with the Head Girl and the Prefects."

"It's okay," Kurt said, forcing a smile as they climbed onto the train.

"I'll see you later, okay?"

Blaine flashed him a grateful smile, giving him a quick kiss before moving down the aisle in the opposite direction towards the front of the train.

Kurt sighed heavily and dragged his feet along the hall passed the filling compartments. He saw Wes and David sitting with a group of Ravenclaw girls from their year but didn't stop to chat. He was suddenly feeling depressed.

In the time he'd spent with Blaine over the passed few days, he'd forgotten that Blaine had a lot more responsibility at school as Captain and now Head Boy. Not to mention their N.E.W.T.s were this year. Somehow he knew already that their time together would be either limited or strained. He'd met stressed and tired Blaine before and he was not a fan.

Grumbling irritably, he plopped down in an empty compartment and took to staring out the window, not even caring if the others found him or not at this point. He didn't want to have to deal with them trying to console him and telling him they'd have plenty of time together.

Because he knew it was going to be a difficult year already.

"Can I sit here?"

Kurt turned and blinked in surprise at the tall, lean boy with short, light brown hair watching him nervously through dark blue eyes. He looked vaguely familiar but Kurt couldn't place him.

"Er, yea, fine," Kurt mumbled, moving his trunk off the seat opposite him so he could sit.

"It's Hummel, isn't it? Kurt Hummel?" the boy said, smiling.

"Yea," Kurt grunted, still staring out the window at the people gathered on the platform.

"I thought so," the boy said. "You're dating Blaine Anderson, aren't you?"

Kurt sighed in mild annoyance. "Yes."

"Sorry," he muttered. "I'll be quiet."

Kurt felt a twinge of guilt and turned to give him a small smile. "No, it's fine," he said. "I'm sorry, I'm just a little...annoyed."

"Yea?" the boy said, looking curious.

"Yea," Kurt replied shifting in his seat to face him fully. "Um, Blaine's Head Boy so he has to ride at the front."

"I'm sorry," the boy said. "But good on 'im for making Head Boy. I can't imagine it will be easy with him being Quidditch Captain, too. *And* you guys have your N.E.W.T.s."

"I know," Kurt muttered, scowling. He sighed and looked up at the boy. "What's your name?"

"Leighton," he said, smiling. "Leighton Cross. Slytherin. Sixth year. Seeker."

*That's* where Kurt recognized him. He'd watched Ethan, the Ravenclaw Seeker, beat him out for the Snitch in January. He smiled. That had been the same day he'd started dating Blaine.

"Something funny?" Leighton said, frowning.

"What? Oh, no, sorry, just...thinking," Kurt muttered.

Leighton nodded awkwardly before settling back in his seat.

The door to the compartment slid open and Jeff and Nick sidled in.

"Kurtsie!" Jeff cried, leaping into Kurt's lap. "We missed you."

Kurt shoved him off onto the seat next to him. "You just saw me yesterday," he said, cocking an eyebrow.

"Yes, and it was much too long," Jeff said, beaming at him. Nick sniggered and sat down next to his best friend.

"Where are Thad and Flint?" Kurt said, glancing into the hall.

"Sitting with Dan," Nick said as he shoved his trunk under the seat with his foot. "They said they're sorry but they hope you understand. We'll see Thad at dinner, though."

Kurt's heart sank a little further in his chest. He'd been hoping to at least have Thad to talk to during the ride. He loved Jeff and Nick, but dealing with them alone could get very tiring in large doses.

"Oh, hello, Cross," Jeff said, blinking in surprise as he looked at Leighton, apparently just realizing he was there.

"Hello," Leighton said nervously.

"What're you doing here?" Nick said, quirking an eyebrow.

Leighton glanced at Kurt. "Er..."

"Leave him alone, guys," Kurt said, rolling his eyes. "He's not hurting you."

They both shrugged and turned to each other to play chess.

Leighton gave him a thankful look and Kurt smiled in reply.

The train's whistle blew loudly and they slowly started to pull away from the platform, parents and siblings waving and calling out their goodbyes as the scarlet engine picked up speed.

Sighing as they rounded a corner and the station disappeared from view, Kurt opened his trunk and pulled out his book on the St. Mungo's Potioneer Training Program he'd picked up in Diagon Alley on Wednesday.

"Oh, you like Potions?" Leighton said excitedly.

Kurt looked up from his book, nodding. "Yea, it's my favorite subject."

"Mine, too," Leighton said, grinning. "If I didn't have to take any other subject, I don't think I would."

Kurt laughed. "Well, I like my other classes, too, but Potions is my favorite. And Slughorn's a lot of fun, too."

"Yea," Leighton said, nodding. "You know, he has parties and stuff sometimes for his Slug Club. Have you ever been to one?"

"No," Kurt said, shrugging. "I've never really shown any interest in it so he's never invited me."

"You should come sometime," Leighton said enthusiastically. "Last year for Valentine's he had one of the Head Potioneers from the Ministry come and he showed us how to make Amortenia for fun. It was really cool. And the way it smells different for everyone was awesome. It was like Butterbeer and the smell of rain and—"

He cut himself off, blushing faintly as he snapped his mouth shut and swallowed nervously.

"Er," he said, twisting his hands in his lap. "So, what other subjects do you take?"

They ended up chatting about classes for the next hour. Leighton, it transpired, would be taking Care of Magical Creatures, Charms, Herbology and Transfiguration in addition to Potions. He reminded Kurt a lot of Finn, with his enthusiastic way of speaking and his lanky frame. Kurt hadn't realized how little interaction he'd had with students from other Houses other than Flint and occasionally his best friend Dan. He thought maybe joining the Slug Club would be a perfect distraction from the lack of time he'd get to spend with Blaine that year.

The lunch trolley came and Nick and Jeff bought a huge carton of Every-Flavor Beans. Kurt reached for the cauldron cakes at the same time as Leighton and they both laughed, each of them buying a small stack of the sweets and eating them slowly as they continued their conversation.

"So is Hogwarts different from your school in America?" Leighton said as he swallowed a bite of cake.

"Very," Kurt said, wiping crumbs from his hands and crossing his legs primly.

"Yea?" Leighton said curiously. "How?"

"Well for one thing," Kurt said, ignoring Jeff, who was poking him insistently to try and get one of his remaining cakes. "We don't wear uniforms. We can dress however we want. Well...we can't show up in our underwear, but you get the picture."

Leighton grinned. "Yea, sometimes I wish we didn't have to wear those robes," he said thoughtfully. "But I guess it saves worrying about dressing well." He eyes Kurt's dark skinny jeans and designer boots.

"Though I'm guessing that wouldn't have been problem for you."

Kurt laughed lightly. "Not really," he said. "I have a rather extensive wardrobe."

Leighton glanced down at his own loose jeans and Quidditch t-shirt.

"Yea...not the same with me," he said, shrugging.

"Not everyone can pull off Alexander McQueen," Kurt said, smiling.

Leighton stared at him blankly. "So, um," he said, breaking the awkward silence as he unwrapped another cake. "What else is different about your old school?"

"Well, we don't have Houses," Kurt said, shifting his position away from Jeff, who was now reaching slowly across him towards his food, and throwing him a dirty look. "And it's definitely not a Castle, just



a...school. It's nothing fancy. A lot like my brother's school, really. He's a Muggle. Um, there's no Quidditch—"

"What?" Leighton practically shouted. "Wha- no Quidditch?"

Kurt rolled his eyes. "One of *those*, are you?" he said. What was it with every boy at Hogwarts and their obsession with the sport? "No, there's no Quidditch."

Leighton looked like he could barely comprehend such a thing.

Sighing, Kurt continued, "Anyway. There's also no owl post. We just use regular mail or e-mail or—"

"E mail?" Leighton said, frowning. "What's that?"

Kurt pulled his phone from his pocket and showed it to him. "It's like texting only...wait, you don't know what that is either, do you?" He sighed. British wizards were sorely uneducated. Lucky for him Blaine at least took Muggle Studies.

Leighton took the phone from him with a look of wonder, jumping as he touched the screen and Kurt's phone list popped up.

"And *Muggles* made this?" he said incredulously, glancing up at Kurt.

Kurt nodded, laughing at his wide-eyed expression of disbelief. "They do more than you give them credit for, really. I don't know how you all live without cell phones, honestly."

Leighton turned the phone over, running his fingers over the Ravenclaw crest Kurt had engraved on the back. "And you can *talk* to people with this? This is like...bloody brill."

"Um, what?" Kurt said, laughing.

"It means brilliant," Nick said, glancing up from the chess board and smacking Jeff's hand away as he tried to move his pieces.

"Oh, right," Kurt said, frowning. He still hadn't picked up on all their slang yet.

"So you use a lot of Muggle things at home?" Leighton said, passing Kurt his phone back carefully.

Kurt nodded, slipping his phone back into his pocket. "It also helps that my step-brother and his mom are Muggles. But it's very different in Ohio than here. The two cultures are very closely associated so mixing them together was kind of unavoidable. I like it though."

"I dunno," Leighton said skeptically. "I still think it's dodgy that you don't have Quidditch."

Kurt laughed, shaking his head.

Leighton's girlfriend, a slender fifth-year Slytherin girl named Penelope, stormed into the compartment as they were finishing their cakes ten minutes later.

"Why didn't you come find me?" she shouted, glaring at him, hands on hips.

"I tried," Leighton said sheepishly.

"Well, obviously not hard enough," she snapped, grabbing his hand and pulling him out of the compartment.

Leighton glanced over his shoulder at Kurt and shrugged, looking unenthusiastic about leaving with Penelope. Kurt didn't blame him in the least.

"See you later," Kurt called out to him before Penelope slammed the door shut behind her.

Sighing, he opened his book again and started to read about the year-long training program that Potioneers at St. Mungo's had to undergo. It would be tough, he could tell, but he knew it was what he wanted to do with his life as much as he knew he wanted to be with Blaine.

The compartment door opened again and he squirmed excitedly as Blaine slumped in, looking haggard and exhausted. He collapsed onto the seat that Leighton had vacated, closing his eyes and leaning back against the headrest.

"You okay?" Kurt said, laying a comforting hand on his knee.

"Yea," Blaine muttered. "Just tired." He opened his eyes and looked around. "Do you have anything to eat? I'm starving."

Kurt smiled and pulled out the box of Chocolate Frogs he'd bought for Blaine from the trolley.

"Merlin, I love you," Blaine said, flashing Kurt a grateful smile before tearing hungrily into a frog, making a noise of contentment. "Mmm, much better."

Kurt watched him eat; he looked completely drained. Kurt bit his lip anxiously. If Blaine was this bad after a few hours as Head Boy, what would he be like for the rest of the year?

He moved to sit next to Blaine, resting his head on his shoulder. Blaine smiled and kissed him lightly on the temple before leaning his head against Kurt's.

"So what was your meeting about?" Kurt said.

Blaine sighed. "Mostly just meeting the new Prefects, telling them what their responsibilities would be and stuff," he said, yawning. "It was pretty boring. And we were given a list of what all we have to do, me and the Head Girl."

"Yeah?" Kurt said apprehensively. "Like what?"

"Make patrol schedules and obviously patrols themselves. Helping with teachers when they need errands done. Enforcing the rules and all that, of course." He paused thoughtfully. "And we have to attend all the Quidditch matches in case anything gets out of hand. Basically the same things as when I was Prefect but more responsibility."

"Right," Kurt said, his heart sinking.

Blaine gave another shuddering yawn, half-drowsing in his seat for the next few hours. Kurt would have liked to talk more, but just having

Blaine next to him was enough after the two months they'd spent apart. That and he had no idea how many more chances they'd have to simply be together like this.

When the lamps turned on, they all got up to change into their robes, Blaine yawning and looking as though he'd like to skip the Welcome Feast and go straight to bed.

"Hey," Kurt said, taking his hand and giving him a careful look. "You okay?"

"Mhmm," Blaine said, smiling in a strained sort of way. "It's just going to take some getting used to. I apologize in advance for anything stupid I might say over the next few weeks. I love you."

Kurt smiled and kissed him on the cheek. "I love you, too. And it's alright. I know it's going to be hard on you. But that will just give me plenty of chances to help you relieve the tension." He gave him a suggestive look.

Blaine smiled faintly, not looking at all in the mood for what Kurt was thinking.

The train pulled into the station half an hour later and they moved around the platform, which was filled with the sounds of hoots and meows, talk and laughter. Kurt searched the crowd for Thad but couldn't find him or Flint anywhere.

Sighing in resignation, he climbed into a horseless carriage with Jeff, Nick, and Blaine. As they set off, his heart began thumping excitedly in his chest. He was going to see Hogwarts again in mere minutes.

He glanced at Blaine, who was frowning faintly at his reflection in the window, looking at the gleaming badge on his chest.

"You deserve that," Kurt said, leaning close to him. "And you're going to be an amazing Head Boy."

Blaine smiled, though it didn't reach his eyes as he turned to look out of the window again.

Kurt watched him sadly for a moment before looking out through his own window, ignoring Jeff and Nick's loud chants of "Hogwarts! Hogwarts! Hogwarts!"

They passed the winged boars framing the path and Kurt squirmed with excitement. Then they rounded the corner and there it was. Hogwarts.

The towers and turrets were just as he remembered them, rising into the dark sky, firelight glowing in some of the windows like golden eyes flickering in the twilight. The vast black lake rippled lightly, diffusing the reflected moon into tiny flecks of silver tossed about with the stippled starlight. The forest rustled and swayed in the gentle breeze that murmured to the balmy summer night.

Jeff and Nick let out cheer as they saw the Castle, clapping like toddlers and bouncing in their seats. Kurt was tempted to join them. Finally, he was back. He couldn't stop grinning as they pulled up to the oak front doors, which were thrown open wide in welcome. Leaping from the carriage with Jeff and Nick, he waited for Blaine, allowing the other two to dash up the front steps with squeals of delight.

He slipped his hand into Blaine's and squeezed it reassuringly. Blaine gave him a faint smile and they walked together up the stairs and into the entrance hall with the rest of the crowd.

The Great Hall, with its four long House tables and staff table facing them, was filled with noise as usual, students chatting happily about their summers and their plans for the coming year as they settled into their seats. The ceiling overhead, which was enchanted to look like the sky outside, was a deep navy scattered with myriads of stars and the occasional wisp of cloud.

"Kurt!"

Kurt turned at the sound of his name and saw Thad hurrying towards them, looking distinctly ruffled.

"Hey," he said breathlessly. "Sorry, I was just saying goodbye to Flint."

Kurt took in his disheveled appearance and smirked. "I can see that." Thad blushed but looked pleased.

They moved to find Jeff and Nick, who were sitting halfway down the Ravenclaw table with their backs to the Hufflepuffs. The three of them settled onto the bench opposite them, the Slytherin crowd behind them.

"I'm starving," Jeff whined.

"If I die before the feast, make sure they know it's their fault," Nick said in a voice of feigned weakness.

Kurt gave them both a dead-panned look. "The two of you ate about two pounds of Every-Flavor Beans of the train."

"Kurtsie, that was like, four hours ago," Jeff said, waving him away.

"Besides," Nick said, twirling his fork absently. "Sweets don't count."

"We'll see about that when your metabolisms slow down," Kurt muttered. Thad giggled beside him.

They gazed around absently as the tables filled up with students, Jeff and Nick grumbling loudly that if they weren't fed soon their stomachs would start eating themselves. Kurt shook his head, exchanging a small grin with Thad.

Blaine was sitting quietly, his head in his hands and his eyelids drooping. Kurt laid a hand on his back and rubbed gently, giving him a shirt peck on the cheek and whispering, "love you," in his ear. The

corner of Blaine's mouth lifted in a small smile but he remained silent, staring at the table.

Kurt glanced at Thad, who chewed his bottom lip anxiously. Sighing, Kurt rested his hand on Blaine's thigh under the table as the Headmistress, Professor McGonagall stood up.

She gave them all a stern look until the silence was complete before speaking. "Before we sit down to another lovely feast—"

"Pst, Kurt!"

Kurt turned in his seat to see Leighton grinning at him from the Slytherin table directly behind him.

"I talked to Slughorn," Leighton whispered, "on the train. He said he'd love for you to be in the Slug Club if you're interested. Should I just let you know when the next meeting is?"

"Yea," Kurt said, smiling. "Thanks."

Leighton flashed him another bright grin before Penelope forced him to turn back to her.

Feeling a little better, Kurt tuned back to his empty plate. Thad gave him a questioning look but didn't say anything as the doors to the Hall swung open and a crowd of terrified looking first years entered, led by Professor Aldebrand—the Transfiguration teacher and Deputy Headmistress.

"They're so small," Kurt muttered as the first years passed between the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff tables, wearing expressions of mingled awe and fear. Jeff and Nick weren't helping things with the manic looks they were giving them.

"Stop it, you two," Blaine grunted as one little boy stumbled on his robes and toppled into the girl in front of him at seeing Jeff and Nick's faces.

The two Beaters sniggered but complied, returning to their loud complaints about the lack of food in relation to their mouths.

"So," Kurt said, ignoring them and turning to Thad, "you and Flint had a nice goodbye?"

Thad blushed but nodded as Filch—the old Caretaker—carried a three-legged stool and the heavily patched Sorting Hat up to Aldebrand, who set it at the head of the Hall and stepped back.

"Are you going to do what I suggested?" Kurt said, ignoring the quivery song the hat was now singing about the qualities of the four Hogwarts Houses.

"Mhmm," Thad said, his eyes trained on the Gryffindor table across the Hall, where Flint's broad back was turned towards them. He sighed.

"What's wrong?" Kurt said as Aldebrand began reading down the list of first years to be Sorted. Nick and Jeff whooped loudly when Nick's

sister Vanessa stumbled up to the stool, cheering and whistling when the hat shouted "Hufflepuff!", though Nick looked mildly disappointed. "I just can't believe it's our seventh year," Thad mumbled, looking glum and picking absently at the white tablecloth.

"I'm sure there will be plenty of insanity before we leave," Kurt said with a smile. "Jeff and Nick will see to that."

"I suppose," Thad said heavily, glancing at Jeff and Nick, who were staring at their plates with pained expressions as though they might be able to will their dinners into existence if they tried hard enough. There was a slight upswing in noise and Kurt looked up to see the last first year to be Sorted scurrying towards the Slytherin table.

"Food!" Jeff squealed, wiggling his fingers excitedly as he stared around at the now full dishes scattered across the table. He and Nick practically dove into the spread, filling their plates and eating with unnecessary enthusiasm.

Kurt clucked his tongue at their lack of table manners, Thad wrinkling his nose next to him as they both filled their own plates with a bit more dignity.

"Blaine?" Kurt said, glancing over at him. He hadn't moved since the food had appeared. Blaine didn't reply and Kurt shook him gently.

"Hmm?" Blaine said, looking around and blinking rapidly.

"You need to eat," Kurt said, dishing potatoes onto Blaine's plate and forcing his fork into his hand. "I'm not having you starve yourself like you were last year."

Blaine gave him a grateful smile. "Thank you, love. You take such good care of me," he said, giving Kurt's leg a squeeze under the table.

"Sorry I'm being so anti-social. I'm just tired."

"I understand," Kurt said, dishing more food onto Blaine's plate.

Dinner was excellent as always. The Hogwarts house elves never failed to produce sumptuous fare. Kurt ate his way through his meal, chatting with Thad and watching Blaine closely to make sure he cleaned his plate.

After a desert of warm rhubarb crumble they were all feeling sleepy and content, yawning and stretching as McGonagall stood up to give them all the usual spiel about rules and banned items before dismissing them for the night.

"I've got to go help the first years," Blaine said with a sigh, looking at Kurt. "I'll see you back in the tower, okay?"

"Alright," Kurt said. He leaned forward to give Blaine a kiss but he'd already turned away and started walking down the aisle towards the front of the Hall.

Kurt frowned faintly but turned to walk with Thad only to find Leighton grinning at him.

"So you're going to join?" he said, falling into step next to Kurt.

"I guess," Kurt said. He might as well. He didn't have Quidditch to distract him like the others and obviously Blaine was going to be pulling his "I'm tired, leave me alone while I sulk" routine for at least the next few weeks.

"Brill," Leighton said. "I'll let you know when we're getting together if Slughorn doesn't first.

"Alright," Kurt said, smiling.

"Leighton!"

"Sorry," Leighton said at Penelope's shout. "Gotta go! See you 'round, Kurt!" He grinned again before disappearing into the mass of students moving towards the doors.

"You're joining the Slug Club?" Thad said, tilting his head in question.

"Yea," Kurt replied, shrugging. "It will give me something to do when Blaine has Quidditch or patrol and you're getting cozy with Flint in the Gryffindor Tower."

Thad blushed faintly and stood on his tiptoes as they reached the end of the table, looking for Flint. He yelped as Flint suddenly appeared and lifted him up around his middle, laughing as Thad squirmed in surprise.

"Hello, pet," Flint said, setting Thad down and kissing him on the cheek. "Hey, Kurt."

"Hey," Kurt mumbled, feeling suddenly lonely seeing the two of them cuddling as they exited the Hall.

They walked up the marble staircase together, though Kurt thought he might as well have been by himself as the other two spoke softly to each other and exchanged loving looks. When they reached the corridor that split to lead either to the Gryffindor tower or Ravenclaw's and the Owlery, Kurt tapped his foot impatiently as Thad and Flint wrapped their arms around each other and kissed for a full two minutes.

"Night, pet," Flint said as they pulled apart and he set off towards his tower.

"Goodnight," Thad called after him breathlessly.

"Can we go?" Kurt said, a slight edge to his voice.

"Sorry," Thad mumbled as they set off together.

Kurt sighed. "Don't apologize," he said. "I'm just being grumpy because Blaine's not here."

Thad gave him an understanding smile. "You'll have plenty of time together, I'm sure. You did last year, right?"

Kurt nodded. Somehow, though, he knew Blaine being Head Boy would entail much more than him being a Prefect.

They climbed the spiral staircase to the door with the eagle knocker, which was hanging open as a group of third years pushed inside. Kurt followed them in, smiling as he entered the familiar, high-ceilinged room with its arched windows and suede couches and chairs scattered across it. There were students lounging around, talking and laughing, but Kurt made his way directly across the room to the stairs leading up to the open hall overlooking the common room where the dormitory doors were set around the wall.

They opened the door labeled "Seventh Year Boys" and Kurt's eyes fell immediately on his four-poster bed. Pav was sitting by the window, clicking his beak as Kurt entered.

"Hey, boy," Kurt said, moving to pet his soft wings. "Thanks for coming to see me." Acorn was curled on Thad's pillow, purring loudly, and Kurt saw Pav eye him.

"Not for you," he said sternly, tapping the bird's beak warningly. "Now, go hunt. And no cats." Pavarotti nipped his finger lightly before taking off through the window into the night.

Thad flopped onto his bed, giggling as Acorn climbed onto his chest, rubbing against his face before curling into a ball at the crook of his neck.

Kurt changed into his pajamas, glancing up as Jeff, Nick, Wes and David entered, laughing about something and making a lot of noise as they settled into the room.

"Any of you guys seen Blaine?" Kurt said, laying back on his bed and setting his wand on his bedside table.

"I think he was talking with Tiffany," Wes said, pausing as he spoke of the Gryffindor Head Girl.

"They have to schedule patrols and stuff, he said," David supplied as he shifted through his trunk in search of his pajamas.

"Oh, right," Kurt said.

Thad gave him a reassuring smile as he stood up to get changed as well.

Kurt climbed under his covers, rolling to face away from the rest of them. Is this how it was going to be? The two of them returning separately to the room each night and barely having a second to spare for each other?

He snuggled deeper under the warm sheets and blinked back sudden tears. He wanted Blaine to be happy, knew he deserved to be Head Boy and Captain more than anyone. But he also wanted his boyfriend to be there for him.

Feeling defeated and lonely, he wrapped the blankets around himself more tightly. He listened absently to the sounds of the others' chatter, falling asleep long before Blaine had returned for the night.



---

The following morning he went down to breakfast with Thad and Flint—Blaine had dashed off as Kurt was dressing to pass out the patrol schedules for the next week. Again Kurt waited as his two friends exchanged a non-verbal goodbye as Flint dropped Thad off at the Ravenclaw table. Slumping down in his seat and not feeling at all hungry, he waited for Professor Flitwick—the tiny Head of Ravenclaw House—to come around with their schedules.

Kurt scanned the parchment and scowled. Double Transfiguration first thing followed by a free period—which would have been fine save the fact that Blaine would be in Herbology. After lunch he had another free period during Double Arithmancy. He huffed in annoyance knowing he would not see Blaine other than at lunch until that afternoon's Muggle Studies class. Thad looked a little upset as well as the only class he shared with Flint that day was Herbology.

Kurt groaned as he looked at the next day's schedule: Double Potions, Transfiguration, Double Charms and Arithmancy for Blaine. He already knew that it would be his least favorite day of the week as Blaine often scheduled Quidditch practices on Tuesdays as well.

Thinking he'd just focus on getting through Monday, he folded his schedule and placed it in his bag.

Blaine entered the Hall as Thad was finishing his breakfast, looking extremely put out.

"Hey," Kurt said, laying a hand on his arm as a cloud of owls flew in through the windows with the morning mail. "You okay?"

"Fine," Blaine grunted as he poured himself a glass of juice, swearing loudly when a low-flying owl caught his goblet with its wing and sent it flying, splashing Blaine's robes.

"Shh," Kurt said soothingly as Blaine looked completely overwhelmed. He pulled out his wand to clean up the puddle of juice and Blaine's robes. "See, no harm done."

Blaine didn't reply as he slammed eggs onto his plate angrily.

Kurt watched him for a moment before standing up. "I've got to get going," he said, trying not to sound as upset as he was.

"Transfiguration."

Blaine made a noise of acknowledgement but didn't look up, scowling at his plate.

"I love you," Kurt said, leaning over and kissing his cheek before straightening up and striding between the Ravenclaw and Slytherin tables; He saw Leighton up ahead, juggling goblets and grinning as his friends laughed. He saw Kurt approaching and quickly set the goblets back onto the table, giving his friends hurried goodbyes as he stood, ignoring Penelope's scowl.

"Hey," he said excitedly.

"Hey," Kurt muttered, hoping he didn't catch his over-bright eyes.

"I talked to Slughorn," Leighton said, bouncing along beside him. "He said he's planning on everyone getting together Friday night. We always meet in his office up on the sixth floor."

"Alright," Kurt said, smiling over at him. At least he had that to look forward to. "Sounds fun."

"Cool," Leighton said as they reached the end of the Slytherin table. "I reckon I'll see you there then?"

"Yea," Kurt said, nodding. "Yea, I'll see you then."

"Awesome," Leighton said, grinning. "Bye!" He waved briefly as he bounded back towards his friends, who hailed him happily.

Kurt dragged himself back to the tower to fetch his books before going back down to the fifth floor Transfiguration classroom, which, funnily enough, had been the last class he'd been in in June for exams.

Flint waved to him from their usual table at the back of the class across the aisle from Jeff and Nick. His hair was tousled and his tie was crooked, telling Kurt he'd obviously met up with Thad before class.

Kurt sighed as he sat down, tossing his bag under the table. The fact that Thad—who still blushed just hearing the word sex—was getting more action than him was thoroughly depressing.

He could barely focus on the lecture and spent his free period in the library rereading the section they'd covered on Animagi, though he still barely understood it.

Blaine was moody again during lunch, barely saying a word in reply to Kurt's attempts at forcing conversation. When he left for Arithmancy twenty minutes later, Kurt returned to the library and started working on the Transfiguration homework he'd been given that morning, trying to ignore Jeff and Nick as they played paper Quidditch with a ball of parchment across the table.

He went to Muggle Studies feeling wary, but was relieved to see Blaine smiling and chatting happily with Thad when he entered the room.

"Hey," Kurt said brightly as he sat between them.

"Hello, love," Blaine replied, pulling him into a gentle kiss before whispering, "I'm so sorry I'm being such an arse. I'm not mad at you, I swear. I love you."

Kurt smiled at him as he pulled back, gripping his hand under the table. "Love you," he said.

---

The rest of the week passed in much the same fashion. It was like Blaine was two completely different people. One minute he was laughing and wrapping his arms around Kurt's waist as he kissed his

neck and the next he was quiet and withdrawn, snapping at the slightest disturbance and scowling at everyone.

Kurt found himself spending a lot of time in the library either alone or with Jeff and Nick—who made it impossible to get any work done—or Thad and Flint—who were simply becoming overly affectionate and lovey, though of course Kurt might just have thought this due to his lack of physical contact with Blaine. They hadn't done a single thing since they'd gotten to school other than short kisses when they were with their friends.

Friday night Blaine was holding Quidditch tryouts for the free Chaser position. He was in one of his moods when Kurt informed him he was going to a Slug Club meeting rather than coming with him to watch and he left Kurt after dinner with a muttered, "Whatever," looking grumpy, Jeff, Nick and the rest of the team following after him.

Kurt set his fork down with an annoyed sigh.

"Hey, Kurt!"

Kurt turned to Leighton sliding onto the bench beside him. He made a noise of greeting, pushing his half-finished dinner away.

"Good idea," Leighton said seriously. "Slughorn always has brilliant food."

Kurt didn't feel like telling him he simply had no appetite. "Can I follow you?" he said, glancing at Leighton. "I've never been to Slughorn's office."

"Sure," Leighton said brightly. He leapt to his feet and Kurt followed him out of the hall and up the marble staircase. They made their way to the sixth floor, where a door hung ajar down one of the corridors. It was a surprisingly large room for a teacher's office, sumptuously decorated with several plush leather couches and a massive armchair all situated around a large, unlit fireplace. There were a dozen other students of various ages and Houses scattered around and chatting happily.

"Kurt, m'boy!" Slughorn cried jovially as he appeared through the small crowd. "So glad you've decided to join us." He shook Kurt's hand enthusiastically.

"Happy to be here, sir," Kurt said, smiling.

Slughorn clapped Leighton on the back. "I guess I've got Leighton to thank for you being here," he said. He chuckled. "Honestly, the two of you put all my other students to shame."

Leighton grinned and gestured for Kurt to follow him as Slughorn moved to talk to another new arrival.

"You like Butterbeer?" Leighton said, uncorking one of the bottles on the snack table.

"Yea," Kurt said.

Leighton handed him the bottle and got another one for himself, closing his eyes as he inhaled the sweet smell. "Mmm, I love this stuff," he murmured before taking a large gulp.

Kurt smiled and took a sip of his own drink.

"It's going to be nice having another Potions geek in here," Leighton said, grinning at Kurt. "I mean, most of the people in here are brilliant but none of them are as into Potions as me or you."

Kurt laughed as Leighton held out his Butterbeer for Kurt to clink with his own with a bright, "To being nerds."

They spent the next few hours talking and laughing with the rest of the Club, who were all either well-connected or simply the best at a particular subject. It was nice to escape from classes and the usual madness of the common room and talk to people about interests beyond school and Quidditch.

Leighton was apparently one of Slughorn's favorites, receiving fond pats on the shoulder from the old Potions Master as he kept them all in stitches half of the time with his quick and playful wit.

When Kurt waved goodbye to him at curfew, promising to see him at the next meeting in a few weeks, he felt the lightest he'd felt all week knowing he had someone he could simply rave about Potions with and not feel like he was the only one enjoying the conversation. His mood was further buoyed when he returned to the common room to find Blaine grinning as he watched Jeff and Nick talk over each other as they sat on either side of a dark-skinned, fifth year girl with long black hair and high cheekbones who was smiling warmly at both of them.

"Hanna Thompson," Blaine supplied as Kurt approached.

"Is she good?" Kurt asked as he sat down next to Blaine on the couch. Acorn was running around the room playfully, leaping at flies and acting generally like the kitten he was. Kurt smiled.

"She's brilliant," Blaine said, his grin widening. "I reckon Jeff and Nick will be proposing any day."

Kurt laughed.

Blaine turned to him, looking sheepish. "I know I've been absolute rubbish to you this week. I know it doesn't mean anything but I'm really just trying to adjust to this whole Head Boy thing."

"I know," Kurt said, laying down and placing his legs across Blaine's lap, giving him a hopeful look.

Blaine chuckled and pulled Kurt's shoes off, rubbing his feet gently.

"So how was your party?"

"Mmm, good," Kurt said, closing his eyes as Blaine worked at his tired feet. "Where's Thad?" He opened one eye to catch Blaine's smirk.

"Visiting Flint," he said.

"And you're not giving him detention for being out after curfew?" Kurt said with mock incredulity. "Some Head Boy you are."

Blaine grinned and kissed his sock-clad toe lightly. "Yes, well, I've been there before. Lucky for me, I don't have far to go."

Kurt nudged him lightly with his heel, smirking as he groaned faintly and closed his eyes at the touch.

"Say," Blaine said, his hazel eyes dark as he turned to Kurt. "Why don't we take this upstairs?"

Kurt gave a tinkling laugh and slipped his legs back from Blaine's lap to stand. Blaine had apparently forgotten about his promise to keep Kurt in his bed for a week with his pile of responsibility. That was alright, though, Kurt thought as he and Blaine half-ran up the stairs to the empty dormitory, they had plenty of time to make up for it.

Blaine slammed and locked the door behind him as they entered the dormitory, giving Kurt a hungry look and making to take off his shirt.

"Wait," Kurt said, stilling his hands. He grinned. "Let me."

Blaine raised his eyebrows in surprise but allowed Kurt to pull his t-shirt over his head for him, kissing his way down his tanned chest and the dark hair dusting it before unbuttoning Blaine's jeans and yanking them down his legs along with his boxers so that he was completely naked.

Kurt eyed his Quidditch-toned body, running his hands down Blaine's arms and torso, Blaine watching him eagerly. Kurt kissed lightly down the side of his neck, licking along his collarbone before sucking hard at the hollow just above his sternum.

Blaine swore softly, his chest rising and falling with his ragged breath. "Love, you can do amazing things with that mouth of yours," he breathed.

Kurt laughed lightly. "You wouldn't be suggesting anything now, would you?" he said, dropping his voice so that it was low and sultry.

Blaine chuckled. "Maybe," he said, his eyes dark and needy.

Kurt dropped down to his knees and gripped his fingers around the base of Blaine's erection, tilting it up to lick along the underside. Blaine let out a string of swearwords, digging his fingers into Kurt's shoulder-blades and closing his eyes. Kurt sucked at the head of Blaine's cock, teasing the tip with his tongue before pulling back and blowing a thin stream of air where his saliva gleamed.

Blaine hissed at the sensation.

Kurt pushed himself back onto his feet. "Sit on the bed," he said.

"What?" Blaine said, frowning.

"Sit on the bed," Kurt repeated a little more firmly, pushing him lightly towards it.

Blaine sighed but obeyed, resting on the edge of his mattress and looking impatient.

Kurt winked and moved to stand in front of him. Blaine tried to touch him but Kurt swatted his hands away.

"No, no," he said, wagging his finger. "Not yet."

Blaine huffed in annoyance.

Kurt unfastened his robes and let them fall to the ground from his shoulders before reaching up and slowly loosening his tie, running his hand down his chest as he did.

Blaine reached out again and Kurt smacked his hand, holding up the tie threateningly. "You've been tied up before," he said. "I'll do it again."

"I hate you," Blaine groaned, fidgeting uncomfortably.

Kurt merely smirked and began undoing the buttons on his shirt one by one, pausing after each one to allow Blaine's anticipation to build before moving on. When his shirt hung open over his chest, he ran his own fingertips down his skin lightly, closing his eyes and throwing back his head as he let out a low whine of delight.

Blaine groaned in longing but kept his hands on the bed beside him as he watched Kurt pop open the button on his slacks and slide the zipper down slowly.

Kurt hooked his thumbs on the waistband and slipped them down his legs at a leisurely pace, moving his hips from side to side as he did. He straightened up gradually, gliding his hands up his legs as he went and letting out a moan as they ghosted over the sensitive skin on the inside of his thighs and then over the tented front of his dark briefs.

Blaine looked like it was literally causing him pain restraining himself from touching Kurt.

Kurt wrapped his fingers around himself through his briefs, moving his hand in long, slow strokes and making tiny whines in the back of his throat that he knew always drove Blaine crazy.

"Oh, Blaine," he groaned. "Mmm, that's so good." He swiped his thumb over the wet spot spreading across the fabric and whimpered, biting his lip and letting his eyes slide back in his head.

Blaine made a low sound of frustrated desire, squirming but not reaching out for fear that Kurt would make him wait longer.

Kurt pumped a few more times before licking his lips slowly as he slithered out of his briefs so that he was standing there in nothing but his uniform shirt hanging open over his pale chest.

Blaine swallowed as he took in his supple form. He was breathing heavily just watching Kurt, his eyes hooded with desire. But Kurt had been very, very lonely that week and he wasn't about to let him off

that easily. He wrapped his hand around himself again and pumped gently, tossing his head back and gasping at the touch.

"Yes," he breathed, biting his lip as he continued his careful movements. "Ohhh, yes...god, yes..."

"Dammit, Kurt," Blaine hissed.

Kurt groaned and bucked his hips into his own hand, letting out a shout of pleasure and running his free hand through his hair. Blaine watched with a mixture of disbelief and awe, his lips parted and his eyes moving between Kurt's face and his hand.

Kurt whimpered, panting heavily as he dragged his fingernails down his own, slightly sweaty, chest and stomach before digging them into the skin at the top of his thigh just under his hipbone. His hand was moving faster now, more sporadically as the moonlight splashed over his skin.

Blaine suddenly let out a growl and grabbed Kurt's arm, pulling his hand away and yanking him onto the bed. Kurt toppled onto Blaine, who grunted at the sudden weight but didn't hesitate to seize Kurt's ass and force their hips into each other as he wrapped his legs around Kurt's waist.

Kurt let out a sharp cry at the touch, his whole body trembling as their searing skin rubbed together. Blaine bit down on his shoulder and growled, arching up into Kurt with a sense of urgency.

"Blaine," Kurt whined, gripping his shoulders tightly. "Blaine, I need you."

Blaine rolled them over on the bed and snatched his wand from the floor.

"Hands and knees," he hissed as he coated his fingers with the liquid that had shot from his wand.

"W-what?" Kurt said, eyes wide as he slipped off his shirt and tossed it onto the floor.

Blaine grabbed him and turned him onto his stomach, his lubed fingers slipping on his skin, before lifting him onto his hands and knees in front of him.

Kurt gulped a little nervously as he looked back at Blaine, who was sitting up on his knees behind him. He knew he was about to feel a lot of pain. But he also knew it would be worth it for what came later.

Blaine pushed his index finger into Kurt without hesitation. Kurt bit his lip at the burn, allowing Blaine to crook and bend carefully, stroking Kurt's back with his other hand.

"I've been waiting to do this again," Blaine said, his voice low and rough as gravel on Kurt's ears. "You're so gorgeous when you're bare and vulnerable like this. The way you look at me like you're so innocent when I know what you've done before."

Kurt glanced back over his shoulder at him, biting his lip and giving him a look of wide-eyed uncertainty.

"Mmm, exactly that," Blaine said, smirking he thrust another finger inside a little roughly.

"Christ, Blaine, easy," Kurt grunted as tears sprang to his eyes.

"Sorry," Blaine growled, working his fingers inside Kurt fervently.

Kurt closed his eyes and waited for his muscles to relax, almost just saying screw it because he literally *needed* Blaine right now. They hadn't done this in so long and suddenly Kurt was ready to beg for it. For the closeness and contact he'd been craving non-stop first for two months and now for the past week.

Blaine pressed a third finger into him and Kurt let out a shout of pain.

"It's alright, love," Blaine cooed, reaching around Kurt to wrap his hand around him and pump gently.

"Blaine...Blaine now, please," Kurt whined, unable to take the torture any longer.

Blaine chuckled and slid his fingers free. Kurt heard him mutter something and there was a faint, wet slapping sound. Then he felt Blaine pressed against him and he braced himself, trembling with the effort to stay up in his current position.

Blaine let out a low, keening sound as he slowly pushed inside him, the movement of his hand around Kurt stopping as he went. Kurt nearly blacked-out at the touch, the feeling of pain and pleasure mingling so perfectly together as Blaine filled him completely.

They both stayed there for a moment, panting and marveling at the sudden closeness. Then Blaine thrust a little further in and Kurt actually screamed as he hit the spot deep within him that made white lights pop in his vision.

"Hush, love," Blaine said, his hand picking up its gentle movements again as he pulled back out of Kurt slowly before pushing back in, gripping Kurt's hip with his other hand to hold him there.

Kurt closed his eyes and dropped his head, his arms shaking violently as he tried to keep himself up. Blaine thrust carefully into him, eliciting another shout as he again struck the bundle of nerves inside Kurt that seemed to send jolts of electricity flying through him.

Blaine ran his hand down Kurt's back, drawing his fingernails down the soft skin. Kurt arched his back at the touch, whimpering.

"I love you," Blaine said, leaning down to tenderly kiss the faint red marks he'd just left.

"I I-love you," Kurt gasped. He was going to be gone any second. The combination of Blaine's fingers and careful movements and hot breath on his back was just too much. "Blaine, I-I—"



"Shh," Blaine soothed, increasing the speed of his movements and panting heavily against Kurt's spine.

Kurt snapped as Blaine hit that certain spot and cried out as he came onto the bedspread beneath him, wobbling on his arms, which felt like they'd been turned to jelly.

Blaine pushed into him and let out a strangled cry as his own orgasm washed over him and damp warmth suddenly filled Kurt.

Unable to hold himself up any longer, Kurt collapsed onto the bed, pulling off of Blaine with a whimper as he did. He grimaced as he felt the sticky, damp feeling of his own cum on his stomach and something wet trickled down his thigh.

"Oh my god," Blaine breathed as he fell beside him, his arm wrapped around Kurt's shoulders. "Love, you are...the most...unbelievably perfect, wonderful, amazing person in the entire world. Even if you are a tease." He grinned dazedly.

Kurt laughed weakly. "I love you, too," he whispered, closing his eyes as a sudden drowsiness swept through him. "I've missed you this week."

"I know," Blaine said, moving closer to him. "I've missed you, too. I promise I'll find more time for you if it kills me."

"Stop it," Kurt said sternly. "I don't blame you at all. Yea, it sucks sometimes but you have so much to deal with and I understand completely that you're still adjusting to this. I love you so much, Blaine, and I know we're going to have some rough patches in our relationship."

"You're so bloody perfect," Blaine murmured, moving his head towards him to kiss him, their lips and tongues moving loosely together in their current state.

Blaine rolled off of the bed to stand, stumbling slightly. He went into the bathroom. Kurt heard him turn on the sink for a moment before returning with a damp, soft cloth and sitting on the bed next to him.

"Roll over, love," he said, smiling.

"Oh, no, Blaine, I can just use my wand," Kurt said as Blaine held up the cloth.

"I know," Blaine said. "I want to do this myself."

Kurt smiled and turned onto his back. Blaine flicked his wand to clean the comforter before slowly wiping the warm, wet cloth over Kurt's forehead, cleaning off the film of sweat. He moved carefully down his body, cleaning his neck and chest and lastly the mess across Kurt's stomach and thighs and Kurt's softening cock.

"I love you," Blaine murmured, kissing his stomach lightly and sending a shiver up his spine.

Kurt hummed in reply, closing his eyes as Blaine stood up and tossed the cloth into the hamper with the rest of their clothes. He heard Blaine open his trunk and slip into his pajamas before moving back to Kurt.

He touched Kurt's legs lightly and Kurt lifted them up so he could slide a pair of sweatpants onto them carefully. Blaine's arms slipped beneath him and picked up him from the bed. Kurt opened his eyes to watch him curiously.

Blaine grunted a little in exertion as he adjusted Kurt in his arms so he could move the blankets down with his foot. He laid Kurt down gently, smiling lovingly as he pulled the covers up to his chest, tucking him in before crawling into bed next to him and propping himself up on his elbow as he watched Kurt.

"Will you hold me?" Kurt whispered. They hadn't slept together in so long. He just wanted to fall asleep in Blaine's arms.

Blaine nodded and Kurt rolled onto his side, sighing as Blaine's arms slid around him and he pressed his chest against Kurt's back.

"You're so beautiful," Blaine murmured in his ear. "Honestly, how did I get so lucky?"

Kurt nuzzled back against him. With everything he'd missed, the touches and sensations and noises he'd been aching for, he knew that this, just simply lying against Blaine as they fell asleep to the sound of each other's breathing, was what he'd been missing the most out of all of it.

## Chapter Five

"Your N.E.W.T.s," Professor Aldebrand said, watching them all sternly over her glasses, "are the final assessment of your magical knowledge before you enter into the wizarding world and start your careers. There are many job opportunities for young witches and wizards such as yourself, which we shall, of course, be discussing later in the year, but only if you apply yourself to you exams and—Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Campbell, what *are* you doing?"

Kurt turned to look at Jeff and Nick, who looked like a pair of deer caught in headlights as the Transfiguration Master stared them down with a look that could freeze the sun.

"Er, nothing," Jeff said, hastily hiding the sheaf of parchment he'd been poring over with Nick.

Aldebrand strode through the desks towards them and held out her hand expectantly.

Jeff's shoulders slumped as he passed her the parchment, exchanging a defeated look with Nick.

"An Owl Order Catalog for Weasley's Wizard Wheezes?" Alderbrand said, scanning the page. She sniffed and looked up at Jeff and Nick.

"And why, exactly, would the two of you need a dozen boxes of Nosebleed Nougat?" she said, quirking an eyebrow.

"Uhhh," Jeff said, eyes searching for an answer on the ceiling. "For learning?" he said with a small, hopeful smile. He shrank under Aldebrand's gaze.

"Twenty points from Ravenclaw," she said, tearing the catalog in half and tossing it in the trash as she returned to her desk. "I would have thought that even you two would have realized how serious these examinations are. They are not something to be made light of."

Kurt grinned at the pout on Jeff and Nick's faces, Flint laughing softly beside him. They looked like a couple of five year-olds whose favorite toys had been taken away. He almost admired the fact that they didn't look at all shamefaced about being caught, though he had to agree with Aldebrand. All of their other teachers had already given them "the talk" about next June's exams. Though, despite their joking, he knew that Jeff and Nick were actually incredibly smart, though they'd never admit it.

"Smart just isn't...cool these days, Kurtsie," Jeff had said with a sigh one evening later in the week when Kurt asked him why they both pretended to be oblivious half the time.

"Yeah, all the daft blokes get the girls," Nick said, frowning and contemplating the chessboard set between him and his best friend.

"Honestly, some of the trolls get the best looking birds just because they're, your know," he flexed his arms and rolled his eyes, "even though they've usually got massive Dungbombs for brains."

"In case you've forgotten, neither of *you* have girlfriends even with your front of stupidity," Blaine said, glancing up from the massive book he was reading for Arithmancy. He was in a mild mood at the moment, his legs stretched across Kurt's lap and looking tired but at least somewhat happy.

"Not yet," Jeff said, tapping the side of his nose and winking. "We haven't been acting thick enough. We've got a plan, though."

"This wouldn't have anything to do with the Skiving Snackboxes you were trying to buy, would it?" Kurt said, cocking an eyebrow as he watched Jeff's queen tussle with one of Nick's bishops.

"Maybe," Nick said. "Doesn't matter much now, does it, seeing as Aldebrand's taken our catalog."

"You have about half a dozen more in your trunk," Thad piped up from the couch, peering around Acorn, who was stretched across his chest.

"You always stock up over the summer."

Jeff gave him a slack-jawed look, looking completely ridiculous as his eyes slid out of focus. "Oh, right," he said after a moment, eyes lighting up as he grinned stupidly. He glanced at Nick. "How was that?"

"Brilliant," Nick said, grinning. "Totally believed you were a complete pillock."

Jeff beamed, nodding triumphantly. He glanced down at the chessboard and smirked, moving his knight with a flourish. "Ha, checkmate," he said, grinning.

"What was that, ten moves?" Nick said conversationally as he started to set up the board again.

Jeff nodded, looking pleased.

"Hey, guys?" Kurt said as they started their fifth game in the past hour. "This whole 'being idiots' thing? You're doing it wrong."

Blaine chuckled and turned the page in his book.

---

The rest of September passed in a haze as Kurt tried desperately to readjust to the Hogwarts routine. Blaine fell almost daily into his somber, irritable moods, and Kurt often found himself living for the weekend when Blaine at least didn't have to worry about classes, though the mountains of homework they were now receiving made those days almost just as busy as they tried simply to keep up with the workload. All their teachers talked about these days were N.E.W.T.s and Kurt was already starting to feel anxious about it. But he and Blaine made sure to make time for each other. Even if it was just simply ten minutes before they went to bed, talking and

cuddling together on either his or Blaine's bed, which was often the only thing they were able to do because of their packed schedules. But they both knew that they were the only thing keeping the other sane at times.

Yes, Blaine had continued being moody but he always apologized and Kurt knew how hard it was for him with everything he had to do. Though he had to admit it was starting to wear on him at times. He tried to remind himself that the good times they had together made up for it, though.

The forest was ablaze with color as the leaves changed. Reds and golds and browns clung to the branches and fluttered to the ground as autumn settled in around the Castle, bringing with it chill mornings and cool days as October slid into view.

"Haven't seen you wear that in awhile," Blaine said, smiling as he looked at the scarf around Kurt's neck, bright, vivid blue with a fringe of palest green to match Kurt's eyes.

"I've been anxious for a chance to," Kurt said, squeezing Blaine's hand as they walked across the lawns together towards the Quidditch pitch one Saturday in early October, Blaine's Nimbus hanging in his other hand.

"I guess I should be thankful for British weather then," Blaine said, laughing.

"Definitely," Kurt replied, grinning.

They exchanged a fond look as they stopped outside of the changing rooms.

"You don't have to stay," Blaine said, shuffling his feet in the layer of leaves gathered around the door.

"I want to," Kurt said. "I told you that. It's just a little more time we can spend together."

"But I'll be flying," Blaine said, looking a little upset with himself. "It's going to be boring for you and I know it. You should just go with Thad to the library. I know you want to."

"Blaine," Kurt said sternly. "I want to watch you practice. One, you're sexy in your Quidditch uniform. Two, Thad is just going to be making eyes at Flint the whole time. Three, I have my journal to read if I need something to do."

He held up the bound sheaf of parchment he was clutching in his gloved hand, the latest edition of *The Practical Potioneer*, which he'd borrowed from Leighton earlier in the week. Apparently there was an excellent article on the Apprenticing Program at St. Mungo's that Leighton thought he should read.

"Are you sure?" Blaine said, looking hopeful.

"One hundred percent sure," Kurt replied, smiling and rubbing their noses together lightly. "And maybe...maybe you'll be up to fooling around later?" he added hopefully.

Blaine's eyes darkened slightly. "You're mine after I get back from patrol tonight," he said in a low growl.

Kurt grinned, pulling him into a kiss full of teeth and tongue. He was missing Blaine so much lately. They tried planning times to be intimate—which, in itself depressed Kurt beyond belief given how spontaneous they were the previous year—but Blaine always ended up too tired to do anything.

"Mmm, I hope you keep your word," Kurt breathed, moving his hand to cup Blaine's crotch. Might as well make sure he knew what he was missing out on.

Blaine groaned. "Love, you can't do this to me right before practice. I won't be able to fly straight."

"Well maybe later on we can make it so neither of us can walk straight," Kurt murmured, teasing the shell of Blaine's ear with his lower lip.

Blaine growled in frustration when he heard Jeff call for him to hurry up from inside the changing room. "Dammit. I've got to go, love."

"Alright," Kurt said, sighing in annoyance as he was half-hard *once again* with no promise of upcoming release.

Blaine gave him a quick kiss. "Love you."

"Love you," Kurt called after him as he moved into the changing room.

Kurt shuffled through the leaves he walked around the changing room and onto the pitch, stopping as he saw a lone figure zooming around the air overhead. They flipped and spun, diving towards the ground and pulling up at the last second before shooting up into the pale sky. They were practically a blur at the speed they were going and Kurt watched with an open mouthed as they clung close to their broom and soared through the middle goal hoop on the opposite end of the pitch and cork-screwed tightly down around the tall post.

They flew low along the ground towards Kurt, who squinted as he tried to make out who it was. But they were rocketing straight towards him and he dropped his journal and yelped as he held up his arms to shield himself.

There was a shout of laughter and he lowered his arms to see Leighton striding towards him, his broom slung over his shoulder. His hair was windswept, his cheeks faintly pink from the chill and air that had been rushing over him.

"H-how did you do that?" Kurt said, staring at him in disbelief.

"Which bit?" Leighton said, bending over to pick up the journal. He dusted it off and passed it back to Kurt, grinning.

"All of it!" Kurt breathed. "Leighton that was—you're an amazing flier!" "Thanks," he said, beaming at him, his blue eyes sparkling. "I've been trying to get better after last year. The only Snitch I caught was against Hufflepuff. My team wasn't too chuffed about it."

"Well you're certainly doing a good job of it," Kurt said, still in shock. He'd never seen anyone fly with such ease, not even the professional players he'd watched over the summer. "That was incredible. Seriously, I'm impressed."

Leighton turned faintly pink. "Er, thanks," he muttered. "I-I guess I should probably go now that your lot have practice."

"Nonsense," Kurt said, hitting his arm lightly with the journal. "You can sit with me. It will give me someone to talk to. I can read this another time."

"Yeah?" Leighton said, looking mollified. "Alright, sure. Saves me dealing with Pen for bit more."

Kurt shook his head as they moved towards the stairs. "Why do you even date her?" he said, laughing. "I'm sorry but she's a bitch."

"Yeah," Leighton said, sighing heavily. "But we've been dating for over a year. I'd feel bad breaking it off."

Kurt gave him an incredulous look. "So, what, you're just going to marry her and be done with it? Yeesh, Leighton, you need to grow a pair."

Leighton laughed, giving him a surprised looked. "Kurt Hummel, you've got quite the mouth on you."

"You have no idea," Kurt muttered, smirking. He stopped. "That definitely didn't come off the way I wanted it to."

Leighton grinned. "It's alright. I'm not going to run away from you because you're gay."

"Oh, I'm not worried about that," Kurt said, moving down the rows of seats. "I just know how hard I am to resist. You're lucky you're straight. My charm is legendary."

"Oh, and so modest, too," Leighton said with a laugh as he plopped down next to Kurt, setting his broom on the seat next to him.

"I try," Kurt said with a sniff. He smoothed down the front of his coat, watching as Blaine and the rest of the Ravenclaw team strode onto the pitch, talking and laughing. Blaine waved, grinning in his direction.

Kurt waved back, blowing him a kiss.

Leighton snorted.

"What?" Kurt said, frowning at him.

"Nothing," he said, grinning.

"That was definitely not nothing," Kurt said.

Leighton shook his head. "You two make the rest of us look like rubbish. Honestly, if every couple at Hogwarts was like you, life would be very boring. You two have no drama."

Kurt hit him lightly in the arm. "We are not boring!" he said defensively. "And we have plenty of drama. We just don't air our dirty laundry out in the open like the rest of the Castle."

"Riiight," Leighton said, nodding sarcastically. "Next you'll be telling me you two have wild and crazy sex in the Ravenclaw dorms." He laughed.

Kurt quirked an eyebrow, giving him a pointed look.

Leighton realized he was silent and turned to him, still grinning. His eyes widened and the amused expression faded from his face to be replaced by one of shock and embarrassment.

"O-oh," he said, turning pink again. "Er..."

Kurt laughed at his look on his face. "Calm down," he said, patting Leighton on the arm. "I'm not going to start discussing it or anything." Plus, there wasn't exactly much to discuss as of late. Since the time he and Blaine had had sex that first Friday nearly a month ago, they'd barely done anything at all. A hand-job here or there, he'd sucked Blaine off in the shower a week ago but...that was it. He was starting to realize just what Flint had been going through with Thad the previous year.

"Right," Leighton muttered, looking mildly uncomfortable. "So Potions," he said suddenly in a desperate attempt to steer the conversation away from Kurt's love life.

"Potions," Kurt repeated, biting back a laugh.

"Have you read any of that yet?" Leighton said, nodding to the issue of *The Practical Potioneer* in Kurt's lap.

"Just skimmed it," Kurt said, flipping through the pages absently. "It looks good though, thanks for letting me borrow it."

"No problem," Leighton said, grinning. "My dad got me a subscription for my birthday. It's brill."

Kurt smiled. "You know, I never would have taken you for someone who read Potions journals voluntarily."

Leighton shrugged. "Eh, I enjoy it," he said. "I'm just glad I finally found someone who doesn't think I'm a freak for it. If it wasn't for Quidditch I probably wouldn't have any friends, I'm such a dork."

"Yeah," Kurt said, nodding and smirking.

"Gee, thanks," Leighton muttered, though he, too, was grinning.

Kurt turned to watch Blaine pause as he circled the goal hoops to yell at Jeff and Nick, who were harassing Hanna, who laughed at their behavior. He smiled faintly.

"Kurt?" Leighton said nervously.



Kurt turned to face him; he was fidgeting a little, his hands twisting in his lap.

"Yeah?" Kurt said, giving him a questioning look.

"About what you said about Pen," Leighton said, frowning faintly. "Do you really think I should break up with her?"

Kurt cocked an eyebrow. "I don't know if I'm the one who should be answering that question," he said. "I mean, we're friends but...shouldn't you ask your other friends what they think? Better yet, what do *you* think?"

Leighton shrugged. "It's just...I don't want to hurt anyone," he mumbled. "I mean, I like Pen, she's fun to be around when she's not yelling at me.... And all of my friends are *her* friends, too, so I don't know if they'd be honest about it."

"Well," Kurt said, turning in his seat to face him. "Do you love her?"

"No," Leighton said readily.

"Do you think you could?" Kurt said, watching him closely.

"No," Leighton replied, looking a little surprised as his own bluntness.

"Well, there's your answer then," Kurt said, shrugging. "No point in dragging it out. Plus, she really is a bitch."

Leighton grinned, looking relieved and grateful.

---

Frowning down at his notes, Flint turned his paper sideways as he tried to decipher his own handwriting. He squinted, thinking he'd probably be a great Healer if only for the fact that he wrote as badly as one.

Thad flipped the page of his book next to him, fidgeting a little.

"Kurt decided to watch Blaine and them practice then?" Flint said, glancing over at him.

"Mhmm," Thad said, not looking up.

"Are you going to watch the matches again this year?" Flint said, smiling faintly as he remembered when Thad had come to the Quidditch Final the previous year to cheer with on with some rather...inappropriate banners.

"Mhmm," Thad repeated, still concentrating on his homework as he wrote something down in his neat script.

"Maybe you and Kurt could make some more of those banners," Flint said, nudging his elbow lightly with his own and grinning.

"Hmm, maybe," Thad muttered, eyes fixed determinedly on his parchment.

Flint sighed, frowning. "Pet?"

"Hmm?"

"Are you alright?"

"Mhmm."

"You don't sound alright." Flint reached out towards his hand hesitantly.

Thad looked up at him from his homework, biting his lip and looking nervous as he had been for the few weeks when they were studying together like this in the library and Flint couldn't for the life of him figure out why. They'd always worked on Runes together.

"Thad, what's wrong?" Flint said, setting down his quill. "You've been acting off lately. Am I doing something wrong?" Panic suddenly gripped him. "Are you breaking up with me?"

"What?" Thad squeaked, dropping his quill. "No, of course not!"

"Alright then," Flint said, taking a deep breath to slow his suddenly thumping heart. "What's up? You know you can tell me anything, right?"

Thad nodded, eyes fixed on his own lap. "I-I have something to give you," he said in a small voice.

"Yeah?" Flint said, smiling softly. "What's that?"

Thad gulped, eyes darting around the library. He sighed resignedly and slipped his hand into his bag and pulled out a wrinkled slip of parchment, which he passed to Flint.

Flint took it with a smile, remembering when Thad had first told him he loved him in a similar manner, with a note written in runes the previous May. He unfolded the worn parchment and read it curiously. Thad was practically shaking with anxiety as he waited for him to interpret the note. He read it in a low voice, "I...I want? Want you..." he trailed off, eyes widening as he swallowed nervously, moistening his lips with his tongue. Oh...okay...just a note from his boyfriend offering a blow-job. He told himself not to freak out. "T-Thad? Are you...are you serious?"

He looked up to see Thad give the tiniest of nods, looking up at him steadily through his wide, dark eyes despite his deep blush.

"Thad," he said, wishing he hadn't just broken out in a cold sweat.

"You don't have to do that. I-I'm happy with what we're doing already."

"I know," Thad whispered. "I...I want to. I've been trying to get the nerve to say something for a month."

"A month?" Flint croaked. Thad had been carrying the thought around for a month and he hadn't even known it? He wanted to bang his head off the table.

Thad nodded again, twisting his hands in his lap. "S-so, you w-want me to?" he said.

"Yes," Flint said immediately. "I mean, er, only if *you* want to, of course."

"I'd like to try," Thad said, biting his bottom lip anxiously.

Flint wondered if all couples had to have conversations like this before they advanced in their relationship. Things rarely just *happened* with him and Thad. Not that he minded discussing things beforehand. It was what made their love unique, that they could so be so open with each other, even if it was awkward at times.

"Alright," Flint said, nodding nervously. "We can do that, er, some time."

"Now," Thad said in a small voice.

"W-what?" Flint said, turning to him in disbelief. "Now? Oh, er, alright...um, w-where do you want to go?"

Thad tapped his foot absently under the table. "Come with me," he said softly, holding out his hand and standing up.

Flint stood shakily and allowed Thad to lead him through the silent shelves to the back of the Restricted Section. Thad glanced around to check they were alone, before turning to Flint and running his hands gently down his chest, his eyes trained on his own fingers.

"Thad," Flint said, his voice higher than normal. He gulped to try and calm himself. "Thad, I don't think *here* is really the best place for— ahh, o-okay." He gasped as Thad's hand slid down to squeeze him gently through his jeans.

Thad gave him one last apprehensive look before dropping down to his knees. His hands trembled as he unbuckled Flint's belt. Flint stared at the shelf opposite him in shock. He couldn't move. His body wasn't responding to anything he told it to do. He gulped and looked down at Thad.

"You d-don't have to do this, pet," Flint said, glancing around and suddenly petrified that someone would walk around the shelves and catch them, though he knew no one ever came back to this section. Thad always picked the strangest places to get bold about things.

"I know," Thad said, looking as nervous as Flint felt. "I...I know *you* want it though and I want to make sure you're happy."

"Thad, I *am* happy," Flint said, reaching down to still Thad's hand as he pulled down his zipper. "You know that, don't you? You don't have to...to *try* and keep me around. I'm not going to leave you just because you're not ready to do something that I'm ready for."

Thad bit his lip, looking up at Flint through his dark lashes. "I know," he whispered. "I...I want to do this. I like knowing that I can make you—" he cut himself off, blushing furiously. "Erm, happy," he finished in a feeble whisper.

"You do," Flint said, smiling. "And not just...you know...because of *that* stuff."

Thad looked faintly anxious. "B-but you do like that stuff, right?" he said softly.

Flint nodded perhaps a little too eagerly and stopped at once. "Um, yeah...I-I like it," he stammered.

Thad smiled. "Well, then I'll just be giving you something else to like, won't I?" he said brightly.

Flint laughed nervously. "Uh, I g-guess so," he said breathlessly.

Still smiling faintly, Thad moved a little closer to him, his hands planted on the floor as he leaned forward to tentatively mouth Flint through his boxers, watching him nervously for a sign of approval.

Flint closed his eyes and sighed in satisfaction. He could feel the warmth and wet of Thad's mouth through the thin fabric. "Mmm, pet that's...ah, that's...wow..." he said, his voice a little broken as he tried to keep quiet.

Thad pulled back after a minute or two, looking up at Flint through his lashes as he reached up to slip him carefully from his boxers with a trembling hand and took him tentatively in his mouth.

Oh, dear lord, there was no way this way happening to him.

It was hot and damp and...he couldn't even think of anything articulate at the moment. The feel of it what Thad was doing to him was just...ugh.

He was spluttering stupidly, his body unresponsive as Thad moved his mouth carefully around him, which was about a million times better than it had been through his boxers. The faces he was making made him extremely glad that Thad had decided to close his eyes. Flint looked down at him and his legs shook at seeing his pink lips wrapped around him.

Thad wasn't even doing much at all, just sucking gently on the end of Flint's erection and looking nervous as always. But even that small amount of wet heat was just...mind-boggling. Thad slipped a little more of Flint into his mouth hesitantly and his teeth pressed down around him.

"Ahh, careful, pet," Flint said, wincing.

Thad mumbled something around him and the vibrations traveled along his nerves and he gripped the shelves behind him to keep from sinking to his knees.

"P-pet...Thad...you're...so amazing...." Thad always managed to reduce him to various states of incoherency, especially whenever he decided to suddenly spring things like this on him...which was usually the only time they were intimate. He certainly didn't mind though. The things Thad did on a whim made up for a few days without it.

When Thad set his mind to something there was simply no disagreeing with him, not that he ever would...obviously...he was watching Thad give him head in the middle of the damn library for Merlin's sake.

Thad made a strange face, wrinkling his nose and pausing for a moment and Flint was sure he was tasting the bitter pre-cum leaking from him.

"Sorry," Flint muttered, blushing. He hated seeing Thad uncomfortable, especially when it was his fault.

Thad murmured something as he continued his movements with a little more insistence, reaching one hand from the ground to grab Flint's thigh. Flint covered the soft hand with his own, stroking it gently with his fingertips and watching in disbelief as Thad moaned. *Moaned*. And took Flint even further into his mouth.

It was sloppy and occasionally there was the roughness of teeth but watching Thad turn in an instant from careful and nervous to licentious and assertive was one of the things Flint loved about him. Knowing that under the sweet demeanor there was that sexual wildcat just waiting to be coaxed out.

"Pet, I suggest you m-move," Flint choked, his legs shaking violently. Thad pulled back suddenly, looking anxious, and Flint grabbed himself and pumped twice before coming into his hand with a groan, his vision flashing white for a moment. He fell back against the shelves, panting and wiping sweat from his forehead with his sleeve. He slid down onto the floor, feeling dazed.

"W-was that alright?" Thad said nervously, biting his slightly swollen lip.

Flint let out a shaky laugh. "You need to stop asking me if you're doing a good job," he said, glancing up at Thad and blinking hard to clear his vision. "You're...Thad, I can't even think of a word to describe you right now, that's how good of a job you did."

Thad blushed, looking relieved. He pulled out his wand and cleaned Flint's hand with a small smile.

Flint slipped himself back into his boxers, zipping up his jeans and leaning towards Thad to pull him into a deep kiss. Thad squealed in surprise but pushed back into the kiss, crawling across the floor and climbing into Flint's lap. He draped his arms around Flint's neck tightly and glided his tongue around his mouth.

There was an odd taste in the kiss and Flint groaned when he realized that he was tasting himself on Thad's tongue. Why that was so sexy to him, he had no idea but he could already feel it affecting him. He forced himself to pull away from Thad, smiling softly at him.

"I love you," Flint said, running his hair through Thad's hair. "I really, *really* do."

"I love you, too," Thad whispered, tracing his fingers lightly down Flint's chest.

"And I love it when you do things like that," Flint said, hugging him close. "When you take control. I know you're not ready for me to do the same thing. But I swear when you are...you're going to scream."

Thad swallowed nervously, lips slightly parted in surprise. "O-oh...okay," he breathed, eyes wide.

Flint gave him a steady look. "I mean it. Thad, you mean the world to me. I'd do anything to make you happy."

Thad smiled and snuggled against him happily. "Mmm, me too," he said, closing his eyes and sighing contentedly.

---

Kurt returned to the Castle with Blaine, Jeff and Nick when their practice was over, Leighton claiming he wanted to get in a bit more flying on his own before lunch. Glancing over his shoulder as they left, Kurt saw him mounting his broom and zipping off around the pitch at such a speed he was shocked he hadn't crashed yet. He truly was an unbelievable flier.

When they returned to the common room, Kurt found Thad sitting in front of the fire reading quietly, the faintest of smirks on his face.

Acorn, who had grown exponentially in the past month, was curled up in his lap, Thad occasionally stroking him absently.

"What are you so happy about?" Kurt said, sitting next to him as Jeff, Nick, and Blaine went to get showers. "And why aren't you studying with Flint?"

Thad closed his book and set it down carefully on the table before turning to him. He blushed and smiled sheepishly.

"Thad," Kurt gasped. "You didn't...did you?"

Thad bit his lip and nodded.

Kurt let out a shout of laughter, Thad grinning next to him.

"Oh, Thad," Kurt said, slipping an arm around his shoulder and shaking his head. "What have I done to you?"

"Nothing," Thad said. Kurt could tell he was trying to sound casual.

"I'm the one doing things...to Flint."

Kurt snorted and dropped his head to his knees as he shook with laughter. He straightened up after a minute, wiping tears of laughter from his eyes. "So, I guess that means Flint won't be coherent for the next few days then?"

Thad bit his lip in an effort to conceal his broad grin.

That evening, Blaine had patrol so Kurt spent the time curled up on his bed with a mug of tea, Thad sitting next to him as they gossiped, Acorn purring happily where he was curled between them. He had certainly missed talking like this with someone over the summer. Sure, Mercedes and Tina were great, but they weren't, well, they weren't

Thad. There were things he couldn't discuss with them because he knew they wouldn't be comfortable with it.

Not that he and Thad were divulging the details of their love lives to each other, but he didn't feel awkward mentioning things like that, though Thad still often blushed at the idea of doing certain things with Flint. Kurt still firmly believed neither of them would be able to form logical sentences for a week once they actually started having sex.

Around ten thirty, Kurt pulled out his pocket watch and frowned.

Blaine was ten minutes late from his patrol.

"I'm going to go hunt him down," Kurt said with a sigh.

"Kay," Thad said, smiling and scratching Acorn's stomach.

Kurt slipped out of bed, setting his tea on the table beside him and making his way down to the common room, which was crowded and loud as it always was on Saturday nights.

Yawning, he walked down the spiral staircase. The sound of laughter reached his ears and he opened the door out into the corridor and peered around.

Blaine was standing nearby with a boy Kurt did not know. He was short and freckled with bright red hair, laughing and staring at Blaine with a reverent expression.

Blaine was smiling in a strained sort of way, looking faintly uncomfortable.

"Hello, dear," Kurt said, sidling over to Blaine and slipping an arm around his waist.

Blaine looked relieved by his appearance. "Hello, love," he said, smiling.

"You're late," Kurt said, glancing at the red-haired boy, who was glaring at him, all trace of laughter gone from his face.

"Sorry," Blaine said, "I was just talking to Cole." He nodded to the other boy, who took on a dreamy expression the moment Blaine said his name.

Kurt bit back a laugh with difficulty. "That's alright," he said, wrapping his other arm around Blaine. "Do you want me to just wait for you in the room?"

"No!" Blaine said quickly. Kurt sniggered. "No, no, I'm finished patrolling now. I, er, I'll come with you."

"That's right you will," Kurt muttered suggestively.

Blaine's eyes widened in warning.

"What?" Kurt said. "I'm not allowed to want a little quality time with my boyfriend?" He kissed Blaine on the neck lightly, feeling him shiver at the touch.

"Kurt," he said in a low, slightly reproachful voice.

Kurt laughed, turning and catching the furious glare Cole was giving him. If it wasn't for the fact that he was almost a foot shorter than him, he might have felt threatened.

"Well, Cole," Kurt said, giving him a bright smile. "Blaine's really got to come with me. We have, ah, things to do."

Blaine's eyes darkened. "Will you be okay walking back to your tower, Cole?" he said, shifting to try and hide his growing problem.

Cole opened his mouth hopefully.

"I'm sure he's fine, dear," Kurt said. "You look tired. Why don't you come inside and let me take care of you?"

Blaine looked torn between wanting to follow Kurt and to being his usual, kind self.

His hormones won out in the end.

"Alright, well, see you then, Cole," he said, giving into Kurt's gentle tug on his hand and waving absently over his shoulder at Cole, who was scowling at Kurt.

"You didn't have to be so mean," Blaine said reprovably when they were climbing up the tight spiral staircase to the tower.

Kurt gave a tinkling laugh, answering the tower door's question before turning back to Blaine. "Blaine, he has a pretty obvious crush on you. I'm just showing him that he can't have you," he said as they stepped up the dormitory stairs. "Why was he here anyway?"

"New Prefect," Blaine said with a sigh. "He's actually Ethan's cousin but...we had patrol together and he's er..."

"Smitten with you?" Kurt supplied as they entered the dorm.

Thad looked up at them and smiled before ambling out of the room with a grin in Kurt's direction and an off-handed, "I think I'll go see Flint," Acorn trying to rub against his ankles as he went.

"I guess," Blaine muttered in response to Kurt's comment.

"Well," Kurt said, edging over to him and running his fingers down Blaine's arms before taking his hands and pulling him close. "I'm the only one who's allowed to be smitten with you."

"Kurt Hummel, do I sense jealousy?" Blaine said, grinning.

"Me, jealous?" Kurt said airily. "I doubt it. I know I have nothing to worry about."

"Yeah?" Blaine said, closing his eyes as Kurt moved his hands to his hips, rubbing his thumbs against his hipbones and eyeing him eagerly.

"Why's that?"

Kurt laughed lightly and lowered his mouth to Blaine's ear. "Because I know no one can do the things I can do to you."

Blaine groaned, leaning into where Kurt's hot breath was ghosting over his earlobe. "So true," he murmured.



Kurt hummed and took Blaine's earlobe into his mouth, sucking it lightly and flicking it with his tongue. He rubbed at Blaine's tense back muscles, working at the knots that he was sure had been there since his practice earlier that day.

"Ugh, love, you know just how to relax me," Blaine said, closing his eyes as Kurt moved to work at his other earlobe.

"I know," Kurt mumbled, teasing the soft flesh and pressing his hips into Blaine's. He frowned and pulled up to look at Blaine, who suddenly looked embarrassed. "Um, everything alright?" he said, cocking an eyebrow.

"I'm sorry," Blaine said, groaning and laying his head against Kurt's shoulder. "I'm just so exhausted. Honestly, it has nothing to do with you, love. It's just so relaxing what you're doing and...I'm sorry."

Kurt gnawed his lower lip. Well, they'd certainly never had *this* problem before. Still, he could tell Blaine was most definitely worn out. "It's alright," he said, forcing a smile.

Blaine looked relieved. "Thank you...I'm sorry I'm just...well...you know." He fell back onto his bed and kicked off his shoes. His earlier hungry expression was gone and he looked completely exhausted. "I'm completely knackered.... I could sleep for a week."

Kurt sat down on the bed next to him, rubbing his shoulder. "Do you just want to cuddle?" he said.

Blaine gave him a pleading look and nodded. "I'm really sorry. I'm just not in the mood right now."

"It's fine," Kurt said, though he was aching for intimacy; a week had passed without physical contact other than snuggling under the blankets or kissing gently, which he loved, but that didn't change the fact that he was a seventeen year-old boy with a *very* attractive boyfriend.

But he climbed under the covers with Blaine and allowed him to hold him and kiss him on the top of the head.

He loved Blaine, he really and truly did, he just felt that, over the past month, they'd fallen into a strange rut in their relationship. And he hated it.

---

The Gryffindor common room was as crowded as ever, loud talk and laughter filling the comfortable space. Flint frowned down at the chessboard in front of him, tapping his fingertips along the table top. "Any day, Flint, would be great," Dan said, cocking an eyebrow. Flint held up a hand to silence him before reaching out to take Dan's knight.

"I wouldn't do that."

Flint turned to see Thad standing beside him, his nose wrinkled up and his head tilted to the side as he considered the position of Flint's pieces on the board.

"Pet!" Flint exclaimed, grinning. "What are you doing here?"

Thad wiggled his way onto Flint's lap, his legs draped over the side of the chair. "I've been kicked out of the dorm," he said with a sigh.

"You know," Dan said, smirking. "I reckon Hamilton and Campbell were right in saying that Kurt and Anderson are like rabbits."

Flint laughed, Thad giggling in his lap as he leaned against him, nestling his head under Flint's chin.

"So, pet," Flint said, grinning. "What do I need to do to thoroughly thrash Dan?"

"Hey," Dan said, scowling. "No fair, you can't ask him for help, there's no way I can beat him."

Thad blushed happily. "Well, I certainly don't want things to be inequitable," he said.

"Mmm, I love it when you talk like that," Flint murmured, nuzzling Thad's ear.

"Yeah?" Thad said, smirking. "Does it whet your propensity towards salacious endeavors?"

"Um..."

"Just say yes."

"Yes," Flint said, grinning at Thad's smug expression. "So, you won't help me, huh?"

Thad gave him an apologetic look, shrugging.

Flint sighed. "Alright, I'll just beat him on my own," he said, taking one of Dan's rooks.

"As if you could," Dan said, watching as his queen hauled Flint's knight off the board. "You're a horrible chess player."

Flint scowled and moved a pawn forward. Thad tilted his head up towards his ear as Dan's bishop dragged the squealing pawn to the edge of the table.

"If you lose, that will just give me a reason to comfort you," Thad whispered, his warm breath tickling Flint's ear and neck.

Flint gave him a look of mild surprise, grinning faintly. "Well, maybe I'll lose on purpose then," he murmured, a shiver running down his spine as Thad bit his lip, his dark eyes looking up at him through his lashes. Apparently his spontaneity from earlier had yet to wear off.

"Well, okay then," Thad said, holding his gaze even as he turned pink. Just as Flint was about to upend the chessboard to end the game then and there, Cole O'Brien, the fifth year Prefect, approached them, glowering.

"You can't be in here, Jenkins," he said, crossing his arms over his chest.

"I'm sorry?" Thad said, tilting his head curiously.

"You can't be in here," Cole repeated. "One, it's not your common room. Two, it's past curfew."

Thad blinked in surprise.

"He's not doing anything to you, Cole," Dan said, not looking up from checking Flint with his queen.

"Well, it's against the rules," Cole said, tapping his foot impatiently.

"Don't make me force him to leave."

Flint laughed, eyeing the other boy, who he thought would probably be carried away by a strong breeze. "Take it easy, he just came to visit me. He's not spying or anything."

"I'm a Prefect, Wilson!" he said poking Flint in the shoulder. "I can give you both detention, you know."

Flint opened his mouth angrily, but Thad silenced him with a finger to his lips. "It's fine, Flint," he said, smiling sadly. "Really, I'll see you tomorrow. We can, er, finish this then." He gave Flint a chaste kiss and stood to leave, throwing a dirty look in Cole's direction.

"What the hell?" Dan said as the portrait hole closed behind Thad.

"What's your problem?"

"I haven't got one, Westwood," Cole snapped. "And if I was you, I'd keep my mouth shut, because I can give *you* detention, too." He stormed off, muttering angrily.

Flint looked at Dan, whose mouth was hanging open.

"What's got his knickers in a twist?" Dan asked incredulously.

"Not a clue," Flint said, shrugging and feeling annoyed. He sighed and took Dan's bishop, clucking his tongue in frustration and Dan moved his knight and said, "Checkmate," with a cheeky grin.

---

That Monday, Kurt made his way to breakfast alone—Blaine was passing out patrol schedules and Thad had gone to walk with Flint and Dan. He saw Leighton sitting alone at his usual seat at the Slytherin table, picking absently at his hash and looking defeated.

"You alright?" Kurt said as he approached. Leighton turned and Kurt clapped a hand to his mouth.

The right side of the other boy's face was a harsh purple, swollen and shiny with the dark bruise.

"Christ, Leighton, what happened?" Kurt said, dropping into the seat next to him.

"I broke up with Pen," Leighton muttered.

"And she punched you?" Kurt said, gaping. She was obviously a lot stronger than she looked.

"No," Leighton said, shaking his head. "She threw a book at me."

"And you felt bad about wanting to dump her? What did I say, Leighton? She's a total—oh, crap...this is my fault!" Kurt gave him an apologetic look.

"Nah," Leighton said, grinning lopsidedly. "You didn't do anything wrong. Besides, it's kind of cool, don't you think?" He examined the bruise in the back of his spoon, making a fierce expression. "Makes me look like a badass."

Kurt snorted. "Until you consider the fact that it was caused by a hundred pound, fifteen year-old *girl*."

Leighton pouted.

"Here," Kurt said, pulling his wand out. "I can make it all better."

Leighton laughed and allowed Kurt to take his face in his hand, turning it so Kurt could tap his wand lightly on the bruise. He grimaced as it healed, the bluish coloring shrinking until his skin was smooth and clear again.

"There," Kurt said, smiling, his fingers still on Leighton's chin.

Leighton turned with a grin, his dark blue eyes meeting Kurt's.

Something seemed to crackle between them and Kurt quickly pulled his hand back, blinking in surprise.

"Um, right," he said, hurrying to stand and avoiding Leighton's eyes.

"So...yeah, I'll see you at Friday's meeting then."

"Yeah," Leighton said, frowning and looking dazed. "Yeah, I'll see you then."

Kurt moved down the Ravenclaw table to sit with Nick and Jeff, his heart beating rapidly in his chest. The two Beaters hailed him loudly and he muttered a greeting in reply as he stared down at the table. He loved Blaine, loved everything about him. It was simply his body responding to the lack of physical contact he'd been dealing with. It was just creating chemistry, he assured himself. Because Leighton was attractive, he wasn't about to deny it. But he was also straight. Completely straight. So then why had he seen the same sudden spark in his eyes that he'd felt in his own?

---

Stifling a yawn, Blaine made his way to his patrol Friday evening after a brief goodbye to Kurt. He'd been so completely exhausted these days, he almost forgot to stop and wait in the third floor corridor for whoever he was patrolling with. Though he'd checked the schedule at least half a dozen times, he couldn't for the life of him remember who was going to be joining him.

"Hey, Blaine!"

Blaine turned and fought back an annoyed sigh as Cole bounded towards him, beaming.

"Hi, Cole," Blaine grunted. He'd been patient. He really had. Being cruel and hurtful was not on his list of things to do but Cole's strange infatuation with him was getting a bit out of hand. Whenever they had patrol together, Blaine usually just walked along in silence while Cole rambled on about *everything*. But he listened, as best as possible, and tried to be nice. He was, after all, just a kid.

"So how was your week?" Cole said as they set off together.

"Fine," Blaine muttered. Which was a lie. His combination of responsibilities was starting to wear him extremely thin. Between practice and patrols and classes, he barely had a spare moment for Kurt and he knew it was starting to affect both of them.

Kurt at least had his club thing to keep him busy while Blaine was away. Blaine was happy that he'd finally found something he enjoyed as much as Blaine loved Quidditch to distract him from Blaine's complete lack of enthusiasm in...certain aspects of their relationship. It wasn't that he didn't *want* to do things with Kurt like that, he was just often too damn tired to do more than try and catch up on his sleep, which he never managed to.

And he *knew* Kurt was starting to get fed up with the lack of intimacy. Kurt had a libido like no one Blaine had ever seen and no matter how many times he told Blaine that he understood when he was too tired to fool around, he never missed the looks of frustration or longing that crossed Kurt's face when he thought Blaine wasn't looking. That in combination with Blaine being a complete arse half the time...he was starting to wonder why Kurt was even staying with him.

"—patrol together more often," Cole was saying.

Blaine blinked, shaking his head and trying to concentrate. "I-what? I mean, yeah...you're right." He had no idea what he was agreeing to.

"Really?" Cole said, looking suddenly excited.

Oh, crap, what did he say?

"Um, no...I mean...we'll see?" He hoped this was a sufficient answer.

Apparently it was because Cole's expression faded a little but he said, "Alright," with a still relatively anxious smile.

Sighing in relief, Blaine returned to his stupor. He spent the next hour battling between trying to focus on what Cole was saying and thinking longingly of his warm, soft bed. Then he thought of Kurt again and of how they still had yet to sleep in the same bed together since the last time they'd had sex a month ago.

He hated how much it was wearing on Kurt...the lack of contact. Blaine missed it, too, but then he'd start thinking of the pile of homework he had, of Quidditch strategies and patrol schedules and being physical with Kurt was so often pushed to the back of his mind.

He promised himself that he would wait up for Kurt when he got back to the tower, shaking off Cole with difficulty. So he sat and waited...and waited. But despite slapping himself in the face a dozen times, he simply couldn't stay away and he collapsed in a tired haze, falling asleep immediately and feeling overwhelmed and lonely.

---

Kurt made his way to Slughorn's office that evening some time after Blaine had left for patrol, feeling apprehensive. He hadn't talked to Leighton since Monday and hadn't said a word about the incident to anyone else. It was nothing, after all. Why should he worry Blaine or Thad with such things as a momentarily flash of attraction? He accidentally walked past Slughorn's office and back-tracked, feeling confused and frustrated. Leighton was chatting with Slughorn when Kurt entered, the rotund Potions Master chortling at whatever the other boy had said.

"Ah, Kurt!" Slughorn called, waving him over.

Kurt didn't look at Leighton as he crossed the room, giving Slughorn a strained smile.

"So," Slughorn said, "Leighton tells me you're interested in Apprenticing at St. Mungo's?"

Kurt glanced at Leighton, who grinned over his Butterbeer.

"Er, yes, sir," Kurt said, nodding and uncorking a drink for himself.

Slughorn gave him an indulgent smile, swirling his glass of mead absently. "It just so happens I know Antony Merkwood, Head Potioneer for the Hospital. Good man, grand student. And I'd be more than happy to put in a good word for you."

Kurt gagged on his Butterbeer, coughing and spluttering as Slughorn clapped him on the back. "T-that would be amazing, sir!" he gasped.

"Really, I-I can't thank you enough!"

"Thank Leighton," Slughorn said, patting the boy on the shoulder.

"He's been dropping hints to me about it all week."

Kurt gave Leighton a look of stunned disbelief. Leighton shrugged, taking another drink of Butterbeer.

Slughorn gave Kurt another pat on the back as he ambled over to pick at the tray of crystallized pineapple on the snack table.

"Leighton!" Kurt hissed. "W-why did you—thank you."

Leighton grinned. "Well, I knew *you* weren't going to say anything about it so...yeah."

Kurt smiled. It was nice to know there was someone who would take the time to think of him, who knew what he wanted and tried to help him achieve it. It was something Blaine would have done. He stopped, scolding himself for thinking of the two of them in any comparative fashion. They were nothing alike.

"I finally read this," Kurt said, holding up the copy of *The Practical Potioneer* he'd borrowed over a week before.

Leighton pocketed it with a grin. "So what did you think?"

"Very...informative," Kurt said thoughtfully.

"Let's hope," Leighton said with a smirk. Kurt hit him playfully. "So are you going to Hogsmeade for Halloween?" Leighton said, draining his Butterbeer and reaching for another one. He seemed to be addicted to the stuff.

"I guess," Kurt said, shrugging. "Jeff and Nick said they have some insane tradition I need to be involved in but I'm sure I can handle both. I need a good break."

"It'll be fun," Leighton said earnestly. "It's great to hang out in the village before the feast."

"Plus I can actually do something outside of school with Blaine," Kurt said. "It's been hell lately trying to find any time to spend with him."

"Yeah," Leighton said, a frown momentarily creasing his brow. "Yeah, totally, of course you'd go together."

"And what about you?" Kurt said, picking absently through a bowl of licorice snaps and swearing when one of them bit him.

"What do you mean?" Leighton said.

"Who are you going to Hogsmeade with?" Kurt said, sucking on the little red mark on his finger.

"Oh," Leighton said, turning pink. "I, er, I might just go alone now I'm single. My friends aren't happy with me for breaking up with Pen."

"You're making me feel bad," Kurt said. "As it's my fault."

Leighton shrugged, staring into his bottle and frowning. "I'm not upset with you. I'm much better off without Pen anyway. I should be thanking you."

"But I didn't do anything to be thanked for," Kurt said, laughing.

Leighton lifted his eyes to him and Kurt swallowed nervously as he saw them snapping with electricity again as they had at breakfast on Monday.

Leighton gave him a steady look. "Yes, you did."

Kurt left the meeting not long after, no longer able to take the sudden tension that had sprung up between him and Leighton. Assuring himself it was just his hormones acting out, he hurried back to the tower to find Blaine, to tear his clothes off and show his body who it was supposed to want.

But when he burst into the dorm after escaping Jeff and Nick—who had tried to convince him to hold onto a firework while they lit it to "see how it goes"—Blaine was stretched across his bed fully clothed, sound asleep.

Kurt groaned in frustration and collapsed onto his own bed, lying on his side as he didn't want to be on top of his own erection. He needed Blaine, needed release and relief from his stress and confusion. He pulled his shoes off and climbed under the blanket on his back. Pressing a pillow over his face, he screamed into it, throwing a small tantrum. It didn't help much and he felt ready to cry as he curled into a ball and fell into a restless sleep.

---

Flint smiled softly as Thad wrinkled up his nose in consideration, frowning down at his Runes essay. His black robes were draped over the couch and his sleeves were pushed up to his elbows, his wand tucked behind his left ear. He looked adorably relaxed. He hadn't been able to have Thad around much this week since Cole O'Brien had thrown a fit about it. But Cole had been on patrol and had luckily gone straight to the dorms upon returning, not sparing a second glance for Flint or Thad.

"I can't read this," Thad said, holding up the parchment and leaning against Flint as he pointed out a particular passage.

"Flint, how have you still not learned how to write?" Dan said, grinning as he glanced up from his History of Magic homework.

"Shut up," Flint said, scowling at him. "I know how to write just fine. No one else knows how to read is all."

"Right," Dan said, shaking his head as he turned back to his textbook.

"Thad, I'm sorry you have to put up with him. But, then again, it saves me from doing it."

"Prat," Flint said, punching him in the arm lightly.

Dan grinned, eyes still fixed on a passage about Giant Wars.

"I don't mind it," Thad said, smiling as Flint turned back to look at his scribbled writing. "It gives me an excuse to come visit you."

"Well, then I'll just continue writing like a five year-old," Flint said, taking the quill from Thad and writing the unreadable sentence more legibly. "Though you shouldn't need an excuse to visit me. You can come any time."

Dan snorted.

"What?" Flint said, rounding on him.

"Did you even hear what you just...nevermind, go back to be oblivious," Dan muttered. "You're ace at it, Flint."

Flint frowned at him before swiveling back to Thad, who had just scanning over his conclusion and making a few final corrections.

"There," Thad said, smiling as he ticked his quill against the parchment. "All done."

"Thank you, pet," Flint said, kissing him on the cheek. "I really would fail all my lessons without you."



"It's true," Dan said. "He would."

Flint scowled at him. Thad giggled and sat back, stretching and letting out a small sound of satisfaction. Flint couldn't stop his eyes from trailing to the strip of skin revealed across his stomach as he arched back, his arms hanging over the back of the couch as he yawned.

Taking a deep breath to keep calm, Flint gazed around the crowded common room absently. He frowned as he caught a sixth year boy sitting on the opposite side of the room eyeing Thad hungrily.

"Can I help you, Derricks?" Flint said loudly, glaring at the boy.

Derricks blushed and turned away, though Flint continued to glower at him as sudden anger pulsed through him. He placed his arm protectively around Thad's shoulders.

"What's wrong?" Thad said, frowning, as he hadn't caught Derricks looking at him.

"Nothing," Flint grunted. He'd never had to deal with someone flirting with Thad before, mostly for the fact that there weren't that many students out at Hogwarts. But since Kurt and Blaine and he and Thad had become such open couples, other students were becoming less afraid to reveal their sexuality.

Thad chewed on his bottom lip and looked up at him through his lashes, tilting his head to the side curiously and Flint was suddenly tempted to lock him up so no one else could see him. He was so sweet and sexy all the time and he didn't even know it. Not to mention he could do someone unbelievable things with his mouth and hands while still remaining sweet and demure the whole time. Flint saw Derricks' eyes flicked to Thad again, raking his body in a way that made Flint want to smash his face into the table.

Obviously, they needed proof that Thad was *his* and no one else's. He cupped Thad's face in his hand and kissed him firmly. Thad made a small sound of surprise but closed his eyes and returned to kiss, sighing happily.

Dan laughed lightly but Flint ignored him.

He deepened his kiss, pulling Thad swiftly into his lap and fisting his hands in back of his shirt. Thad whimpered and draped his arm around Flint's neck as he slid one leg around to straddle his thighs. Flint groaned as Thad shifted and rubbed against his rapidly growing problem. He cursed internally that they weren't in the dorm or back shelves of the library. Someone whistled loudly and Thad pulled back, blushing furiously.

"Sorry," he muttered, burying his face in Flint's neck.

"It's fine, pet," Flint said, rubbing his back gently. He caught Derricks' eye and mouthed, "*Mine*," over Thad's shoulder with a hard look.

Derricks swallowed nervously and nodded, gathering up his books and retreating quickly to the spiral staircase leading to the dormitories.

Flint smirked, kissing Thad's shoulder. "Thad?"

"Hmm?" Thad said as he slid back into his own seat, still looking embarrassed.

"You know I love you, right?" Flint said.

Thad smiled, ducking his head and looking pleased. "Yes," he said softly.

"And you wouldn't leave me?" Flint said, watching his dark eyes closely. "Even if someone better came along?"

Thad gave him a curious look, frowning faintly. "But...there's no one better than you," he said as though it was obvious.

Flint grinned, ignoring Dan's chuckle. "You think?" he said, leaning a little closer to Thad.

"I know," Thad whispered, biting his lip and looking up through his lashes. "I love you."

"Mmm, good," Flint said, kissing his temple softly. "Never stop."

Thad giggled and snuggled again him. "I won't."

## Chapter Six

The morning of the year's first Hogsmeade visit dawned cold and clear, with streaks of white clouds brushed across the pale sky in the still air. Blaine dressed with a certain sense of excitement. He'd been needing a break like this more than anything over the past two months and thought Kurt felt the same. Though his boyfriend had been acting a little off over the past few weeks, jumpy and quiet and irritable. Kurt continued to insist that he was simply feeling overwhelmed with the workload and that he was worried about Blaine, who was juggling Head Boy and Captain responsibilities in addition to classes.

They'd been distant lately as they tried to cope with their busy schedules and Blaine knew Kurt was struggling with the lack of physicality in their relationship as of late, though he swore up and down that he understood every time Blaine was simply too drained to do more than lay under the covers or kiss drowsily.

But today was going to be better. They were going to Hogsmeade together and Blaine had been sure to get plenty of sleep the night before so that he would be refreshed for the day. He was going to make up for his lack of involvement today, to show Kurt that he was still everything to him even though he'd been doing an awful job of it lately.

Kurt appeared from the bathroom, wearing charcoal, skin-tight jeans, knee-high boots and a grey sweater that fell to the middle of his thigh. It was the kind of carefully put-together outfit that Kurt always wore when they weren't in uniform.

"You look great," Blaine said, pausing as he tied his shoes to admire him.

Kurt gave him a small, brief smile before going to fetch his scarf from his bedpost. Pale grey bled across the fabric from where his fingertips touched it.

"Everything alright, love?" Blaine said, moving towards him. Kurt's eyes were always grey when he was upset.

"Mhmm," Kurt said, not looking up as he draped the scarf around his neck.

Blaine slipped his hands around Kurt's waist, kissing the back of his neck gently. Kurt tensed at the touch, his hands freezing where they were tying his scarf.

"I love you," Blaine murmured, squeezing him. "And you look amazing. Maybe we can just stay here today instead."

He slid one hand towards Kurt's jeans. Hogsmeade suddenly sounded a lot less tempting than simply spending the day running his fingers over Kurt's pale skin.

"The others are waiting," Kurt said suddenly, moving away from him. "We should go."

Blaine blinked in surprise. "Oh, alright," he said, frowning. Kurt coughed and swallowed nervously, avoiding Blaine's eyes.

A little confused, Blaine slipped on his jacket and took Kurt's gloved hand in his own, squeezing it and smiling fondly at him. Kurt's mouth twitched but he didn't return to pressure.

Blaine sighed. He supposed this was to be expected given the way he'd been acting. He'd been a right prat to Kurt since they'd returned to school, barely speaking and often spending their time together in a strained silence. The only reason he didn't talk though was that he was afraid he'd say something he'd regret. He wasn't himself when he was stressed and he'd been cruel, unintentionally of course, to Kurt before because of it.

"I'm sorry," he muttered as they strode through the corridors together.

"For what?" Kurt said in a clipped tone.

"For being so horrible to you," Blaine said, hanging his head. "You're so patient with me and...I don't deserve you."

Kurt sniffed and Blaine turned to see his eyes bright.

"What's wrong?" Blaine said, alarmed.

"N-nothing," Kurt said hastily, wiping his eyes. He turned to Blaine, eyes full of something that might have been fear. "I love you."

Blaine gave him a worried look and moved closer to him. "I love you, too," he said. Kurt sniffed again and gave him a small smile as they reached the marble staircase. Jeff, Nick, Thad, and Flint were waiting at the hourglasses that displayed the House points.

"Kurtsie!" Jeff cried as they approached, skipping towards them and looking completely ridiculous in a bright orange knit cap with long ear flaps made to look like a jack-o-lantern with black, triangular felt eyes and mouth. Nick was wearing a matching one, thought his was white with round eyes and mouth to look like a ghost.

"You two look...well, I don't think I need to say it," Kurt said, eyeing their hats.

"But, Kurtsie," Jeff began excitedly, "It's—"

"Tradition," Kurt, Blaine and Thad finished for him, all three of them rolling their eyes.

Jeff nodded firmly. He pulled out another hat, pale grey with red eyes and fangs. "We made one for you, too, Kurtsie," he said, holding the hat to Kurt. "It's a vampire!"

"I am not wearing that," Kurt said, folding his arms resolutely.

"You're just like Blaine and Thad," Nick said, sulking. "They won't wear theirs either."

Kurt turned to Blaine with a curious expression. "What kind do you have?" he said.

"Mine's a banshee," Blaine said, thinking of the green hat with black ear flaps, blood-shot eyes and gaping mouth. "Thad's is a troll."

Thad scowled as Flint shook with sudden restrained laughter. "I hate you all," he muttered, ducking out from under Flint's arm and moving away from him.

"Aw, pet," Flint said, smoothing his features. "You're not a troll."

"Yes," Jeff said, smirking. "You're a wildcat."

"Rawr," Nick said, pretending to claw the air, Jeff giggling madly beside him.

Flint coughed to hide his laughter, Thad actually twitching as he glared at Jeff and Nick. He turned on his heel and stormed out of the hall, muttering furiously.

Nick and Jeff ran after him, Nick whipping out a brown hat with cat ears, yellow eyes and whiskers.

"Get off me!" Thad shouted as Jeff pinned his arms to his side and Nick forced the hat onto his head, tying the earflaps under his chin in a complicated knot. They released him and took off down the path, laughing as Thad whipped out his wand with a snarl.

"I'll turn you both into bats!" he shouted, adding in an angry mutter, "Just as soon as I figure out how."

Blaine exchanged a grin with Kurt as Flint moved to try and help Thad loosen the knot Jeff and Nick had tied, his face red as he fought back laughter, Thad's arms folded over his chest as he muttered about the mental state of their two friends.

"Shall we?" Blaine said, gesturing to the door. Kurt seemed to have loosened since meeting up with the others and he nodded, smiling.

"What should I do with this?" he said, holding up the hat Jeff had given him.

"Hide it away where they'll never find it," Blaine said as they fell into step next to Flint and Thad—who still looked murderous as they had been unable to untie the hat from his head. "That's what I did."

Kurt grinned, stuffing the hat in Blaine's coat pocket as they went. The dry leaves crunched beneath their feet on the path leading to the village.

Flint was consoling Thad and trying to get him to uncross his arms while at the same time trying not to laugh at the hat he was involuntarily still wearing.

Blaine took a deep breath, closing his eyes and smiling. "I love autumn," he said, glancing around at the piles of multi-colored leaves. "The smells and the colors. It's my favorite season."

Kurt smiled over at him.

There was a loud shout and Thad shrieked. They both turned to see Nick and Jeff rolling around laughing in the pile of leaves they'd just leapt from. Thad whacked them around the head with his glove. "You-are-both-mental!" he screamed, punctuating each word with another swipe at the sniggering Beaters, who were pointing at his hat and practically wetting themselves laughing.

Thad let out a roar of frustration and stomped off down the path, Flint hurrying after him after giving Jeff and Nick a disapproving glare.

"You know, one day he's going to snap and throttle you both in your sleep, right?" Blaine said casually as Jeff and Nick skipped around them, their earflaps flopping around their faces.

"We welcome his attempt," Nick said, grinning.

"Oh, do you think if we come back as ghosts that we could live in the dorms and haunt him?" Jeff said excitedly.

"Of course," Nick replied with a sniff.

Kurt rolled his eyes, laughing; the scarf around his neck turned slowly to a bright blue-green.

Blaine smiled, his heart swelling at seeing Kurt happy again. They turned onto the High Street, making their way to the Three Broomsticks, where they saw Thad and Flint sitting at their usual table by the window, Thad still glowering under his hat and Flint looking distraught.

The bell tinkled overhead as they entered and moved to the table. Nick and Jeff moved to sit by Thad but veered away at the look Flint gave them, choosing instead to sit with their backs to the window.

"Butterbeer, everyone?" Blaine said.

"Er, no," Kurt said, looking suddenly anxious. "Just...just gillywater, please."

"Oh, okay," Blaine said, frowning.

"And don't forget to get yourself a Color-Change Cocktail," Jeff said sternly as they all passed Blaine their money. "This is your birthday celebration, too, you know."

"Only two months late," Blaine mumbled as he pocketed the money and turned to push through the crowd towards the bar. He sat at one of the stools to wait to be served, humming lightly.

"Hiya, Blaine!"

Blaine jumped, nearly falling off his stool, and turned to see Cole, the fifth year Gryffindor Prefect, smiling brightly at him, his expression dreamy and lovestruck as it was whenever around Blaine.

"Oh, er, hey, Cole," Blaine said, glancing down the bar at the barman, who was busy serving another group. He cursed his luck as he turned reluctantly back to Cole. "How're you?"

"Great," Cole said excitedly, hopping up onto the stool next to Blaine.

"It's boring not having patrol with you." He paused, frowning. "I'm going to ask Tiffany why she never schedules us together."

"No!" Blaine said hastily. He coughed. "I mean, there's, uh, no need to do that. My schedule with Quidditch and everything...you know. It just kind of ends up that way." That, of course, was a downright lie. Blaine had purposefully been scheduling his patrols on different nights than Cole, much to Kurt's amusement.

"Oh," Cole said, looking downcast. "Right." He perked up. "Well, hey, I could come to your practice when I don't have patrol!"

Blaine froze, mentally noting to schedule Cole's patrol every time he had practice. "Er," he said, not really sure that "Ohgodpleaseno" was an appropriate response. He sighed in relief as the barman approached him.

"Four Butterbeers, a gillywater, and a Color-Change Cocktail," Blaine said, digging in his pocket for his money; he set Kurt's hat on the table for a moment to search.

"What's this?" Cole said, picking up the hat and turning it over curiously.

"Oh, uh, it's Kurt's," Blaine said absently.

Cole dropped the hat onto the bar like it was poisonous, glaring at it as if it had insulted him. Blaine pocketed it again, avoiding Cole's eye.

The barman returned with the drinks and Blaine quickly paid him, gathering up the drinks with difficulty, desperate to get away from the awkward conversation. "Um, so, I'll see you around, Cole," he muttered before moving as quickly as possible through the throng.

"Oh, yeah, okay, bye!" Cole called, sounding disappointed.

Kurt smirked at Blaine as he approached and passed out the drinks.

"So," he said as Blaine sat beside him. "How's Cole?"

Blaine shook his head, sighing in annoyance. Kurt laughed lightly and leaned over to kiss him on the cheek.

"Aw, it's cute," he said. "Besides, it gives me an excuse to be all over you in public."

"Yeah?" Blaine said, grinning as Kurt sipped his gillywater daintily.

"Mhmm," Kurt said, setting his glass down. As if to show how serious he was about his statement, he gripped the collar of Blaine's coat and pulled him into a rough kiss, thrusting his tongue into Blaine's mouth and squeezing his thigh with his other hand.

"That work for you?" Kurt said as he pulled away.

"Yeah," Blaine breathed, feeling dazed, "Yeah, that's...that's fine with me."

Kurt smirked faintly and took another sip of his drink, his eyes roaming Blaine's body over the glass. Blaine crossed his legs hastily and turned to his own drink, taking a large gulp and coughing at the sweetness.

"Don't hurt yourself, dear," Kurt said smugly. He slid his hand up Blaine's leg under the table, the tip of his tongue flicking out to moisten his lips. He was practically oozing seduction.

Blaine swallowed hard, fighting back a groan as Kurt took Blaine's hand and moved it over to his own leg, laying it at the crook of his lap so his fingers brushed his growing erection under his long sweater.

"Feel that?" Kurt said in a low whisper, leaning over on the pretense of kissing Blaine on the cheek.

"Mhmm," Blaine said, glancing around at their friends to make sure they weren't watching. Jeff and Nick were seeing who could chug their Butterbeer fastest, Thad was glaring at them, and Flint was staring moodily at his hands.

"Well," Kurt breathed in his ear. "Are you going to do anything about it?"

Blaine squirmed in his chair for a moment before leaping up, thankful for his coat. "Bathroom," he blurted, grabbing Kurt's hand and hauling him through the crowd. Kurt laughed lightly and followed after him, a few people calling out in annoyance as they pushed roughly passed them.

It had been so long since they'd done anything together, Blaine had been so completely knackered all the time that he'd never had the energy. But now...now he was feeling the adrenaline and testosterone that had been building inside him pumping through him and he needed Kurt now before he exploded.

They burst into the bathroom and Blaine glanced around briefly to be sure they were alone before locking the door and slamming Kurt up against the wall.

"Why do you do this to me, Kurt?" he growled, peeling his coat off and twisting Kurt's head to expose his pale neck. Kurt whined as he bit down on the soft skin.

"You know I love it when you get like this," he said, his palms pressed back against the tiled wall.

"Yeah?" Blaine hissed, struggling with the buttons on Kurt's sweater.

"You like it when I'm rough—" at this he shoved Kurt against the wall, "—with you?"



Kurt grinned, biting his lip and closing his eyes. "It's hot," he breathed. "You're hot. I've been wanting this. I can't take so long without you touching me or me touching you. Oh, god, Blaine, I need you."

Blaine shivered. He loved it when Kurt begged to be touched, though he needed it just as much. He chuckled and moved to unbutton Kurt's jeans, pulling them down just enough to pull Kurt free from his black briefs. Kurt let out a loud moan at the contact, bucking up from the wall into Blaine's hand.

"Say you want me to move," Blaine breathed in his ear, his hand still. Kurt whimpered, arching his hips to try and gain friction. "Blaine," he gasped. "M-move."

"Kurt," he said warningly.

"Please!" Kurt almost shouted, practically crying for release.

Blaine smirked and squeezed down around him, jerking his fist roughly as he watched Kurt's eyes rolling around under his closed lids. "I want to taste you," he growled.

Kurt sought him out with his lips and Blaine laughed, shaking his head.

"You know that's not what I mean," he murmured. Kurt licked his lips, swallowing and dropping his head back against the wall in anticipation.

Blaine nudged his legs apart with his knee, giving him a sloppy kiss before grazing his lips slowly down Kurt's heaving chest.

"Dammit, Blaine," Kurt whined. "Just do it already."

Blaine grinned, licking a wide trail up Kurt's breastbone. "Trust me, love, it'll be worth the wait." Kurt groaned impatiently, squirming.

Something clattered to the ground and they both froze, turning to see a wand rolling across the floor. Someone cursed softly from inside one of the stalls.

Blaine exchanged a shocked look with Kurt, who hurried to zip up his pants and button his sweater. They moved towards the stall, Blaine pushing the unlocked door open tentatively. He swore internally.

Cole was curled up on the toilet on the closed lid, his knees tucked to his chest. There were tear-tracts running down his face and he was shaking violently, avoiding Blaine's eye. Kurt huffed in annoyance and Blaine gave him a reproving look.

"Oh, h-hi, Blaine," Cole squeaked, sliding his feet down onto the ground and pushing himself up shakily. "S-sorry, I...I'll just..." He squeaked in panic, pushing past Blaine and Kurt and snatching up his wand before tearing from the bathroom at top speed.

"Dammit," Blaine groaned, clutching his head in his hand. He sighed.

"I should...go talk to him or something."

"And say what?" Kurt said, folding his arms over his chest. "'Sorry you were in the room while I was about to suck my boyfriend's cock?'

Blaine maybe this will help him get the hint that you're not available."

Blaine stared at him. "Kurt, don't you think you're being a little harsh? I mean, he's just a kid and I can't imagine having the same thing..." he trailed off.

No, he could imagine the same thing happening to him. Because it had happened to him. When Kurt was dating Flint and he'd walked in on a very heavy make-out session. But he'd been in love with Kurt...had screamed it at him for the first time soon after...it was so long ago it didn't feel real. But Cole couldn't be in love with him...could he?

Blaine's heart sank at the thought.

"Poor kid," he muttered, shaking his head and seriously debating finding Cole to talk to him.

"Poor him?" Kurt said incredulously. "Blaine, he could have spoken up at any time! Honestly, I'm a little creeped out that he didn't."

"He was probably just scared," Blaine said, frowning.

Kurt rolled his eyes and turned on his heel, checking his hair briefly in the mirror before striding out through the door.

"Kurt, what's wrong?" Blaine said, hurrying after him through the crowd.

"What the hell do you think is wrong?" Kurt hissed, rounding on him and looking irritable. "I've been dealing with you being an asshole for two months and I've been completely patient with you. I've tried, Blaine, I really have tried to act like it doesn't bother me when you treat me like complete crap because you're worn out from everything, but it does bother me! It bothers the hell out of me!" His voice rose angrily.

"Not to mention you've barely touched me since we got here! It's been weeks, Blaine. Weeks since you've been even remotely interested in me, so excuse me for being a little pissed off that we were interrupted by some kid who has a crush on you and that you care more about his feelings than mine!" His eyes were suddenly bright and his voice shook towards the end of his speech.

Blaine stared at him in alarm. There were people watching them now. He swallowed nervously. "What do you want me to do?" he said, suddenly on the verge of panic seeing the look on Kurt's face. "Tell me, Kurt, and I'll do it. I...your feelings are the most important thing in the world to me."

"Well maybe you should start acting like it!" Kurt shouted, tears sliding down his cheeks as he threw up his arms. "You know what I want, Blaine? I want you to be my damn boyfriend! Not this...pissy stranger you've turned into over the past two months. It's not fair!"

More people were staring at them now, shock etched on their faces, and Blaine felt shame creeping over him as Kurt sniffed and wiped his eyes hastily on his scarf, which was grey again.

"Come with me," Blaine said, taking his hand and leading him gently back to the hall leading to the bathrooms, Kurt followed reluctantly and Blaine could tell he was still angry.

Blaine turned to him when they were out of sight. "What can I do?" he said, grabbing Kurt's hands. "Please, tell me what I need to do, Kurt to fix this."

Kurt blinked back tears. "You need to stop acting like I'm a burden," he said. "Because sometimes that's what it feels like...like you're only putting up with me because you have to and...and that might not be true but that's how it feels sometimes, Blaine. And of all the people in my life, you're the one person who shouldn't make me feel that way." "Kurt," Blaine said, completely at a loss. "I—"

Kurt's bottom lip quivered and tears welled in his eyes again.

Blaine wrapped his arms around him, pulling him into a tight embrace as he fell apart.

"I'm sorry," he said, his own voice cracking as Kurt broke down and sobbed against him. "I'm so sorry, Kurt. I'm a horrible boyfriend. I'm sorry." Kurt clutched at him, choking and gasping with what Blaine was sure was two months of suppressed feelings.

He felt hollow. He didn't deserve everything Kurt gave, his love and incredible tolerance. Tears stung his eyes and he tightened his hold on Kurt at the thought of losing him. What if Kurt just snapped one day and left him? He wouldn't blame him in the least after the way he'd been acting.

"I'm sorry," he repeated over and over again, wishing he could stop Kurt from crying but knowing he couldn't because it was his fault in the first place. "I love you, Kurt, I'm sorry, please...please don't...don't leave me."

Kurt pulled up to look at him, his eyes red and tears clinging to his pale lashes. "I could n-never leave you," he croaked. "I love you...and I k-know you love me, it just...doesn't feel like it sometimes."

Blaine's heart cracked in his chest at his words.

"I don't deserve you," he said miserably. "I really don't...you'd be better off with someone who actually takes care of you." He let his arms fall limply to his sides.

"N-no," Kurt sobbed, "I don't want anyone else. I just want y-you. Blaine, I'd go crazy without you. P-please, I love you. I just want you to love me back and...will you hold me...please?"

Blaine slipped his arms back around Kurt's middle and held him as tight as he could without hurting him. He buried his face in Kurt's neck, kissing him and breathing in his sweet scent.

He hated this. This was supposed to be his best year at Hogwarts, when he had Kurt and he was Head Boy and Captain and...had he been

naïve enough to think they wouldn't have any problems? That they would just breeze through the year together simply because the previous year's drama was over?

Kurt sniffed loudly and his hold loosened. Blaine lifted his head from his neck to look at him, searching his eyes anxiously.

"Okay," Kurt said with a watery smile. "I'm better."

"Do you want to go back to the Castle?" Blaine said as Kurt wiped his eyes on his sleeve.

"No," Kurt said, shaking his head and looking slightly brighter. "I'm alright I just...needed that." He bit his lip nervously. "Can I sleep in your bed tonight?" he said hopefully.

Blaine tried not to ache at the fact that he thought he needed to ask.

"Of course, love," he said, taking his hand.

"Good," Kurt said as they made their way back towards their friends.

"I've missed it...a lot."

"Me, too," Blaine said earnestly. "I'm sorry I keep being such a prat. I feel like all I do is apologize. And don't say it's okay because it's not," he added as Kurt opened his mouth.

Kurt smiled softly as they reached the table by the window. Jeff and Nick were working on chugging their second Butterbeers; Thad had finally gotten the 'wildcat' hat off and was back to staring lovingly at Flint, who looked pleased with himself.

"Diffindo," Flint offered in explanation to Kurt's quizzical look as they sat. He gestured to the hat, which was in two pieces on the table.

"And you managed not to kill him?" Kurt said, impressed. Flint was notoriously bad at Charms.

Flint grinned. "I guess Thad just brings out the best in me," he said, smiling fondly at his boyfriend. Thad sighed, hearts in his eyes as he returned Flint's smile.

Blaine could see Kurt was holding back a laugh with difficulty; he was always talking about how overly sweet their two friends were.

Jeff and Nick slammed their empty bottles down on the table, Nick punching the air and shouting, "Suck it, Campbell, I kicked your arse!" Jeff scowled, tugging his earflaps so that his hat covered his eyes. "I'm staying in here," he declared, pouting. "No one's mean in here."

Kurt rolled his eyes and finished off his gillywater. "Does anyone want to go to Honeydukes?" he said, glancing around at them. "I want to try some of their Halloween candy."

Jeff leapt up excitedly, falling over his chair as he tried to walk with his hat still over his eyes. Nick sniggered, yelping as Jeff kicked his chair out from under him from the floor. They rolled around, tussling and laughing.

"You know," Kurt said, lifting his feet as they passed under the table. "If you two keep this up, people are going to think you're a couple. You don't have girlfriends, after all. Also, that floor is filthy." They stopped and Jeff popped up like a gopher, grinning. "We'd be the hottest couple in Hogwarts," he said as Nick sat up beside him, his dark hair sticking in all directions. "Definitely," Nick said, nodding sagely. "Plus, we're brilliant so the rest of you really have no chance." "Dammit, Nick, why aren't we gay?" Jeff said, turning to his best friend with a frown. "I don't know," Nick said with an exasperated sigh. "Kurt will teach us, won't you, Kurt?" Kurt gave them a dead-panned look and they fell about sniggering. "You're both mental," he muttered, shaking his head and exchanging a grin with Thad. "Anyway," Jeff said, hopping up into a standing position and pulling Nick with him, their clothes dusty and rumpled. "Honeydukes." "Right," Blaine said, draining his drink and standing with Kurt. "Ah ah ah," Nick said, "tongue check." Blaine rolled his eyes and opened his mouth wide. "Alright, we can go," Jeff said, nodding sharply at seeing Blaine's thoroughly blue mouth and tongue. Blaine threw a few Sickles onto the table as a tip and took Kurt's hand. "You guys coming?" he said, looking at Thad and Flint, who were, as usual, lost in each other's eyes. "No, you go ahead," Thad said dreamily. "We'll catch up with you before tonight." "Don't you dare be late," Jeff said sternly. "And we'll just give this a proper burial," Nick said, snatching up the destroyed hat with a sniff. "R.I.P. wildcat Thad," Jeff said solemnly, laying a hand over his heart. "We didn't know him well, thank god," Nick said, wrinkling his nose. Thad ignored them completely. Blaine was surprised there weren't birds fluttering around his and Flint's head at the looks they were giving each other. "We'll see you guys later," Kurt said with a light laugh as they turned to follow Jeff and Nick—who were each holding half of the hat and singing a slow dirge, earning them alarmed looks from everyone they passed—out of the pub into the cool autumn air.

---

Cole stared down into his pumpkin juice, pushing the ice around with his straw and sniffing. How could he have been so stupid to think that

Blaine Anderson, Head Boy, Quidditch Captain and total...dreamboat would ever be interested in a midget like him?

He swallowed hard as he thought about what he'd overheard, blushing at the vulgarity of it and at the same time feeling a faint fascination at the way Blaine's voice had turned from his kind, gentle tone to that low growl that sent shivers up his back...until he'd realized that Hummel was there...Hummel, begging like a-a *harlot* for Blaine to touch him.

He scowled. If he hadn't been such a baby and been hiding in the bathroom after Blaine left to go back to Hummel he wouldn't have heard any of it.

He sighed. Why was Blaine so taken with Hummel anyway? He wasn't that great. Sure he was older and taller and he was okay looking but Blaine was so much better than him.

Stupid Hummel and his stupid face and his stupid American accent. Glancing up at the table where Blaine had been sitting, he felt a sense of loss seeing that he was gone. Only Wilson and Jenkins were left, making goo-goo eyes at each other and playing footsie under the table.

"Ugh," he grunted, wrinkling his nose in distaste, though he couldn't help but wonder what it would be like to have Blaine looking at him like that...they way he looked at Hummel.

He stood up, pulling on his hat and gloves and making his way through the crowd, scowling as people jostled him. He hated being short.

He passed a table of Slytherin boys—most of them from the Quidditch team—and one of them hailed him.

"Hey, O'Brien!" he shouted, his friends sniggering.

"What?" Cole said, stopping to look at them suspiciously.

"I thought house elves weren't allowed to leave the Castle," he said.

"Shouldn't you get back to the kitchens to work on the feast?"

His friends fell about laughing, one of them falling off his chair which made them laugh even harder. Cole scowled at them.

"Come on, guys," one of them, Leighton Cross, said with a frown. "You shouldn't—"

"Shut up, Leigh," another boy said, punching his arm as he laughed.

"What's he gonna do?"

"Refuse to clean out dorm?" another boy offered. They all snorted, one of them spitting out a mouthful of Butterbeer. Cross' mouth twitched, though he continued to look reproofing.

"Besides," the boy who had hailed Cole said, "We're still not happy with you for breaking up with Pen. So, hush." Cross rolled his eyes. Cole turned to leave but one of them grabbed his arm and stopped him.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, O'Brien," he said, grinning. "We're not done."

"Guys."

"Shut up, Leighton!" They all cried, rounding on him.

The boy holding Cole's arm turned back to him, sniggering as he spoke. "So we hear you're sweet on Anderson," he said.

Cole froze. Was he that obvious? "N-no," he stammered, trying to look nonchalant as he swallowed nervously.

They all laughed.

"Having lots of cozy patrols together?"

"Rendezvous' in the Prefect's bathroom?"

"Does Hummel know?"

"You'd be perfect, the elf and the hobbit."

They roared with laughter, even Cross was biting back a grin. Cole glared at them even as tears stung his eyes. He wrenched his arm free.

"Twenty-five points from Slytherin," he snapped, smirking as they made noises of protest.

"You can't do that!"

"Screw you, elf!"

"Lads, lads," the one who seemed to be the leader said. "Calm down. Leighton will just win them all back next week when we thrash Gryffindor. Won't you, Leigh?" he turned to give Cross a threatening look.

"Er—"

"Of course you will." He turned back to Cole. "So go on, O'Brien, and get back to the Castle. And make sure there's plenty of food for tonight, I'm hungry."

They all laughed again and Cole turned sharply and pushed towards the door, trying not to cry and glaring at Wilson and Jenkins, who were now kissing over their Butterbeers.

"Wilson, Jenkins!" he snapped.

They broke apart, Jenkins blushing and Wilson frowning and saying, "What?"

"Ten points from both of you," Cole snapped, ignoring Jenkins' look of surprise and Wilson's angry sound of protest. "This isn't your dorm room."

"Yeah, well, in case you forgot, you won't let him in their anymore," Wilson said, glaring at him. "Besides, *you're* in Gryffindor. You just took points from yourself you little—"

"Flint, it's fine," Jenkins cooed, touching his arm.

Wilson turned to him and his gaze softened.

"You're lucky he's here," he said, flashing Cole a glowering look before returning to staring at Jenkins. "I love you."

Jenkins sighed happily. "I love you, too."

Cole almost barfed. They were disgusting. Huffing angrily, he left the pub, shoving his hands in his coat pockets and walking towards Honeydukes. Maybe some chocolate would cheer him up. But when he reached the shop, he saw Blaine and Hummel—and their two weird friends—standing beside a display of seasonal candy.

Blaine was holding a box of Brickle Bats up and saying something to Hummel, who laughed and exchanged a fond glance with him before moving to another display.

Cole sighed as Blaine set down the box and picked up a different one, frowning as he considered it and sweeping his dark hair back. Cole pressed his hand against the window and stepped closer, tilting his head as he watched Blaine look up and smile as Hummel reappeared, rolling his eyes about something and wrapping his arms around Blaine's waist. Cole watched him kiss Blaine's neck and whisper something in his ear that made Blaine close his eyes and lean back into him.

"It's disgusting, isn't it?"

Cole turned to see a Slytherin girl in his year—Penelope Marsh—standing beside him and watching Blaine and Hummel. Her lips were pursed and her arms were folded over her chest.

"Marsh," Cole said in a clipped tone. She was one of the people who often poked fun at him for being short.

"O'Brien," she replied. "So you *do* like Anderson then?"

"Er..."

"That's a yes," she said, rolling her eyes. She paused, making a disgusted noise as Blaine turned his head to have Hummel's tongue shoved down his throat.

Cole sighed in longing, trying desperately to imagine being kissed by Blaine. But he'd never been kissed before so he had no idea what it was like.

"So, you want Hummel out of the way?" Marsh said off-handedly.

"W-what?" Cole said, turning and frowning at her. He scowled at the fact that she was taller than him.

"You heard me," she said, turning to him. "You like Anderson and we both dislike Hummel. I could use you're help."

"Why don't *you* like him?" Cole said, cocking his head curiously.

"Because he's the one who told Leighton to dump me," she said, scowling.

"Oh," Cole said. He frowned. "But aren't you dating Stevens now?"

"So?" she said. "No one breaks up with me and gets off that easy.

Stupid Leighton wants to be gay, well then let's just break up Anderson and Hummel and he can be gay all he wants."



"Cross is gay?" Cole said incredulously.

"Why else would he dump me because Hummel told him to?" she said, glowering through the glass at where Hummel and Blaine were practically feeling each other up.

Cole bit back his retort. It wouldn't be conducive to start insulting her if she was willing to help him.

"No one else believes me, though," she continued with a sigh. "But there's no reason he should dump me after we were together for a whole year.... Anyway," she said, turning back to him, "I want to get back at him."

"And how will breaking up Blaine and Hummel help?" Cole said.

"Because," she said, grinning, "One, it will get Hummel back for telling him to do it and two, when everyone sees Leighton is gay or bi or *whatever*, they won't want to hang out with him. You know what Reinhold did to Hummel and Anderson last year? It's risky hanging out with gay guys here no matter how safe McGonagall says it is."

Cole considered her words. She had a point. He'd never told anyone he was gay and he still didn't have any friends, not really.... He supposed they must have sensed it or something.

"Oh and I guess you'll have a shot at Anderson." She shrugged, nudging him suggestively. "So what do you say?"

"I dunno...." Cole said anxiously.

"Come on, O'Brien," she said, grinning. "You're a smart Gryffindor and I'm a clever Slytherin. We'd make the perfect team."

Cole bit his lip in consideration. "Oh, alright," he said at last.

Marsh beamed at him, a faintly mischievous glint in her eye. "Oh, we are so going to mess them up."

"But it won't hurt Blaine, right?" Cole said anxiously, glancing at Blaine, who was now laughing as Hummel smacked their other friends with a box of Pumpkin Pasties, yelling something.

"Nah," Marsh said, waving the thought away. "Besides," she said, smirking, "he'll be able to cry on your shoulder right?"

Cole shivered at the thought, letting out a small giggle.

"Crap," Marsh said as Blaine and his friends moved to the till to pay for their sweets. "I should go. But I'll let you know if I come up with anything, alright...partner?"

Cole nodded absently, watching the way Blaine slid his arm so casually around Hummel's waist.... Maybe one day. "Yeah, alright," he said. "I'll see you later."

She hurried off, calling out to someone down the street, who called out in reply with a laugh.

Cole tore his eyes from Blaine and continued up the path towards the Castle, smiling faintly. He had no idea how they were going to make

Blaine leave Hummel, or vice versa, but he didn't really care right now. Just the prospect of maybe one day having Blaine, who was without a doubt the smartest and best looking person in the entire school, hold his hand or kiss his cheek as he dropped him off at class was enough to make him let out a squeal of happiness that cause a few passing third years to give him an alarmed look. He ignored them and skipped up the path through the leaves, humming happily.

---

Kurt shifted his Honeydukes bag on his arm and rolled his eyes as Jeff and Nick ran towards Zonkos, sniggering about something.

"Are you sure you don't want me to hold your bag, love?" Blaine said, squeezing him with the arm around his waist.

"I'm sure," Kurt said, laughing. "It's not exactly heavy." He glanced into his bag at the Chocolate Cauldrons, Smoky Spectres—small candies that looked like they were made of fog and nearly vanished like a ghost in bright light—and Brickle Bats that they'd bought for later.

"You know there's going to be a ton of candy at the feast," Blaine said.

"But not these," Kurt said, shaking his bag lightly as they strode into Zonkos. "I want to be completely immersed in your British Halloween." Blaine smirked. "I'd like to be completely immersed in your—"

"Blaine!" Kurt scolded, smacking him playfully. "Always in the gutter with you now. Though I won't say I'm complaining about it."

Blaine grinned and pulled him close for a long, lazy kiss. Since Kurt had told him how much everything had been wearing on him, he'd started taking every opportunity to kiss him. He didn't mind at all, he was just afraid that it wouldn't last and that Blaine would fall back into his skulking self after classes had resumed.

Still, he *needed* Blaine to start being physical again. The strange spark that had sprung up between him and Leighton was starting to worry him. He'd barely talked to Leighton since the incident for fear that it would happen again. Leighton was so busy practicing for the upcoming Gryffindor-Slytherin Quidditch match that he didn't seem to notice, though.

"Kurtsie, we found a costume for you!" Jeff shouted, popping up from the crowd and waving a box. "Ooo, maybe you should *both* be vampires since you like sucking each other's necks so much." He sniggered as Kurt gave him a dead-panned look.

He passed Kurt one of the boxes he was holding and Kurt stared at it. It claimed to contain one-time, temporary spells for a vampire disguise.

"Why do we need costumes exactly?" Kurt said, raising his eyebrows.

"Because no one will be scared of you like that," Jeff scoffed, glancing at Kurt's outfit and clucking his tongue.

"And why are we scaring people?" Kurt said as Nick appeared at Jeff's side holding a cloak with a tag that claimed invisibility for up to twenty-four hours.

"Because," Jeff said simply. He looked to Nick, holding up two boxes.

"What do you think? Inferi or Death Eater?"

"Inferi," Nick said, tossing the cloak over his shoulders and grinning at his own invisible feet.

"Blaine, you're a werewolf this year," Jeff said, tossing him a box.

"Again? Really?" Blaine said with an annoyed sigh. "I'm not *that* hairy." Kurt giggled.

"Thanks, love," Blaine muttered with a scowl.

"Aw, I think it's sexy," Kurt said, pushing Blaine's thick, dark hair back. "I think you're sexy." He resisted the urge to drag Blaine back to the dorm with difficulty. "So, is that really going to turn you into a werewolf?" he said, nodding to the box Blaine was holding as Nick and Jeff started scanning the shelves again idly.

"Nah," Blaine said, shaking his head. "These are like the Muggle versions of the magical stuff. My eyes and ears and stuff will just change."

"Does it hurt?" Kurt said anxiously, glancing at his own disguise.

"Not too bad," Blaine said, shrugging. "Stings a bit."

Jeff let out a shout of laughter, falling against Nick and showing him a box.

"Yes," Nick said, starting to laugh, too. "Yes, oh, Thad is going to kill us."

"Worth it," Jeff choked.

Kurt and Blaine gave them a curious look and Nick held out a box that said "Lynx—includes spells for claws, eyes, ears, and tail."

"You're right," Kurt said, rolling his eyes. "He will kill you."

---

The Halloween feast was exactly what Blaine had said it would be.

There were mountains of candy corn and cauldron cakes and pumpkin pasties amongst the usual fare. Kurt didn't eat too many sweets for fear of getting sick, though he did nibble at some custard creams that Blaine insisted he try. They school ghosts drifted around, the Fat Friar—the Hufflepuff ghost—regaling them with the story of his death as they ate.

Afterwards, they all returned to the tower. Thad—much to Nick and Jeff's mingled amusement and disgust—nearly knocked Flint over with his enthusiastic goodbye kiss. Kurt suspected the large amount of

chocolate he'd eaten, in combination with the four Butterbeers he'd had throughout the day, might have something to do with it. When he started undoing Flint's tie, however, Kurt decided to put a stop to it.

"Alright, break it up or get a room," he said, laughing as Thad pulled away from Flint, who looked extremely dazed.

Thad blushed, looking flustered as he looked at Kurt, Blaine, Jeff and Nick with a faintly surprised expression.

"Oh...right," he said, frowning. He turned to Flint and pulled him down into a short, sloppy kiss before whispering something in his ear that made Flint close his eyes as he gulped.

Thad giggled, stumbling a little as he made his way back past Kurt and the others towards the door to the tower, humming happily.

Kurt gave Flint a quizzical look but then caught his expression and knew he wouldn't be getting anything coherent out of him for some time.

"I, uh, I gotta go," Flint said, blinking hard and tearing his eyes from Thad, who was trying to figure out how to open the door, a look of extreme concentration on his face as he contemplated the doorknob. Kurt bit back a laugh at how alcohol had drastically lowered his best friend's IQ.

"Good idea," Kurt said, grinning.

Flint turned to leave, glancing back over his shoulder at Thad, who had given up on the door and was now spinning in slow circles, staring at the ceiling and muttering something.

"Alright, you," Kurt said, turning to Thad when Flint disappeared.

"You're going to make yourself sick." He grabbed Thad's arm to steady him.

"Kurt," Thad whispered secretively, staggering against him as Kurt led him up the spiral staircase. "Kurt, guess what I told Flint?"

"Something pertaining to you being a wildcat, I'm sure," Kurt said, smirking.

Thad tittered. "No," he said as Kurt answered the question about Patronuses the eagle knocker asked. "No, Kurt...Kurt, I told him I was going to come to his tower after we're finished and...and that he should kick his friends out of the dorm."

"I'm both shocked and amused," Kurt said as he half-pulled Thad up the stairs towards the dorm. He was glad that Thad had begun to come out of his shell; he remembered how thrilling each new step with Blaine had been, but he was also annoyed because, besides their interrupted session in the bathroom of the Three Broomsticks, he'd gotten very little from Blaine physically.

Thad let out a loud giggle and leapt onto his bed the moment they entered the dorm—Blaine, Jeff and Nick following behind them. Acorn, who was now five months old and the size of a small dog, stood and stretched luxuriously before leaping lightly onto Thad's chest and curling up, purring loudly. Thad pet him absently, looking flushed and excited about his own earlier boldness.

"Alright," Jeff said, pulling out his bag of Zonkos products. "Time for disguises." He pulled out a box and tossed it to Nick, who opened it and shuffled through the cards inside.

"Stand still," Nick said, pulling out his wand.

Jeff scrunched his eyes closed and stood stiffly as Nick waved his wand, reading off the spell on the card he was holding.

Kurt watched as Jeff's skin turned waxy and pale, almost deathly so, bags formed under his eyes, his cheeks shaded to appear hollowed out and his clothes shredded into distressed rags. He winced faintly as Nick worked but beamed when he was finished, opening his eyes—which were icy and looked like they were wrapped in cobwebs.

"Brilliant," he said as he examined himself in the mirror. "What do you think, Kurtsie? Am I scary?" He turned to Kurt, reaching out his arms stiffly and moaning with a slack-jawed expression.

"You're always scary," Kurt muttered. Blaine chuckled, catching the box Jeff threw him.

"Who's doing Thad?" Nick said as he draped his cloak over his shoulders and vanished from the neck down.

Jeff sniggered. "Flint, obviously."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "I'll do it," he said as he waved his wand and watched as Blaine's ears turned pointed and furry and his fingernails curled into blunt claws.

"Woof," Kurt said, smirking as he eyes him.

Blaine scowled, his eyes yellow with dark pupils and his over-long canines poking from under his lip. "Jeff, you do me," Kurt said, pocketing his wand.

"Oh, Kurtsie, I thought you'd never ask," Jeff said, his voice high and fluttering as he bated his eyelashes.

Blaine growled, low and deep and definitely more wolf-like than ever before.

"Down, boy," Jeff scolded, flicking Blaine on the nose as he opened the box for Kurt's disguise.

Kurt winced as Jeff waved his wand. His eyes stung and he felt his teeth lengthening to fangs.

"Barely even changed your skin," Jeff said as he tilted his head to look at Kurt, who glanced at himself in the mirror. His skin was paler than

usual, grayish and dull. His eyes were red with almost no pupils and he grinned to examine the long fangs he sported.

"Alright, Thad," he said, pulling his wand out again. "Up you come."

Thad giggled as Kurt hauled him up, Acorn rolling lazily off him onto the bed—he'd become very spoiled over the past two months.

The door opened and Wes and David walked in, laughing about something.

"Getting ready to haunt, I see," David said, eyeing them as he walked to his trunk.

"I'm Voldemort reincarnated," Jeff said, dragging his feet and shuffling towards them. "I'm here for your souls!"

Wes rolled his eyes and David snorted.

"You guys joining us this year?" Blaine said, scratching the back of his neck absently.

"Nah," Wes said as he pulled off his t-shirt in exchange for a black button-down he took from David's trunk. "There's a party in the Hufflepuff common room."

"What?" Nick said—still invisible except for his head. "Why were you invited and not us?"

"Because Charlotte was in Hufflepuff," David said, speaking of Wes' girlfriend as he pulled a sweater over his head. "And we have non-Ravenclaw friends besides Thad's boyfriend."

"Blasphemy," Jeff hissed.

They both rolled their eyes. "See you later," Wes said, raising a hand in farewell.

"New plan," Jeff said, rounding on the rest of them as the door closed.

"Crash the party?" Nick said airily.

"Obviously," Jeff said with a nod.

"Oh, oh, oh," Thad said, jumping up and down even as Kurt tried to apply his disguise with his wand. "Can we get Flint first?"

Kurt bit back a laugh. "Thad, you need to calm down, I still need to do you ears," he said.

Thad examined his claws, fangs and yellow-brown eyes in the mirror and tittered. "No, I want to stay like this," he said, baring his teeth at his reflection, Acorn hissing faintly at the sight of him.

Jeff and Nick were shaking with silent laughter, leaning against each other for support. Nick's cloak had fallen off one shoulder so half his torso was visible.

"So, are we going or not?" Kurt said, glancing around at the others.

"Yeah," Jeff said, calming himself down.

Kurt grabbed Thad's arm to try and steady him as they moved towards the door.

"Kurt, are we getting Flint?" Thad said, poking his sharp fangs with his tongue curiously.

"Mhmm," Kurt said, exchanging a grin with Blaine.

"Do you think he'll mind that I'm like this?" Thad whispered, gesturing to his partial disguise. Blaine chuckled.

"I don't think he'll mind at all," Kurt said, shaking his head and laughing.

---

"You're acting fidgety, Flint," Dan said, glancing up from the copy of *Which Broomstick 2011-12* he'd been casually scanning and giving Flint a curious look.

Flint shrugged jerkily, glancing around the crowded common room. Since he'd gotten back to the tower twenty minutes before he'd been waiting anxiously, checking the portrait hole every other minute to see if Thad was climbing through it yet.

"What's wrong?" Dan said, looking faintly concerned. "You know, if you're bored, we can go to that party."

Flint shook his head. No. He wanted to wait for Thad. Wanted to hear him talking in that low tone he almost never heard. "'M fine," he muttered.

Dan narrowed his eyes at him for a moment before returning to his catalog with a sigh. "Whatever you say," he mumbled.

The portrait hole opened and Flint turned, nearly jumping with excitement as Thad leapt through it, half-hunched and hissing like a cat.

Kurt, Blaine, Jeff and Nick followed after him, all of them in various disguises and fighting back laughter with obvious difficulty. Dan looked up and snorted loudly, shaking his head as he turned back to his magazine.

Thad's eyes were yellow with slit pupils, his nails curved into claws and short fangs peeking from under his lip. He spotted Flint and hurried towards him, stumbling a little before literally crawling into his lap and curling into a ball.

"Hello," he purred, gazing up at Flint through his lashes.

"H-hey," Flint stammered. "What're you doing here? I thought you guys were going to go scare people or something?"

"We're crashing the Hufflepuff party instead," Thad said, his words slurring slightly as he giggled at the thought of breaking the rules. He closed his eyes and rubbed his head against Flint's hand. "Now I can really be your pet. You just need a leash."

Nick and Jeff howled with laughter. Dan muttered, "oh my god," under his breath, smirking faintly.

"Er, that's okay, pe—Thad," Flint said, swallowing nervously as his mouth was suddenly very dry. "Why don't you, um, get up and we can go."

"Okay," Thad said, jumping up onto the couch Flint was sitting on and bouncing lightly.

"You coming, Dan?" Flint said, glancing at him.

"I'm good," Dan said, grinning and not looking up. "You kids have fun, though."

Flint nodded absently and stood, staggering and grunting in surprise as Thad leapt onto his back, wrapping his arms and legs around him like a monkey and holding tight.

"Go, go, go!" he said excitedly, squirming as Flint tried to adjust and keep him up.

"Nick, have I mentioned that I love drunk Thad?" Jeff said as they clambered out through the portrait hole together. "Because I do."

Thad giggled as he burrowed against Flint's neck, biting gently and letting out a soft growl.

"Pet, you really need to stop," Flint said in a strained voice.

Thad rested his chin on Flint's shoulder, leaning so their cheeks were pressed together. Flint tried to concentrate on the fact that four of their friends were walking very close to them as he carried Thad through the corridors and down the marble staircase, barely hearing Jeff and Nick rambling about how brilliant their idea was.

They walked down to the basement corridor together, their footsteps echoing loudly in the enclosed space. They passed the painting of the fruit bowl that led to the kitchens, stopping almost at the end of the hall at a painting of a long banquet table draped in white linen, yellow candles flickering from in between platters and bowls of food.

"Erm, password?" Blaine said, glancing around.

"Treacle tart," Flint said. Thad bounced excitedly as the painting swung back to reveal a white door.

Kurt stepped forward and opened it, a rush of talk and laughter and music hitting their ears as they stepped inside.

Flint had been in the room once before for a party two years ago. It was wide and airy, whimsically decorated with an arched ceiling, where a curly chandelier hung, encasing a ball of fire. Everything was painted white, even the round table scattered around with buttercream leather chairs and sofas that were full of older students from all four Houses. There were paintings of badgers framed with yellow hanging lining the walls and a large carving of the Hufflepuff crest over the massive white marble fireplace. Round-topped doors on either side of the room led to narrow tunnels to the dormitories.



"Oh, it's pretty in here," Thad said excitedly, wriggling to drop from Flint's back. "Is that Gubraitian Fire?" He pointed to the chandelier, sounding awed.

"Er..." Flint said, not really sure what he meant. He brushed off the question as Jeff and Nick jumped up onto a table, declaring that the party could 'officially start' now that they had arrived. A few girls giggled and watched them down shots of Firewhiskey, whooping loudly at the burn.

Thad grabbed Flint's hand and pulled him towards one of the couches, where Montgomery and Riley, the other two seventh year Ravenclaw boys, were sitting chatting with some members of the Slytherin Quidditch team.

"Hi, guys," Thad said, plopping down on the couch happily, Flint sitting next to him.

"Oh, hey, Thad," Montgomery said, frowning. He glanced around, sighing as he spotted Jeff and Nick juggling bottles of Butterbeer and making random things vanish with Nick's cloak.

"I told you we shouldn't have said anything, Wes," Riley said, though he smirked faintly as he took a sip of his drink.

Thad had started running his fingers up and down Flint thigh, getting closer and closer to Flint's groin with each swipe.

"Pet...please stop," Flint muttered, crossing his legs and taking slow, deep breaths.

"No," Thad breathed, leaning over so his lips grazed Flint's ear. He giggled. "I don't want to." He trailed his tongue along the shell of Flint's ear teasingly, digging his nails...no, claws, lightly into Flint's thigh.

Flint kept his hands firmly clasped at his sides, wondering why the universe enjoyed testing him so much. Thad giggled again and climbed up into his lap, nuzzling his neck with his nose. Flint wiped away the sweat that was starting to form on his forehead, ignoring the way those around him were sniggering at his dilemma.

"Thad," he said, his throat nearly closing off as he tried to restrain himself. "You *really* can't do this here."

"Well then let's leave," Thad murmured, giggling.

Flint needed no second bidding. He slipped one arm under Thad's knees, wrapping the other around his waist as he stood. Thad squirmed, laughing as Flint slung him over in shoulder in a fireman's carry and carried him towards the door.

A few people laughed, Flint caught Kurt smirking from where he was standing with Blaine, watching Jeff and Nick throw handfuls of candy corn at each other to see how many they could catch in their mouths at once.

Flint pushed through the crowd, Thad kicking his legs and giggling as they receiving some very odd looks. Honestly, Flint didn't care what anyone else thought anymore. He'd wasn't about to turn down an open invitation from Thad.

"Where are you two off to?" one of Flint's roommates, Robert Larkin, asked with a smirk.

"We're going to go have sex!" Thad said loudly. Flint nearly dropped him.

Robert laughed, those around him choking on their drinks at Thad's bold statement.

"Well, have fun with that," Robert said, winking at Flint.

Flint swallowed nervously, his legs suddenly shaking as he carried Thad out into the corridor to loud titters. He kicked the door closed behind him with his foot, glancing up and down the empty corridor as he moved to a nearby alcove at the end of the hall.

Thad yelped and giggled as Flint grabbed his thighs and slid him down so that his legs were wrapped around Flint's hips.

"Thad...you, you didn't mean that, did you?" Flint said as he pressed Thad lightly against the wall and closed his eyes as Thad began attacking his neck, letting out little sounds of longing that sent blood rushing south. "About...you know," he gulped, "sex?"

Thad pulled back, frowning faintly. "Isn't that what we're doing?" he said, twitching his hips against Flint's to elaborate.

Flint sighed in relief, thankful beyond belief for Thad's naivety.

"Er...sure," he said, shrugging. "Yea, sure, I guess we can call it that." He paused, smiling as Thad gnawed his bottom lip. "You're adorable. I love you."

Thad blushed, smiling as he fiddled with the back of Flint's collar. "I love you, too," he murmured. He tilted his head and leaned forward to kiss Flint, his 'fangs' grazing Flint's bottom lip as he groaned faintly. Flint winced as Thad gripped at his back, scratching his claws across his skin and pulling him even closer as he slipped his tongue, a little sloppily, around Flint's mouth. Flint groaned and ground his hips against him, receiving a light, whimpering gasp as Thad dug even harder into his back. It hurt but Flint's honestly didn't care anymore as he rocked against Thad again and tightened his hold on his thighs. Thad trembled against him, panting into his mouth and tasting of chocolate and Butterbeer.

Flint moaned. "You taste so good," he breathed hoarsely, rocking into Thad again.

Thad whined in the back of his throat, dragging his nails across Flint's back and leaving long scratches across his skin. Flint grunted in pain and drove his hips a little harder than he meant to against Thad, who

gasped and threw his head back, his eyes closed and his mouth open as he licked his lips with a soft growl.

Flint, who had been ready to apologize, blinking in surprise and experimentally pushed Thad a little roughly against the wall. Thad hissed in pain but tightened his legs around Flint's waist.

Okay...not what he'd expected.

He moved his hands further up Thad's legs and pushed him back into the wall in a way he knew would hurt.

"Flint!" Thad gasped.

"I'm sorry," Flint said hastily, watching him anxiously. "I...I thought..." Thad shook his head, his throat bobbing as he swallowed and breathed, "again."

Flint stared at him in shock. "O-okay," he said. He drove his hips roughly into Thad, biting his shoulder and sliding one hand up to tug at Thad's hair, struggling a little to hold him up with his other arm.

Thad groaned, his breaths harsh and shallow as he clawed at Flint's back.

"Pet," Flint breathed in his ear. "Go on, pet. God I love you."

Thad whimpered and tightened his hold on Flint's shirt as he shook against him, a string of runic words escaping his lips, though Flint didn't try to understand him as he stilled his movements and swore softly as he came into his jeans. He blinked away the white threatening to overtake him and struggled to stay upright. Thad somehow managed to make every time they were together even better than the last.

He turned them both around and slid down onto the floor, wiping his forehead on his sleeve and dropping his head back against the wall, closing his eyes and letting his arms fall limply to his sides.

"I'm sorry," Thad said, still breathing heavily against Flint's shoulder.

"That-I..."

Flint laughed weakly and lifted a hand to rub his back. "It's fine," he said, "I just...never expected that."

Thad groaned in embarrassment.

"You just keep surprising me, pet," Flint said, grinning. He nuzzled his face into Thad's neck, biting down and earning a small, breathy groan from Thad.

"I feel gross," Thad mumbled after a moment, shifting uncomfortably.

"I really just want to shower now."

As usual, Flint's imagination whirled into action and he pictured Thad standing in the steamed up air of the Gryffindor showers, water cascading over his tanned skin, his head thrown back as his dark hair clung to his face. Flint couldn't completely imagine the fantasy though as he had yet to see Thad completely naked.

Thad squeaked in surprise as he changed positions and felt Flint's growing erection against him.

"Sorry," Flint murmured, feeling oddly sleepy and aroused all at once.

"I just...you...shower. Does things to me."

Thad giggled nervously, reaching in his pocket for his wand to clean them both up.

"Well," he said as he stood, staggering from the lingering effects of Butterbeer. "Maybe if you win next week I can, ah, join you afterwards in the locker room...you know...if you want."

Flint stared after him, mouth suddenly dry as Thad, faintly flushed—though Flint didn't know if it was from embarrassment, the Butterbeer, or what they'd just done—set off down the corridor, stumbling a little and humming happily.

Even though he was going to have to deal with the whole school thinking he and Thad were now having sex, Flint definitely agreed with Jeff on the matter. He *loved* drunk Thad.

---

"They really are insane, aren't they?" Kurt said mildly as he watched Jeff and Nick move among the crowd, occasionally slipping under Nick's cloak and jumping out at unsuspecting girls, yelling and then laughing as they jumped.

"Pretty much," Blaine quipped, nodding as Leighton's ex-girlfriend Penelope detached herself from her current boyfriend and ran screaming after Jeff, thwacking him with a pillow, after he caused her to slop Butterbeer down her shirt.

Kurt shook his head. "Want to go sit down?" he said, glancing at Blaine and ignoring Nick's shouts of, "the mantle, Jeff, she can't reach you there!"

"Yeah," Blaine said, smiling and taking Kurt's hand. They strode towards the couches, pausing to let a giggling Jeff fly by, Penelope hot at his heels and shouting death threats.

"I'm already dead," Jeff cried gleefully. "Can't kill me again!"

Blaine chuckled as they sat down in the seats Thad and Flint had vacated fifteen minutes earlier. Kurt regretted their seats almost immediately when he was that Wes and David were talking to members of the Slytherin Quidditch team, which included Leighton. He was grinning as everyone around him laughed, a Butterbeer clutched in his hand.

"Hey, guys," David said as they sat, sounding a little breathless from laughter. "Oh, you have to hear this joke Cross just told."

Blaine turned to them as Wes started telling the joke, the rest of them half-laughing as he went, though Kurt didn't hear any of it.

Leighton had caught his eye as he looked around; the other boy's grin faded to a soft smile for a split second as something flared across their gaze before his eyes widened and he looked away quickly, blushing and taking a hasty gulp of his drink.

Kurt swallowed nervously and inhaled deeply through his nose as he tried to slow his suddenly rapid pulse and crossed his legs. That was *definitely* not an appropriate reaction. He cursed his hormones, glancing at Blaine and feeling sorely tempted to drag him back to the dorm for the second time that day. But he was laughing at the joke Wes had told and falling into a deep discussion about the upcoming match and Kurt wanted to cry as he realized it would be another night of "I'm just too tired" when they went to bed.

He stared down at his lap, blinking back sudden tears.

The couch sank beside him and he glanced over to see Leighton settling next to him, looking anxious.

"H-hey," he said, fiddling with his near empty bottle of Butterbeer.

"Hey," Kurt replied, instinctively grabbing Blaine's hand, though more for his own reassurance than anyone else's.

"So," Leighton said, "how do you like your first Hogwarts Halloween?"

Kurt blinked. Was he really going to try and do this? To avoid the awkward air between them? Maybe he should just ignore him in the hope that that infuriating spark would disappear.

But why should he? He liked Leighton. As a *friend*. Leighton was straight and Kurt loved Blaine and he was being stupid sacrificing what had been turning into a great friendship just because he just because he knew he was attracted to him. No. He wouldn't do that to either of them. He'd managed to control his hormones with Blaine, doing it with Leighton would be easy. He had no desire to cheat on Blaine.

He smiled, feeling mildly relieved when Leighton returned it. "Not bad," he said. "Definitely crazier than the ones at home. But I'd expect it to be with Jeff and Nick around."

Leighton glanced to where Jeff was standing on the wide mantle across from them, sticking his pale tongue out at Penelope as Nick, invisible, pelted her with candy corn from various spots around the room.

"Yeah," he said, frowning faintly. "At least they're not sneaking around scaring people like usual. I had nightmares for a week after last year. I'll never look at jack-o-lanterns the same way again."

Kurt quirked an eyebrow. "Do tell," he said, his curiosity piqued.

Leighton shifted in his seat to face him, one arm draped across the back of the couch casually. "They broke into the Slytherin dungeon and snuck into the dorms while we were sleeping and started shouting about the 'Pumpkin Overlords' taking over Hogwarts. I swear I screamed like an eight year-old girl."

Kurt snorted, inhaling his mouthful of Butterbeer.

"Hey," Leighton said, frowning and smirking at the same time. "In my defense, they were wielding large knives and wearing flaming jack-o-lanterns over their heads."

Kurt coughed, laughing and trying to catch his breath. "Sorry I missed it," he gasped.

"Yeah," Leighton said reminiscently. "They had some brill costumes."

"I was talking about you screaming like a little girl," Kurt said, smirking at Leighton's scowl.

"Tosser," he muttered, draining his Butterbeer.

Kurt smiled innocently.

"You coming to the match next week then?" Leighton said, his fingers drumming on the couch inches from Kurt's shoulder.

"I suppose," Kurt said, sighing. "Thad will be going for Flint and I'll want to make sure he doesn't try jumping from the stands again."

"Um...what?" Leighton said, frowning and laughing.

"Nothing," Kurt said, grinning at the memory of the previous year's Quidditch Final.

"So you'll be cheering on Gryffindor?" Leighton said. He clucked his tongue and shook his head, looking disapproving. "It's a real shame, seeing as it won't matter. We're going to win for sure."

"Oh, who's the 'modest' one now?" Kurt said with a look of mock severity.

Leighton shrugged, grinning. "You said it yourself, I'm amazing."

"Yes, well, I didn't think it would go to your head so quickly," Kurt said. "Especially when the compliment was coming from me. I'm not exactly a Quidditch expert."

"Yes, but your opinion still matters," Leighton said.

"Why?" Kurt said, laughing.

"Well, you *are* American," Leighton said, as though it was obvious.

"You lot are difficult to impress."

"Actually, most Americans are pretty easily impressed," Kurt said thoughtfully. "Seriously, you should see some of the crap we come up with for movies."

"Movies?" Leighton said, frowning. "What's that?"

Kurt stared at him. "Really?" he said blandly. "Really, Leighton?"

"What?" Leighton said, laughing at his expression.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Completely clueless," he muttered, shaking his head.

Hot breath suddenly hit his ear and he jumped, having forgotten Blaine was sitting next to him.

"You want to go back to the tower?" Blaine breathed, his voice rough and heavy.

Kurt shivered at the feeling of Blaine ghosting his lips over his ear and nodded enthusiastically, his jeans already starting to feel tight.

"Let's go," Blaine growled, grabbing his hand and pulling him to his feet.

Kurt waved absently to Leighton, who waved back half-heartedly, frowning faintly into his empty bottle.

"Hurry up," Blaine said, yanking his arm as they pushed through the crowd.

"Ow, easy, Blaine," Kurt said, wincing at the pull of muscle in his shoulder.

"Sorry, love," Blaine said, his eyes—which were starting to return to normal now, were blown out with lust. "I just really need you right now."

"About time," Kurt muttered as they broke through the crowd to the door leading into the empty corridor.

Their footsteps echoed loudly as they ran, Blaine occasionally glancing over his shoulder with a hungry look. Kurt was about ready to just stop in an empty classroom rather than go up to the tower but he wanted to be able to fall asleep when they were finished; he was thoroughly prepared to wear himself and Blaine out.

They rounded the corner to the fifth floor, panting with lust.

"Mr. Anderson!"

Blaine pulled to a halt, Kurt stopping beside him as they both turned to see Professor McGonagall striding towards them, her long robes sweeping out behind her. Kurt pulled his sweater down and he saw Blaine shift as they both tried to hide their obvious problems from the Headmistress.

McGonagall eyed their flushed, sweaty faces and half-faded disguises severely but didn't comment.

"Anderson," she said, turning to Blaine, "Peeves had been causing problems in the Trophy Room in 'honor of the holiday,'" she pursed her lips as her eyebrows knitted together in a straight line in disapproval of the poltergeist, "Mr. Filch has managed to subdue him but he's in need of some assistance repairing the damage. I was on my way to find Ms. Banks but I trust you can handle it instead? I have a meeting with the Minister in my office in a few minutes."

Blaine glanced at Kurt, looking torn. He sighed as he turned back to McGonagall. "Yes, Professor," he said in a defeated voice. "I'll...I'll take care of it."

"Good," McGonagall said in a crisp voice. She turned to Kurt. "And I suggest you get to your tower, Mr. Hummel. Curfew is in twenty minutes."

Kurt opened his mouth angrily, almost ready to tell her about the party they'd just left. He bit his lip. He didn't want to get any of his friends in trouble. Besides, he wanted the dorm empty just in case Blaine finished quickly. "Yes, ma'am," he muttered.

McGongall nodded brusquely before setting off down the corridor past them.

Blaine turned to Kurt. "Sorry, love," he said shrugging. "Maybe next time." He, unlike Kurt, was no longer hard.

"Yeah, okay," Kurt said, trying not to think about the fact that 'next time' might not be for weeks and weeks. "I'll...I'll wait up for you," he said hopefully.

"Don't bother," Blaine said with a moody sigh. "If its Filch I'm dealing with I won't be back for a long time."

"O-okay," Kurt said, his voice constricting as he fought back tears. "I'll see you tomorrow morning then."

"Night, love," Blaine said, leaning over to give him a quick kiss before taking off at a slow jog in the direction of the Trophy Room.

Kurt let out a howl of frustration when he was gone, hitting the wall with the heel of his palm and crying out as pain lanced through his arm. He wanted to scream and storm and tear things apart. He couldn't take it any more. He didn't know which was worse, the fact that he was getting no physical contact from his relationship or the fact that Blaine was so easily brushing it off.

He stomped back to the tower, tears of disappointment running intermittently down his cheeks. He collapsed onto his bed several minutes later, sobbing dryly into his pillow. How had this, this ghost of their formal relationship become the norm? They had barely been able to keep their hands off each other the previous year. Jeff and Nick had called them rabbits they were fooling around so often and now he was lucky if Blaine even kissed him goodbye in the morning. He felt miserable and frustrated. He felt...he felt unattractive. Was he doing something wrong? Had Blaine stopped touching him because he simply didn't find him appealing any more? He was starting to wonder...he couldn't be tired all the time.

Feeling very small and helpless, he cried himself to sleep, his arms wrapped around himself in a desperate attempt to stave off the loneliness and cold seeping through him that had nothing to do with the temperature.

---

The hands searching his body carefully were strong and calloused, their long fingers moving tentatively in the dark across his pale skin. He needed them to touch him, to explore him...all of him.



"Please," he gasped, leaning towards the sound of broken panting near him.

Shaking, hot breath hit his face. His lips were ghosting over a second pair, the taste of Butterbeer hitting his tongue as air passed between them. He was aching in his jeans, his body begging for contact. Unable to take the slow pace, he reached up to grip his hand in the other boy's short hair and crashed their lips together.

There was a rough, needy groan but he wasn't sure which one of them had made it. He lay back, pulling the other body on top of him and bucking his hips, whining as he felt the other boy responding just as strongly to their touch as he was.

"Kurt," the other boy whispered, sounding nervous. "I—What do I do?" "Touch me," Kurt whimpered. "Please."

Strong hands obeyed him, unfastening his jeans shakily and reaching into his briefs to grab him with trembling fingers.

"Oh, god, yes," he breathed at the touch. Raw lust pounded through him as he moved his lips roughly against the other pair, teeth and tongue coming into play, scraping and gliding together in the darkness.

"Is this right?" the other boy said, pulling back for a moment as he worked his hand around Kurt.

"Y-yes," Kurt whined. It felt amazing to be touched again. He'd needed it so much. "Yes, that's, ugh, that's so good."

Blue eyes searched his expression anxiously.

"What do you want me to do?" the other boy whispered, licking his lips at the sight of Kurt arching his back and making small, breathy gasps. Kurt reached up to place his hand on the back of the other boy's head in response, forcing him gently downward. He moaned when wet heat enveloped him, the tentative movement of lips and tongue making his whole body tremble.

The mouth around him vibrated with a gentle grunt as Kurt lifted himself into the touch and he was nearly gone. He reached down to pull the other boy back up to him into a searing kiss, the hand that had been around him returning to its movements. Three sharp jerks was all it took and he was shaking and coming hard between their clothed bodies, gasping out the other boy's name.

"Leighton!"

---

Kurt snapped awake, panting as his eyes darted around the dark room. It took him a moment to remember where he was. Then he saw Blaine curled up in the next bed, sleeping soundly, the bags under his eyes prominent in the moonlight.

He shifted and grimaced at the stickiness against his thigh. No one else had returned to the room yet, filling him with a brief sense of relief. What if he had actually called Leighton's name aloud?

Closing his eyes, he tried to ease the panic surging through him. It was just a dream. People had dreams like that all the time, right? And he's been missing Blaine and been worried about their relationship and Leighton had been at the forefront of his mind at the time from the party....

Despite his reassurances, he couldn't stop the feeling of hot shame creeping through him as he glanced at Blaine. He was pale and worn-looking and Kurt suddenly wanted to cry.

What was wrong with him, dreaming about another boy? Yes, he'd barely gotten anything from Blaine over the past few months and yes, he had been wondering if there was perhaps something more than Blaine simply being tired that was wrong...but seeing Blaine looking so incredibly dog-tired pushed that from his mind.

He hurried to change into clean clothes, shoving his soiled ones into the bottom of the hamper, embarrassment washing over him as he climbed back into bed. Tears stung his eyes as he curled up beneath the covers.

He loved Blaine more than anything. Was his subconscious really going to just replace him just because they hadn't been sexual lately? And why Leighton? Leighton was straight and Kurt simply didn't feel that way about him...did he? Sure, Leighton was attractive but...he would never ever cheat on Blaine. Images of his dream kept flashing against his eyelids and he let out a frustrated sob.

What if he never forgot it? What if it was stuck with him forever, like a cancer slowly eating away at him. Because he didn't think he'd ever be able to look at Leighton without feeling embarrassed again if it did. Or at Blaine without feeling ashamed, guilty, unworthy of the love he'd given to him for nearly a year, even before Kurt loved him back. For the first time he felt he didn't deserve Blaine...or his love...and he, for the second time that night, cried himself to sleep at the thought.

## Chapter Seven

The next week passed without incident. Kurt avoided Leighton like the plague, keeping himself firmly latched to Blaine's side and feeling exceedingly thankful that there were not going to be any more Slug Club meetings until the Christmas party, which would take place the day before break started, because of Quidditch practices and matches now that the season was starting up. It was also helpful that Leighton was busy every other night with his team on the pitch. And when he wasn't, Kurt went down with Thad to watch Flint and the rest of the Gryffindors practice.

He still got panicky at times about his...dream, but decided to simply try and ignore it. It was, after all, normal for teenage boys to have dreams like that, right? Especially since he'd been so damn horny lately and Blaine hadn't been able to, well...help the matter. It was the *Leighton* part of it that set his nerves on edge, though. It placated him a little knowing that even if he *was* mildly attracted to Leighton, nothing would ever become of it since Leighton was straight—at least, he kept telling himself that every time the dream cropped up in his brain.

Saturday morning, he made his way down to the Quidditch pitch with Blaine, Thad, Jeff and Nick—Wes and David had gone down earlier to get their usual seats—feeling a little better than he had the previous week. He didn't want his friendship with Leighton to end, but he knew he at least needed time to get over what had happened and reestablish his physical relationship with Blaine.

"Thad, you've corrupted us," Jeff said, frowning down at his crimson and gold striped shirt and Nick's Gryffindor hat.

Thad grinned. "Happy to do it," he said, tightening his Gryffindor scarf before slipping his arms in the pockets of the over-large sweatshirt he'd borrowed from Flint, which Kurt had first seen Flint wear on his first visit to Hogsmeade—which had actually ended up being his first date with Flint—nearly a year ago.

"I swear to remain impartial," Blaine said. He was wearing no colors from either team, opting instead for a Ravenclaw sweater under his coat. He shivered a little in the November chill that hung strong in the air under the cloud-swept sky. "You know...since I'm Head Boy, I probably should."

Kurt laughed. "Right," he said, glancing over at Blaine. "And I'm sure it has nothing to do with the fact that you'll be playing against both teams later in the year."

"Nothing at all," Blaine said grinning and squeezing his hand. His smile softened. "I love you."

Kurt felt faintly ashamed of himself as he again thought of his dream.

"I love you, too," he said, trying not to betray himself. He knew how jealous Blaine could be, if his reaction of Kurt dating Flint the year before was any indication. It really was nothing to worry about, he thought, since he hadn't actually *done* anything with Leighton. After all, he'd had dreams about Finn—yes, maybe not *those* kind of dreams—before he'd met Blaine and he'd managed to cultivate a perfectly normal *friendship* with Finn just the same. The idea of thinking of Finn like that now was laughable. Still, though...the muddled emotions in his head were starting to give him a stomachache.

Blaine leaned over to kiss him on the cheek and whisper in his ear, "I don't care how tired I am tonight, I'm taking care of you, okay?"

Kurt nodded, relief and anticipation sweeping through him. "Okay," he said, turning his face to Blaine.

Blaine kissed him gently before pulling back, keeping close to Kurt when he did. They climbed the stairs to the stands together, Jeff and Nick complaining loudly about Thad turning them all into Lion-lovers while Thad smirked.

Wes and David hailed them from their seats at the front of the stands, where they'd laid out a Ravenclaw blanket on the bench. Blaine lifted the blanket saving their seats and sat next to David, Kurt settling in next to him with Thad on his other side, clutching a Gryffindor flag.

"No banners this time?" Wes said suspiciously, glancing at Thad.

"Nope," Thad said, blushing faintly. "Maybe next time."

"If that love bite he's hiding is any indication, I think he was too busy wishing Flint good luck last night to make any," Jeff said with a smirk. Thad turned scarlet, shrinking in his seat and tightening his scarf self-consciously. "Shut up, Jeff," he muttered.

Nick sniggered. "Just embrace the fact that you're a wildcat, Thad."

"Flint would appreciate it," Jeff said. He and Nick fell about laughing as Thad turned brick red, hiding his face in his knees and muttering something.

Kurt patted his back comfortingly, exchanging a grin with Blaine, who draped the blanket over their legs, placing his hand on Kurt's knee when they were wrapped up snugly.

"I thought we were waiting until tonight," Kurt muttered as Blaine's hand strayed further up his leg.

"Just making sure you know that I'm serious," Blaine replied, moving so their thighs were pressed firmly together. "When this is over, I'm going to make up for the past two months."

"That might take awhile," Kurt said, closing his eyes as Blaine's fingers ghosted over the front of his jeans.

"I'm prepared to give up the rest of the day for it," Blaine breathed into his ear, nipping the lobe lightly before resting back in his seat, his head tilted against Kurt's shoulder.

"Just keep your hands to yourself for now," Kurt said with a mild smirk, taking Blaine's hand from where it was rubbing him gently and moving it down to his leg. "Otherwise the whole school's going to be seeing quite a different show than the one they're here for."

Blaine grinned but kept his hand where it was resting lightly on Kurt's thigh, squeezing affectionately.

---

Feeling confident and only slightly nervous, Flint opened his locker and pulled out his Quidditch robes, the rest of his team chatting excitedly as they all changed. Flint pulled his t-shirt over his head, thinking fondly of the time he'd spent with Thad the previous night in his dormitory.

"Oh my god!"

Flint turned, looking around to see who had shouted. His team was staring at him, half of them smirking and sniggering the other half looking in utter shock.

"What?" he said, frowning.

"Oh, nothing," his Seeker, Gwen, said.

"Nothing, my ass," one of his Beaters said, looking impressed and grinning. "Get some, Flint."

The team cracked up, tittering and throwing out congratulations to Flint.

"What on earth are you lot talking about?" he said, nonplussed.

Gwen rolled her eyes and gestured him towards the mirror. "Turn around, dear Captain," she said, smirking.

Flint turned and looked at his reflection. Oh, right...that. He blushed furiously as his team roared with laughter.

Hurrying back to his locker and pulling on his Quidditch sweater to cover up the long scratches covering his back, he tried to ignore the comments about his and Thad's relationship his teammates were making.

Ever since the Hufflepuff Halloween party, Thad had started to show a whole new side of himself. Apparently that side enjoyed scratching because since the previous Saturday, they'd been wrapped around each other no less than four times, either in Flint's bed or in the locker room after practice, with Thad clawing his shirt off and dragging his nails down his back as he kissed him furiously.

Not that Flint minded. Well, yes, it hurt and he'd been sleeping on his stomach lately but it was most definitely worth it. They still hadn't taken any more steps yet but Flint had never been more relaxed in his life. Plus, Thad was apparently a lot less delicate than Flint had always thought and, therefore, treated him. He immediately turned from shy and quiet to rough and impatient the moment Flint sucked hard on his neck or tugged his hair or pushed him up against the wall. He was starting to fear he was going to hurt him soon.

He pulled on his robes, strapping on his armguards and kneepads before pulling on his heavy boots, tying them tightly before turning to his team and trying to look authoritative despite the fact that they were all still sniggering.

"Right," he said, nodding at them. "So, Slytherin's got a new Keeper this year, so I think we really need to focus on trying to get the Quaffle past her, get her confidence down until Gwen can get the Snitch. Boost our points just in case."

"I think we can manage that," one of his Chasers, Justin Braxton, said, still smirking.

"What about you, Flint? Can we, ah, *scratch* out a win?"

"*Claw* our way to the top?"

"If we really *dig* in there, I'm sure we'll do fine."

"Okay, okay, I get it," Flint mumbled, turning away from them to hide his blush. "Let's just focus on Quidditch, alright?"

"Yeah, we'll talk about your love life later," Gwen said, smirking.

"How about never?" Flint said, frowning at them as he shouldered his broom and turned to leave the changing room, the rest of them following closely behind.

A tidal wave of sound hit his ears as he stepped onto the pitch, breathing deep the cool, damp air. It had rained the night before and the clouds were still heavy and grey overhead, though he hoped the weather would hold at least for the match.

The Slytherin team approached them from the opposite side of the pitch, their green and silver robes fluttering in the stiff, chill breeze. Madam Hooch was waiting next to the ball crate, her broom at her side as Flint approached the Slytherin Captain, a hard-faced, fifth year girl with cropped blonde hair, who shook his hand without even looking at him before returning to her team, who threw them all challenging looks.

"Keep it clean," Madam Hooch said, throwing open the ball crate and releasing the Snitch and Beaters. The Slytherin Seeker, Cross, kept his blue eyes locked on the little golden ball as it took off through the air. Flint glanced around the crowded stands, spotting Thad waving enthusiastically and jumping up and down while Kurt grinned next to

him, waving as well when he saw Flint looking at them. Flint blew him a kiss. He could almost hear Thad shouting, "I love you!" over the roar of the crowd. Holding back a reply with difficulty, Flint mounted his broom, ignoring the smirks his teammates were throwing him as he waited for Madam Hooch's whistle.

---

"Alright, alright, sit down," Kurt said, grinning as he pulled Thad back into his seat as Madam Hooch blew her whistle and the Gryffindor and Slytherin players shot into the air.

Thad sat down, looking flushed and grinning happily.

"I hope they win," he said, watching as Flint snatched the Quaffle from mid-air and quickly scored the game's first goal.

"Well, it looks like Wilson is off to a good start, no surprise, since he's in Gryffindor."

The Slytherin crowd booed loudly and Kurt turned to exchange a shocked look with Blaine at the commentator's voice.

"Is that..." Blaine trailed off, squinting towards the commentator's box where a short boy with bright red hair was seated next to Professor Cooney, the middle-aged Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher who had thick glasses and fly-away hair.

"Cole?" Kurt said, snorting. "They let *him* commentate?"

"I didn't know he knew anything about Quidditch," Blaine said, frowning.

Kurt smirked. "It's probably part of his master plan to make you fall in love with him," he said.

Blaine blanched, Wes and David sniggering beside him.

"Guess he didn't get the hint last week," Kurt said thoughtfully.

"Maybe Monday we can, ah, give him another little display at breakfast."

Blaine gave him a look of mild surprise but didn't object.

"Turning back into rabbits, are you?" Jeff said, leaning forward to peer around Thad. "Also, I want some blanket, I'm cold."

"Well, maybe you should have worn gloves like I told you to," Kurt said with a sniff, though he untucked the blanket from his legs and held it out so it stretched across Thad's lap to Jeff and Nick.

"Thad, keep your hands to yourself," Jeff said, sounding affronted and slapping Thad's arm playfully.

"That was me," Nick said as Thad scowled at them both and they started giggling madly.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Funny how we come to these matches and never actually watch them," he said. "Well, that or Thad starts making out with Flint while he's flying."

Thad blushed, though he looked faintly pleased with himself.

Cole's voice rang out through the stadium as Kurt focused his attention on the match again. "So that's Gryffindor up sixty to ten already. Those Slytherin Chasers don't really have a chance, do they?" Again the Slytherin crowd hissed and shouted insults at him.

"Not too bright, is he?" Kurt said. "Well, obviously if he thinks he can steal you from me."

Blaine looked faintly disapproving but chuckled. "You're very confident, aren't you?" he said, rubbing Kurt's leg gently under the blanket.

"Well, it's true," Kurt said as Flint scored another goal and the stands around them erupted in applause, Thad squirming in his seat as Flint waved briefly in their direction.

"Most definitely," Blaine said, leaning over to kiss him on the cheek again.

"You're very affectionate today," Kurt said as Blaine moved his arm from his thigh to snake around Kurt's waist. "I like it."

"I'm just...I'm really sorry about not having...no, for not *making* any time for you this past week," Blaine said, looking shamefaced. "And for last Saturday and for...for everything. I love you so much and I swear I'm trying. I don't want you to think I'm just making excuses or something. I...I don't want to lose you, Kurt."

Kurt took in his anxious expression, his bright eyes, and felt shame pricking at his collar yet again for his dream about Leighton. But he also wanted to be honest about *why*—at least in his mind—his brain had conjured up the scene.

"To be honest," Kurt said, lowering his voice and twisting his hands in his lap. "I've been feeling...I mean, I was starting to wonder...do-do you still find me...you know...appealing?" He bit his lip anxiously.

Blaine's eyes widened and he took on a tortured expression. "Kurt," he choked, his voice strained. "Kurt, *of course* I do, I—you're the most...amazingly beautiful and sexy person I've even seen. I-is this because of me? Did I say something or—"

"No, no," Kurt said hastily, raising his voice a little as the crowd around the cheered. "I just...it's been so long since we've done anything and I wanted to make sure I wasn't doing anything wrong."

"You're not," Blaine assured, his eyes shining as he tightened his hold around Kurt. "You're perfect, Kurt, please don't ever, ever think you're not. I'm...I'm so...god, I never meant to make you feel like that. I'm so sorry. I love you."

"I love you, too," Kurt said, feeling as though a huge weight had been lifted from him.

Blaine still looked wretched as he turned to face forward again, his arm limp around Kurt's back.



"Hey," Kurt said, taking his other hand and smiling. "I'm okay. I just...I was just making sure." He leaned forward to kiss him, Blaine returned the gesture with such emotion that Kurt felt a little dazed as he sat back a few seconds later.

They shared a gentle smile, Blaine hastily wiping his eyes and sniffing before returning his hand under the blanket around Kurt's waist.

"Wow," Wes said. "Cross got *really good* this year."

"No kidding," David said, sounding impressed.

Kurt turned with Blaine to see Leighton swooping around the pitch at breakneck speed, diving straight towards the ground before pulling up at the last second and zipping towards the Slytherin goalposts.

"What's he doing?" Thad said, frowning.

"Trying to get the Gryffindor Seeker to concentrate on him instead of looking for Snitch," Blaine said, frowning faintly. "He did get good...damn, Ethan's really going to need to step up when we play them."

Jeff and Nick looked a little worried as well.

"Kurtsie, you're not allowed to be friends with him anymore," Jeff said sternly, Nick nodding in agreement beside him.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Right, because it's my amazing knowledge of Quidditch that he's after," he muttered. Thad giggled.

He only half-watched the match, occasionally hearing a snarky jab at the Slytherin team from Cole or cheering along with Thad when Gryffindor scored, but he was much more focused on Blaine's careful caress on his leg under the blanket. It wasn't sexual, just a reassuring touch that made Kurt think of how their relationship had been the previous year. He missed it more than anything, the way they were all over each other even if it was just holding each other or being close. After twenty minutes of groans from the Slytherin side and cheers from the Gryffindors, the score was a dizzying two hundred and twenty to forty. Kurt had to practically hold Thad in his seat every time Flint did a lap of the pitch after scoring.

"One of the Seekers had better end this," Blaine said, shaking his head. "This is getting embarrassing."

"Their poor Keeper looks like she's going to cry," Kurt said sadly as the girl bobbing in front of the goal hoops froze up as one of the Gryffindor Chasers came zooming towards her and scored easily.

"It's her first match," Blaine said, "I see this all the time. Some people can't handle the pressure."

"Not you, though, right?" Kurt said, grinning. "The great Blaine Anderson would never have stage fright."

Jeff smirked. "Right," he said, rolling his eyes. "The ten times he puked before his first match was just for fun, I'm sure."

Blaine reached around Kurt and Thad to smack him, scowling as Kurt laughed.

"Cross is going for it!" Wes said excitedly.

Kurt turned to see Leighton lying flat on his broom, his face screwed up in concentration as he flew straight up to where the Snitch was hovering high above them in the dreary sky.

"But...they're losing," Kurt said, frowning.

"Doesn't matter," Blaine said as Leighton easily scooped up the Snitch, the Slytherin crowd sighing in relief as the Gryffindor supporters screamed themselves hoarse. "They were so far behind, he knew they had to end it. They couldn't catch up, not with their Keeper freezing up like that."

Kurt nodded, watching as Leighton landed and started back to the changing room with the rest of his team, who patted him gratefully, looking disappointed.

"Come on!" Thad said, ducking under the blanket and hauling Kurt by the hand down the aisle after he extricated himself from the blanket with difficulty.

"See you in a minute," Kurt called back to Blaine, who nodded, smiling. "Geez, Thad, chill."

Thad giggled, his face flushed with excitement as he pushed his way through the crowd on the stairs and ran out onto the pitch to the throng gathered around the Gryffindor team.

"Excuse us, Captain's boyfriend coming through!" Kurt said loudly as Thad wormed his way through the cluster of chattering students to the center of the group, where Flint was receiving praise from a group of fourth year girls who had once made up the 'Flint Wilson Fan Club'.

"You're in my way," Thad said, pushing them aside unceremoniously as he released Kurt's hand and threw himself at Flint, who stumbled in surprise before laughing lightly and returning Thad's kiss with fervor. Kurt rolled his eyes and grinned. Thad could act shy all he wanted but he certainly wasn't fooling anyone pulling stunts like this every other day. A few people seemed to share Kurt's opinion and turned to leave with the rest of the team, sniggering, while others looked either faintly disgusted or curious by their very open display of affection. At this rate they'd be stripping each other down on the Gryffindor table at breakfast any day.

After a very long kiss, they pulled apart, Flint looking even more windswept than when he'd landed and Thad looking breathless and smug at the same time.

"Good game," Kurt said, biting back a laugh at the look on Flint's face.

"Thanks," Flint said, grinning. "It helps having my biggest fan cheering me on." He squeezed Thad around the shoulders and Thad blushed.

"I suppose you two will be going back to the Gryffindor tower for the party then?" Kurt said, fiddling absently with his sleeves.

"Actually," Thad said, turning an even deeper shade of red. "I think Flint needs a shower first."

Flint frowned at him for a moment. "What do you—" His eyes widened and his mouth fell open as he swallowed anxiously. He turned to Kurt, looking a little impatient. "Er, yea, I think...I-er..." he caught the look Thad was giving him, one of innocence blended with seduction that he'd begged Kurt to teach him ("When I try it, it looks like I'm in pain, Kurt!"), and his sentence trailed off into a nervous splutter.

"We'll see you around, Kurt," Thad said, grabbing Flint's hand and dragging him in the direction of the Gryffindor changing rooms.

Shaking his head and, yet, feeling a little lonely seeing his two friends running off together, Kurt turned to leave, thinking he'd hunt Blaine down back at the common room as the noise was starting to give him a headache and he wasn't about to pass up Blaine's offer for intimacy. A light drizzle was starting to fall and he pulled his scarf a little more snugly around his neck. Bowing his head and blinking hard as his temple throbbed, he turned the corner around the Slytherin changing room and ran headfirst into Leighton, his forehead hitting the other boy's chin as he was still looking down and Leighton was looking up at the grey sky. Kurt swore loudly, clutching his forehead.

"Crap, I'm sorry!" Leighton said, dropping his broom and reaching out in concern. "Are you okay?"

"You're bleeding," Kurt observed, nodding to the bright red smeared across Leighton's lower lip.

"Oh, right," Leighton said, licking absently at his split lip. "I guess that's what I get for beating people up with my face." He grinned, wincing a little.

"I keep inadvertently getting you injured," Kurt said, rubbing the spot on his forehead where he'd hit Leighton's chin.

Leighton shrugged. "I've had worse," he said, kneeling down to retrieve his broom. "You sure you're alright?" he said as he straightened up.

"I'll live," Kurt said, smiling. "Good catch, by the way. Sorry you lost." Leighton looked a little downcast but brushed it off, sighing. "I guess...I mean...it's just Quidditch, I suppose."

"Just Quidditch?" Kurt said his eyebrows rising up his forehead. "I thought Quidditch was like air to all of you?"

Leighton grinned. "Yeah," he said, a faintly faraway look in his eyes as he gazed across the pitch. "I suppose I've just been realizing there's a lot more to life."

Kurt frowned. "Oh...okay," he said, a little confused.

Leighton sighed again. "You're getting a bruise," he said, sounding worried. With a look of concern, he reached out to lightly brush his fingers over the spot on Kurt's forehead.

Kurt shivered at the touch, willing his knees not to shake as Leighton tenderly examined the faint bruise forming on Kurt's pale skin.

Leighton's eyes suddenly widened and he withdrew his hand like he'd been shocked, Kurt scolding himself for instinctively leaning towards his fingers.

"I, er, gotta go," Leighton said, eyes darting around nervously. "See you around, Kurt."

Kurt swallowed and nodded. "Yeah, okay," he said, wishing he didn't sound so breathless. "See you later."

Leighton turned and walked quickly back towards the castle, shaking his head and dragging his hand through his hair. Kurt took a deep breath, leaning back against the wall and focusing on Blaine. Blaine, his boyfriend. Blaine, the love of his life. Blaine...who'd often been no less that distant and cold towards him since returning to Hogwarts...no, he wouldn't allow himself to think about that anymore. Blaine was trying his best and he, Kurt, needed to continue to be understanding no matter how difficult it was at times. Besides...Blaine wasn't the one having dreams about his straight friends....

He slid down onto the ground, deciding he would wait until he was one hundred percent sure Leighton was gone before heading back to the Castle as he shivered against the now steady, cold rain flecking across his face and hair.

---

Blaine lingered at the top of the marble staircase, peering through the remaining crowd filtering across the entrance hall. He wasn't sure where Kurt had disappeared to after going down to the pitch with Thad, who had already headed up to the Gryffindor tower with Flint for the post-match party after they'd trailed into the hall a few minutes before looking flushed and perhaps a little more damp than the rain alone could have done. Thad blushed when Blaine asked him where Kurt had gone and said he didn't know as he'd been with Flint at the time.

He saw the Slytherin Seeker, Kurt's friend Cross, enter through the oak from doors, sporting a split lip and frowning. Strange...Blaine didn't remember him being injured when he'd left the pitch....

"Hiya, Blaine!"

Blaine clutched his chest, nearly falling down the stairs as he jumped. "Sorry!" Cole said, clapping a hand to his mouth. "I didn't mean to scare you."

Blaine resisted the urge to tell him to start wearing a bell so he knew when he was coming and avoid him at all costs. "'S fine," he muttered, wondering exactly what he had to do so Cole would get the hint and leave him alone. He didn't want to be mean but still...he could only take so much.

"So how was my commentary?" Cole said excitedly.

"Er...okay, I guess," Blaine said, shrugging.

"Oh..." Cole said, looking disheartened. "I promise I'll do better when you play Hufflepuff in two weeks. "I'm sure you'll do a brilliant job, as always."

Blaine released an annoyed sigh, ignoring him. It didn't hinder Cole, though.

"I bet you guys win the Cup again this year," he said, blushing faintly.

"With you on the team, it's probably impossible to lose."

Still ignoring him and looking around desperately for something to steal his attention, he nearly cried out in relief when he saw Kurt stride through the oak front doors, his head and face damp with rain.

"Thank god," he murmured under his breath. "Kurt!" he shouted, raising his hand to hail him.

Cole turned, his face twisting into a scowl as his eyes fell on Kurt, who looked up at Blaine's call.

Blaine gave him an exasperated, pleading look. Kurt merely smirked but picked up his pace, stepping up the marble stairs and completely ignoring Cole as he pressed Blaine against the low wall and kissed him, fisting one hand in Blaine's hair and the other in his coat.

Kurt moved his mouth to Blaine's ear. "You're coming upstairs with me," he hissed, though he said it loudly enough that Cole could hear.

The boy blushed to the roots of his red hair, glowering at Kurt as he turned around and stomped away.

"You're so mean," Blaine said as Kurt pulled him down the corridor at a brisk pace.

"Well, like I said," Kurt replied, blue eyes shining mischievously. "No one's allowed to be smitten with you but me."

Blaine grinned. "What happened to your forehead, love?" he said, nodding to the faint bruise.

"Oh, er, I ran into Leighton," Kurt said, turning pink for some reason.

"Oh," Blaine said, frowning. "Okay."

Kurt looked mildly anxious.

"Did you two have a row or something?" Blaine said, remembering Cross' split lip.

"What?" Kurt said, his expression turning from nervous to bewildered in an instant. "No, why?"

"Saw him earlier," Blaine said, trying to sound off-handed. "Had a busted lip."

"Oh," Kurt said, letting out a relieved laugh. "No, it's...I *literally* ran into him. Being a klutz and not paying attention."

"Right," Blaine said, nodding slowly. "So...you guys are pretty good friends then?"

Kurt didn't answer immediately and Blaine glanced over to see his jaw tight and his eyes fixed straight ahead. "Er," he said after a moment.

"Yeah...I mean...we both like Potions and we're in the Slug Club."

Blaine frowned, feeling as though there was something Kurt wasn't telling him. He didn't press the matter though as they were now at the tower door and Kurt was answering a question from the eagle knocker before pushing his way into the common room.

Jeff, Nick, Wes, and David were gathered around the crackling fire, warming their hands and discussing the match. Blaine glanced at Kurt, who shrugged and sat down with him on one of the armchairs, resting on Blaine's thigh.

Blaine stared into the fire for a moment, watching the flames flicker and dance off the stone around it and not taking in what the others were saying. He rubbed Kurt's back gently and Kurt turned, smiling faintly.

"I think we need to talk," Blaine said, meeting Kurt's eyes steadily. Kurt eyes widened in fear.

"Not that," Blaine said, taking his hand and smiling reassuringly. "I'd never leave you, Kurt. I just...after what you said I-I need to be *sure* you know how much I love you. Because I don't...I don't want you to leave me."

"Okay," Kurt said, still looking a little nervous.

Blaine turned him in his lap so he was sitting sideways, his legs curled up and his feet resting on the arm of the chair. Blaine slid his arms around him, holding him close and kissing his shoulder softly. Kurt snuggled into the touch, sighing and smiling. Blaine hadn't realized just how much it had been affecting Kurt, not simply being like this together, until today, when Kurt had told him he'd actually started feeling unattractive. He was absolutely touch-starved.

He now understood why Kurt was so cold towards Cole. The idea that someone else was interested in Blaine's affection when he himself was getting none of it was tearing him up inside. Being snarky and rude was simply his way of dealing with it, of hiding how bad it really made him feel, even if he didn't even realize it himself.

Blaine took a deep breath, trying to decide how best to broach the subject. "Kurt," he began anxiously, in a voice low enough that the others wouldn't hear. "I love you. I love you more than anyone or

anything and I know I'll *never* love anyone else as much as you. I...I've been taking you for granted. I guess I'm so used to you just *being* there no matter what that it never really occurred to me that just because I'm able to go without being touchy—not because of you....just because that's who I am—doesn't mean you are.

"I just thought you were...you know...horny, I guess. I never meant to make you feel unwanted or unloved, Kurt. You deserve every ounce of love I have and even more. You're perfectly beautiful and funny and smart and...everything you do reminds me of why I fell in love with you. But I want you to be happy and if I'm not making you happy or giving you what you need, I...I understand if you don't want to be with me." He waited with bated breath as Kurt, whose expression was smooth, shifted on his lap a little.

Kurt sniffed and his eyes grew bright.

"K-Kurt?" Blaine said apprehensively.

Kurt looked down at him. "I love you," he said, his voice breaking. "I won't leave you, Blaine, I couldn't. I know I shouldn't be so needy—"

"Kurt, you're not needy just for wanting affection," Blaine said, brushing his hand over Kurt's cheek. "You're human. And I'm supposed to be showing you how important you are and I've been doing a *horrible* job of it. I'm really, *really* going to do my best to make sure I stop being such a prat but if you even think about feeling this way again, come tell me. Please. Don't let it eat away at you, love. I had...no idea it was this bad. Merlin, I'm so sorry, Kurt."

Kurt was crying in earnest at this point, silent tears gushing down his face as he looked down at Blaine. Rain pattered against the arched windows, thunder gently rolling across the grounds outside.

That Kurt had been putting up such a strong front of support when he was steadily falling apart inside thinking Blaine didn't want him made Blaine want to cry with him. But it was his turn to be the strong one now, the supportive one, the caring one.

"I love you," he said, pulling Kurt down in his lap so Kurt could bury his face in Blaine's neck, which grew damp as Kurt sobbed against him. "Kurt...you're so gorgeous, I love you...you're perfect." He rubbed his hands along Kurt's back, closing his eyes and kissing his hair softly.

"Blaine?" Kurt croaked, lifting his head from Blaine's neck.

"Yes, love?" Blaine said, smiling softly and cupping his cheek.

"Will you...just...touch me?" Kurt said in a small voice. "Not...not like that but...I just miss the way you used to touch me."

Blaine gulped back tears, nodding. "Of course, love," he whispered. Kurt stood and Blaine pushed himself up next to him, wrapping his arm around Kurt's waist and leading him up the dormitory stairs. He glanced back to see Jeff looking faintly concerned, giving Blaine a

questioning look. Blaine gave him a brief smile and Jeff returned it before turning back to talk to Wes, frowning very faintly.

Blaine walked into the dormitory with Kurt, closing the door gently behind him and walking Kurt to his bed. "Here," Blaine said softly, helping Kurt pull his sweater over his head before pushing him gently back to sit on the edge of the bed, taking off Kurt's shoes and socks, kissing his feet softly. Kurt shivered at the touch, his head dropping back a little as he closed his eyes.

Blaine pulled his jeans off for him before standing up, kissing him on the forehead. "Lie down, love," he said softly.

Kurt complied, lying down on his stomach, his arms folded under the pillow. Blaine slipped off his own shoes before climbing onto the bed next to him. He pulled out his wand and pointed it at his own hand, which warmed suddenly. Setting his wand down, he rubbed his hands together before running them down Kurt's back, palms pressing down on his pale skin.

Kurt groaned. "Blaine...your hands are so warm," he muttered, eyes fluttering closed.

"Warming Charm," Blaine said, kneading at Kurt's shoulders with his fingers. "You look so beautiful right now." He bent down to kiss Kurt's shoulder, moving his hands down to press his thumbs along the ridges of Kurt's spine, working to loosen the tight muscle. "You're so tense, love," Blaine said, frowning. "I'm sorry I did this to you.... I hope you know how much I love you."

Kurt mumbled something, his face half pressed against the pillow.

"Is this alright?" Blaine said, now pressing small circles into the dimples at the small of Kurt's back with his knuckles.

Kurt turned his head a little. "'S really, *really* good...ugh...mmm."

Blaine tried to will down his growing erection. There was something about Kurt lying bare and vulnerable, sated and groaning that was incredibly sexy. But this was about Kurt knowing how important he was, not about Blaine getting off.

He slid his fingers down over the back of Kurt's briefs and squeezed gently. Kurt groaned louder, twitching his hips.

"Kurt...are you..." Blaine trailed off, his hands resting lightly on Kurt's thighs.

"Mhmm," Kurt said, eyes still closed. "Feels good."

Blaine smiled and continued massaging down his body, over his smooth thighs and toned calves and lastly his soft feet. When he was finished, he moved back up to lie next to Kurt.

"I feel like a tube of toothpaste that's been all squeezed out," Kurt murmured, yawning hugely. He opened his eyes, smiling. "Thank you."



"Anything for you," Blaine said, kissing his nose. He gripped Kurt's shoulder lightly. "Roll over, love."

Kurt gave him a quizzical look but complied, whimpering as the cool air hit his stomach, but not rolling back to the warmth.

Smiling, Blaine slid down to rest between Kurt's knees. Kurt shivered in anticipation as he realized what Blaine was doing. Blaine pulled Kurt's briefs down and trailed kisses along his thighs and hips for a moment before wrapping his lips around Kurt, taking him as far as he could without gagging and sucking gently.

Kurt moaned, tossing his head back and closing his eyes. "Blaine," he whined, "Ah...yes, mmm, yes, that's—ah—you're so good at that." Blaine chuckled around him and Kurt whimpered as the tremors rocked through him. Even though he hadn't done this for Kurt much, especially recently, he knew exactly what his boyfriend liked. Keeping a steady suction, he slid his tongue along the underside of Kurt's cock, pressing against the bottom ridge around the head before flicking lightly over the slit.

"Oh god," Kurt gasped, his fingers tightening in the blankets.

"Blaine...I, ugh, you're so hot." He stared down at Blaine, his blue-green eyes still half-closed and sleepy. He licked his lips absently and Blaine ground his hips into the bed to try and gain some friction as he strained against his jeans.

Kurt's eyes fluttered closed against, his chest rising and falling with each gasp for air, tiny beads of sweat finding their way between the faint bumps and ridges of his muscles.

Kurt kept repeating his name over and over again. Simply "Blaine, Blaine, Blaine, *Blaine*," as though assuring himself that Blaine was there. Not that he minded the mantra. He sucked a little harder, swallowing spit and pre-cum as he could sense Kurt was close; his breaths had become shallow, harsh and panting as he bucked his hips off the bed into Blaine's touch.

"Blaine, yes, god, I'm—ugh, Blaine, you're—oh, *there*, mmm, so good, I—" He was speaking nonsense, random sounds and syllables strung together and falling from his quivering lips.

Blaine hummed and sucked and swirled his tongue all at once and Kurt's eyes slid back in his head, a soft cry building in his chest as he came down Blaine's throat. Blaine worked to swallow around him, taking every drop that never failed to taste so perfectly of Kurt. He pulled off, kissing Kurt's hipbones gently before sliding up the bed next to him.

Kurt smiled dazedly at him, returning the kiss Blaine gave him a little sloppily.

"So how am I doing so far, making it up to you?" Blaine said, pulling Kurt close so his back was pressed to Blaine's chest. Kurt made a small sound of surprise at the feeling of Blaine's erection against his thigh. "Good," he said, gasping as Blaine shifted and his clothed cock slid against him. "You're doing damn good...why don't you mmph—" He fell silent as Blaine slid two fingers into his mouth, caressing his tongue as Kurt sucked obediently.

Blaine pulled his wet fingers free and slipped them under the blanket, brushing them along Kurt's entrance. Kurt moaned and shuddered, his head falling back against Blaine's shoulder. Rubbing gently, Blaine slowly pressed one finger inside. Kurt tensed for a moment before going limp as he released a long, content sigh. Moving slowly, Blaine pulled his finger back before pushing back in a few times and adding his second damp finger, kissing Kurt's neck softly as he hissed in pain. "Hush, love," he breathed in his ear. "Just relax."

Kurt's throat bobbed as he swallowed and took a deep breath. The tight muscle around Blaine loosened slightly and Blaine scissored carefully, pushing further in until his fingertips brushed Kurt's prostate. Kurt writhed against him at the touch, whimpering and mewling. Blaine glanced down to see he was already half hard again.

"I'm ready," Kurt whined. "Blaine, please, now."

Kissing Kurt's neck, Blaine pulled his fingers free, pulling off his jeans and boxers with difficulty before lifting his hand to Kurt's lips for him to lap at a few times with his tongue.

Blaine coated himself in spit and pre-cum before gripping Kurt's hip with one hand and slowly pushing into him. He groaned at the feeling, the impossibly tight heat around him. Kurt panted desperately, clawing at Blaine's hand on his hip as Blaine picked up a leisurely pace.

"Love, you feel amazing," Blaine grunted.

Kurt whimpered in reply, breathy little moans ghosting over Blaine's cheek and lips as he turned his head towards him.

Blaine reached around Kurt to wrap his fingers around his now fully hard cock. Kurt made a soft sound of pain and Blaine knew it was from getting hard so soon after such a long space of time with no contact.

"Do you want me to stop?" Blaine said, stilling his hand and hips to look at Kurt, who shook his head.

"N-no," Kurt breathed, "Just...gentle."

"Okay," Blaine whispered, kissing the corner of his mouth as he continued his movements. He thrust carefully, Kurt gasping and crying out softly every time he hit his prostate. He didn't seem to know if he wanted to push back against Blaine or forward into his hand.

Blaine could already feel the tendrils of heat curling and tightening inside him. "I'm close, love" he breathed in Kurt's ear. "I love you so much."

"L-love-you-too," Kurt gasped between jolts of pleasure shooting through him. "Blaine, I, ugh—" He bit his lip hard as he came across Blaine's hand onto the bed, tightening around Blaine as he did and sending him with him over the edge.

Blaine shook, swearing softly and closing his eyes as he nearly whited out. It had been a lot longer than he'd realized since they'd been intimate.

He stayed there for a moment, turning his head to meet Kurt in a messy kiss. When he started to feel over-sensitive, he pulled out gently, grimacing as damp spread across his thighs and the blanket. "I love you," he whispered. "Only you, Kurt. You're beautiful. Don't ever think I feel differently."

Kurt smiled, taking Blaine hand from where it was resting around him and lacing their fingers together, laying Blaine's hand over his heart and squeezing. Blaine could feel the gently slowing beat against his skin, the timed flutter of muscle pumping blood to flush Kurt's pale skin. He tightened his hold around Kurt and kissed him on the shoulder.

"I love you," he said again. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay," Kurt said. "I just...I think I needed this. Not just...for sex but, to be close to you. I feel like we've been so disconnected lately and I hate it. I've been acting like a brat and you've been acting like a...a—"

"A moron?" Blaine offered.

Kurt smiled, blinking slowly, sleepily. "Like someone who had more responsibility than they should. I know you can handle it all but then I come along trying to take time you don't have. I know you love me, Blaine. I just need...*this* sometimes to feel like it. When we were apart over the summer, I knew you wanted to be with me and touch me and hold me and then when we got here and you were just...busy, all the time...it just felt like you didn't *want* to do any of that anymore."

"I did—do," Blaine said softly.

"I know," Kurt said, nodding and lifting their locked hands to kiss Blaine's palm. "I know you feel so overwhelmed with everything that sex is kind of secondary. But it's not just, you know, about getting off...for me, I need to be touched and kissed and held. I know it's selfish of me asking so much of you, but it's just who I am. I need to *be* loved to *feel* loved."

"You're not selfish," Blaine said. "You're...you're human. You need affection and I haven't been giving you any. I love doing things like

this with you. I guess it's just that, after the whole...'Jeremiah incident' from fifth year it became less important to me, the physicality, I mean. I think I associated it with the beatings for so long that I never really got over it and I could shut down the need after awhile. But that doesn't give me a right to act like you're the same way."

They fell into silence, digesting each other's words and soaking in their shared warmth.

"Let's promise each other something," Blaine said, lifting himself up on his elbow so he could look down at Kurt, who rolled onto his back to face. There was something in his blue eyes Blaine couldn't quite place. He could see the love, the trust that he always saw in Kurt's gaze. But it was like there was a fog blocking him from seeing everything there.

"Are you alright, love?" Blaine said, brushing his hair back gently.

Kurt nodded, smiling. "Yeah, why?"

Blaine's forehead creased in a small frown as he searched his eyes but he couldn't find anything except that annoying haze that seemed to linger below the surface. "Nothing," he said, forcing a smile.

Kurt returned the smile, looking a little confused. "So what did you want to promise?" he said, stroking Blaine's hand.

"Right," Blaine said, nodding. "Well, I can't...I can't promise I won't act like an idiot again. But...I'll try my best. And I know you can't promise not to get annoyed and angry with me and that's fine. Just...just promise me that if things get bad, we'll sit down and talk about it like this instead of bottling everything up. We're...I love you, Kurt and I want to be with you...always."

"Me, too," Kurt said, smiling and reaching up to pull Blaine down into a tender kiss. "I love you," he murmured against Blaine's lips.

"I love you, too," Blaine replied, pushing aside the cloud underneath Kurt's gaze as Kurt kissed him. "Always."

He felt Kurt smile. "Always."

---

The Gryffindor common room was packed with celebrating students, loud and excited as they always were after a match, even more so given they'd won with such little resistance. Flint stood with the rest of his team, grinning as people congratulated them.

There was a group of fourth year girls fluttering their eyelashes and acting extremely giggly to Flint, despite the fact that he was holding Thad firmly at his side. Thad glowered at them, his dark eyes narrowed as they tried to flirt with Flint, who ignored them as much as possible.

"Maybe you'd like to go to Hogsmeade with us next week?" one of them said, flipping her blonde hair back and smiling.

"Er..." Flint glanced at Thad, who seemed to have developed a nervous twitch as he glared at her so strongly he was surprised she wasn't cowering in the corner. "Sorry," Flint said, turning back to her and shrugging. "You're, um, not really my type."

"Oh you," she said, slapping his arm playfully. Thad growled. She stepped closer to Flint. "I can make myself your type."

"Alright, that's it," Thad said, stepping out from under Flint's arm. He prodded her hard in the shoulder. "Back off."

The girl stared at him, her friends laughing. "Excuse me?" she said, eyeing him and smirking. "What are *you* going to do if I don't?"

Thad smiled, cold and icy, and pulled out his wand. "I could turn you into a Dugbog," he said. "Oh, but that would be an improvement on your looks. Nah, I'll just leave you the way you are, that's much better punishment."

The girl's mouth fell open, her lips quivered for a moment, then she huffed angrily and turned away, tears in her eyes as she pushed through the crowd with her friends.

"Pet?" Flint said, grinning as he wrapped his arms around Thad and kissed the top of his head.

"Hmm?" Thad said, still sounding annoyed as he tucked his wand away.

"Have I mentioned I love it when you get like that?" he said, nibbling Thad's ear. "But you don't have to do that. If anyone needs proof I'm yours, I'll just show them my back."

Thad blushed, fiddling with his scarf absently. "And if anyone needs to know I'm yours, I'll just show them this." He unwrapped the fabric from around his neck, revealing the large, blotchy purple mark Flint had left there the previous night. It covered half of one side of his neck.

Flint reached out to touch the spot lightly. "Sorry, Pet," he said. "Does it hurt?"

"A little," Thad said, shrugging as he tied his scarf to his belt loop. "But when it does I just remember that you're the one who did it and it's like...a good pain, I guess."

Flint smiled and bent down to kiss him soundly, taking him by surprise as he so often did. Thad giggled against him and returned the kiss wholeheartedly.

"Mmm, love you," Flint said as he pulled back, kissing him on the top of the head.

"You, too," Thad said, snuggling against his chest.

"You want something to drink?" Flint said, stroking his cheek lightly with the backs of his fingers.

"I can get it," Thad mumbled, turning pink.

"No, you stay here, I'll get it," Flint said. Thad looked mildly pleased, smiling as Flint kissed him on the cheek before turning to weave through the crowd towards the table where bottles of Butterbeer were gathered.

Dan sidled up to him, grinning. "Nice match, Captain," he said, taking a swig of his Butterbeer.

"Thanks," Flint said, returning his grin as he uncorked two bottles of Butterbeer.

"So, from what I hear, Quaffles were the only thing you were scoring with," Dan said, smirking and giving Flint a knowing look.

Flint blushed. "Er...w-what do you mean?" he said, avoiding his twinkling green eyes.

Dan punched him lightly in the shoulder. "It's not exactly a private changing room, Flint," he said, winking. "Gwen said she went back to get her watch and there were some, ah, interesting noises coming from the boys' showers."

Flint took a hasty gulp of Butterbeer, coughing as he drank too fast.

"Easy," Dan said, clapping him on the back and laughing. "It's not like we didn't all know anyway after what Thad said at Halloween."

Flint's eyes widened. "Wait," he said, rounding on him. "You weren't even there how did—"

"Flint, the whole school knows about it," Dan said, rolling his eyes.

"This is Hogwarts were talking about. You of all people should know how the rumour mill works around here."

Flint gulped nervously. "Dan," he said in a strained whisper. "We're not...you know...doing that. Thad, um, he just...he was a little...confused...and drunk."

"Confused and drunk," Dan repeated, staring at him. "So, what, you two were playing chess in the shower then?"

Flint glared at him. "No," he said, a little on edge. "But we weren't, well...we're not doing *that* yet." He trailed off, taking another sip of his drink to have something to do with his hands.

Dan chuckled. "I believe you," he said.

"Really?" Flint said, feeling relieved.

Dan nodded, smirking. "If you can't even say 'sex' out loud I highly doubt you're actually having any. But still...get some."

Flint grinned sheepishly. "I should get back," he said, holding up the Butterbeers he was holding. "Thad's waiting."

"Yeah, you don't want to leave your wildcat alone too long," Dan said, the corner of his mouth twitching. "See you 'round, lover boy."

"See you," Flint said, laughing as he pushed his way back through the crowd in search of Thad. He was fortunate enough to be taller than most of the other students but Thad was so damn small he was hard

to spot. Wandering around the crowd, he finally saw him on the other end of the room, his back against the wall and his head tilted curiously as the sixth year Walter Derricks approached him, saying something Flint couldn't hear.

Thad glanced around and shrugged and Derricks stepped closer, pressing his hand against the wall beside Thad's head and taking a drink of his Butterbeer.

Thad had a look of innocent curiosity on his face as Derricks spoke, getting closer to Thad as he did. Thad frowned and said something, Flint thought he saw his own name forming on Thad's lips.

He heard Derricks laugh, throwing back his head and setting his Butterbeer on the table behind him. He trailed his hand down Thad's arm, his face mere inches from Thad, who looked suddenly nervous. Anger blurred Flint's vision but his legs didn't seem to want to work. His hands were shaking violently.

Derricks, pointed at the mark on Thad's neck and Thad blushed. Again Flint thought he saw his own name on Thad's lips. Derricks said something else and Thad's eyes grew wide with sudden fear. Derricks plunged his face into Thad's neck, grabbing his shoulders and forcing him against the wall as he pressed against him.

Thad squealed, trying to push him off and something seemed to waken within Flint and he was pulling Derricks off Thad before he'd realized he'd started moving or dropped his Butterbeers.

"What're you doing here?" Derricks said stupidly, fear flickering in his eyes.

Flint slammed him against the wall, shaking with such fury he thought he might not be able to hold him there.

"*You like touching other people's boyfriends?*" He roared.

"N-n-no," Derricks stammered, gulping nervously and cowering under Flint's gaze. The crowd around them fell silent, watching anxiously.

"What did I say, Derricks?" Flint growled, shaking him. "*Mine.*"

Derricks whimpered, shrinking against the wall and looking like he was ready to either faint or wet himself.

"You touch him, no, you *look* at him again and I will break every single fucking bone in your fucking worthless body." He shoved Derricks against the wall again, ignoring his gasp of pain. "Understand?"

Derricks whimpered again.

"I SAID, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?" Flint bellowed.

Derricks nodded furiously, looking on the verge of tears.

"SAY IT!" Flint shouted.

"I-I unders-stand," Derricks squeaked in reply.

Flint released him and he tried to run, tripping on his own feet and only half-rising in his haste to get away. Flint panted, fists balled at his

sides as he watched him go. He heard a loud sniff and turned to Thad, who had his arms wrapped around himself and was shaking, tears running down his face.

"Are you okay, pet?" Flint said, his anger immediately draining away. He heard people muttering around him but he ignored them.

Thad nodded, paused, then shook his head, sobbing.

"Shh," Flint said, wrapping his arms around him and holding him close.

"Shh, pet, I'm here," Thad buried his face in Flint's chest, shaking as he cried against him. Flint kissed the top of his head.

"I'm sorry," Thad choked, lifting his head from Flint's chest to look at him.

"What?" Flint said. "Why are you sorry?"

"B-because now you won't be the only person who's ever kissed me," Thad said wretchedly, his tear-glazed face full of shame.

"Pet, no, no, don't you *dare* apologize to me," Flint said, gripping him tightly. "*I'm* sorry I didn't stop him sooner. I just kind of froze up seeing him flirting with you. I'm so, so sorry."

Thad sniffed, looking relieved that Flint wasn't mad at him.

"I love you," Flint said firmly. "So much, you don't even know what I would do for you." It was because of Thad that he hadn't punched Derricks' face in. Because Thad hated the sight of violence.

Thad smiled and snuggled against him. "I love you, too," he said with a sniff.

"Do you want to go upstairs?" Flint said, running his fingertips gently through Thad's hair. Thad nodded, sniffing and wiping his hand across his eyes.

"Come on," Flint said, holding him against his side and leading him towards the spiral staircase that led up to the boys' dormitories. They climbed in silence, Thad sniffing occasionally or shaking with a soft sob.

Flint opened the door to the seventh year dormitory, leading Thad in and closing the door gently behind him. Thad climbed onto his bed immediately and curled up into a ball, shaking as he wept into his knees.

Flint sat down beside him, wrapping his arms around him and holding him close. "Shh," he said, stroking his hair soothingly.

"I'm sorry," Thad said, his voice muffled against his legs. "I n-never should have s-said what I said."

"What do you mean?" Flint said, rubbing his back gently.

Thad lifted his tear-stained face to Flint. "He s-said that he h-heard what I said at the party about us h-having...having..." he sniffed loudly and hiccupped. "Then he p-pointed to my neck and asked if I l-liked



being a s-slapper and I said I didn't know what it meant and he just l-laughed and started k-kissing me."

The bile rose in the back of Flint's throat at his words. "He called you that?" he said, trying to stop his voice from shaking.

Thad nodded, calming himself a little as he looked up at him. "What does it mean?" he said, sounding faintly curious.

"Never you mind, pet," Flint said, standing. "I'm going to go get you a drink, okay? I'll be right back."

"Okay," Thad said, nodding and slipping his shoes off. "Hurry back."

"I will," Flint said, stopping at the door to smile back at him.

He shut the door and took a few deep breaths as fury clouded his brain. Trying to ignoring the high-pitched whine in his ears, he went back down to the common room, searching over the crowd and ignoring the people whispering in his direction.

He spotted Derricks near the portrait hole, leaning against the wall and looking shaken, though he was laughing with his friends about something. Flint fought through the crowd to reach him, his hands trembling and his blood pounding with such rage that he was seeing red.

"Derricks!" he shouted when he broke through the crowd. Derricks looked up and his eyes widened in fear. He tried to take off but Flint grabbed him by the collar and hauled him back.

"I'm not going to touch him I swear, don't hurt me, please!" Derricks said, sniveling as Flint shoved him roughly against the wall.

"You think my boyfriend's a slag, do you?" he screamed. "Some cheap whore you can put your hands on all you want?"

Derricks spluttered and sobbed fearfully, quaking beneath Flint's gaze.

"WELL, GUESS WHAT, YOU LITTLE PIECE OF SHIT," Flint roared, "HE'S NOT! And the rest of you better back the fuck off of him," he added, looking around at the silent crowd. He gave Derricks one last scathing look before turning to leave.

Derricks let out a small, relieved laugh and Flint stopped.

"Hey, Derricks," he said, turning around. "I forgot one thing." He swung his arm around and smashed his fist across Derricks' face. Not too hard. Just hard enough to teach him a lesson.

Derricks dropped his bottle, letting out a howl of pain and clutching his jaw. Flint smirked, shaking out his hand as he turned and walked back through the crowd, ignoring the anguished sobs behind him and the wide eyes and slack jaws pointed in his direction.

Feeling much better, he climbed back up the stairs to his dormitory, where he found Thad curled up on his bed wearing nothing but his boxers and one of Flint's t-shirts.

"I hope it's okay," Thad said, plucking at the over-large shirt. "I felt...dirty in those other clothes. If you want me to cha—" Flint silenced him with an impassioned kiss, climbing onto the bed and pulling him into his lap quickly. Thad responded a little hesitantly at first in confusion before returning the kiss fervently, fisting his hands in the back of Flint's shirt.

"I love you so much," Flint growled, sucking hard on the side of Thad's neck that wasn't bruised and rubbing at the front of Thad's boxers. Thad gasped and moaned brokenly. "I love you, too," he breathed, his legs tightening around Flint's waist. "Flint, ah, that's, ah..." He groaned as Flint reached into his boxers and wrapped his fingers around his growing erection.

"You're mine," Flint hissed. "Mine and no one else's."

"Y-yours," Thad whined, nodding and wetting his lips as he twisted in his lap, grinding down against him and leaning back. "Only, ah, yours." Flint grinned and wound the hand that wasn't working steadily around Thad in the other boy's dark hair, dragging his nails lightly across his scalp before pulling gently.

Thad let out a loud, keening cry that Flint *knew* the crowd downstairs would hear but he did nothing to stop him, wanting everyone to know that Thad was *his*.

"Say my name, pet," Flint breathed in his ear. "Say it, say you love me and only me."

"Oh god, Flint," he cried. "You, ah, only you, I love you, only you!" Flint bit down on his neck, scraping his teeth across the soft skin and tightening his fingers in Thad's hair.

"Flint," Thad whimpered. "Flint, ja, hardusiro...yodaz, ekan leubhan iuwiz...*dammit!*"

Flint smirked against him, speeding up his hand and feeling more than a little cocky at getting Thad to curse, which he almost never did. He sucked hard at his earlobe, sliding it between his teeth and moving his hand off of Thad to snake around his middle.

Thad whined at the loss but let out a shout when Flint pulled him down against him and dragged their hips together.

"Merlin, Thad, you're so damn sexy," Flint growled, crashing their hips together again. Thad let out a cry of mingled pain and pleasure. Flint returned his hand around him, kissing him hard and tugging at his lower lip.

"Flint!" Thad nearly screamed as his orgasm hit him hard and he shook against Flint, who continued to move his hand as wet heat spread over his fingers.

Thad slumped against him, panting against his neck and letting out little mewling sounds that made Flint twitch his hips against him. Thad

lifted his head from his shoulder, his face glistening with a thin sheen of sweat.

"Do you want me to—"

"No," Flint said firmly. "I'm fine. I just want to take care of you, pet." Thad smiled complacently and Flint pulled him up for a long, languid kiss, Thad not really responding much as his body became loose and pliable.

"You alright?" Flint said, grinning and rubbing his back.

"Mhmm," Thad said, nodding drowsily and falling back fluidly onto the bed with a soft groan. "I feel all squidgy inside."

Flint laughed, pulling out his wand and waving it to clean his hand. Even his miserable Charms abilities were bolstered by his sudden surge of confidence. He leaned forward to kiss the strip of stomach exposed as Thad's shirt slid up his torso.

Thad giggled and squirmed.

"Feeling better now?" Flint said, rubbing his legs absently.

"Mhmm," Thad said, yawning and looking heavy-eyed.

Flint slipped his legs from around his waist and stood, lifting Thad, who was now completely limp, and laying him back down with his head on the pillows. Thad curled up into a ball, snuggling into the blankets and smiling.

"I'll be right back, okay?" Flint said, kissing his temple gently. "I never got you that drink."

Thad made a small noise of agreement, wriggling under the covers and yawning again.

Flint smiled, watching him for a moment before heading back out into the hall and down the spiral staircase. The common room fell silent the moment he entered, every eye following him across the room as he stopped and picked up two Butterbeers, uncorking one and draining it immediately.

Without a word, he walked back across the crowded room, catching Dan and half his team smirking and winking from the corner. He grinned back, straightening a little more as he walked back up to the dorms.

Thad looked up when he entered, smiling sedately.

"Here you go, pet," Flint said, holding out the second Butterbeer for him.

Thad took a few sips before setting it on the table and giving him a hopeful look. Flint smiled and kicked off his shoes and stepped out of his jeans before climbing under the covers next to him. Thad immediately burrowed against him, nuzzling his chest and giggling.

"What's so funny?" Flint said, wrapping his arms around him and grinning.

"Nothing," Thad said, letting out another adorable laugh. "I just love you."  
Flint's smile widened and he kissed his forehead softly. "Love you, too, pet. You're all mine, right?"  
Thad sighed happily, nodding against him. "All yours."

---

The corridors was empty, everyone in his House was busy celebrating. But he was walking aimlessly around the school, lost in thought and feeling...well, *lost* in general. Realizing he wasn't even paying attention to where he was going, Cole glanced up and blinked in surprise when he saw he was in the DADA corridor on the second floor. Sighing in annoyance, he turned around and started dragging his feet back the other direction, thinking he might stop by the library.

"Hey, O'Brien!"

Cole looked up to see Penelope Marsh jogging towards him, grinning.

"Oh, hey," Cole grunted as she fell into step next to him.

"So," she said, nudging him. "Was he impressed by your vast knowledge of Quidditch commentary?"

"Er..." Cole said, blushing faintly as he remembered the way Hummel has whispered in Blaine's ear and how Blaine had followed after him like a puppy. "Not really."

"Really?" Marsh said, frowning and looking confused. "Leighton was always all over me any time I mentioned anything about a...sneech or, whatever they're called."

"Snitch," Cole corrected, sighing. He'd read half a dozen books on Quidditch and practically begged Professor McGonagall to let him commentate in hopes of impressing Blaine. But he just didn't seem to care about anything beside freakin' *Kurt Hummel*.

"Oh well," Marsh said, shrugging. "We tried. Maybe he'll warm up to it after hearing you talk about how amazing he is during the Ravenclaw match."

"Maybe," Cole muttered, frowning at his feet.

"Oh!" Marsh said, sounding excited. "I almost forgot, I saw Hummel and Leighton together today when I was leaving the pitch."

"Yeah?" Cole said, perking up.

"Mhmm," Marsh said, sounding proud of herself. "I'm such a good spy. Really, they should promote me to Head of the Auror Office."

Cole gave her a skeptical look and she smirked. "So...what happened?" he said, trying to sound nonchalant.

"Nothing really," she said, a little disappointed. "But you can practically *feel* the sexual tension between them. It's a little scary, actually. They're just begging to get into each other's pants and they

don't even know it." She rolled her eyes. "Men. They have no idea what to do with their feelings."

Cole scowled but didn't reply.

"Anyway," Marsh said. "What we really need to do is figure out a way to push them closer while keeping Hummel and Anderson apart as much as possible. Not difficult, really, giving Anderson is so busy with everything. Honestly, I'd be *Avada Kedavra*-ing myself by now if it was me."

Cole smiled dreamily. Blaine could handle his responsibilities easily, he was sure. Because Blaine was incredible. He was smart and funny and *so good looking* it wasn't even funny. Hummel didn't even realize how lucky he was. Cole was sure he didn't appreciate Blaine, not like he deserved. He was always so bossy and snide and *mean*. Surely Blaine didn't enjoy it. The cauldron was already on the fire, they just had to stir it a little bit until it boiled over, was all.

"So," Marsh said, swinging her arms absently at her sides. "You keep it up with Anderson and I'll do whatever I can to nudge Leighton towards Hummel. As for Hummel...I think it's just a matter of time before he just snaps and starts tearing Leighton's clothes off. Seriously, so many repressed sexual urges between those two. They just need to come to their senses and get it over with."

She frowned. "I don't think Leighton would make a move first, though. He was always so...*respectful* about that stuff. I guess that should've been the hint to me that he was gay, right?" She laughed and Cole replied with a strained smile.

"Well, I've gotta go," Marsh said, grinning. "Ben's waiting for me. But don't forget," she added, turning and walking backwards down the corridor away from him. "Keep it up with Anderson. I'll let you know if I come up with anything else. See you later, O'Brien!" She waved before turning and setting off down the corridor at a slow jog.

Cole sighed heavily and continued on his route to the library. He didn't want to go to the party, didn't want to be around people right now. Well, unless it was Blaine, of course. But Blaine was with Hummel. Blaine was *always* with Hummel when he wasn't patrolling or practicing.

He stopped at the open Defense classroom, shrugging and walking inside. Absently running his fingers over a poster that displayed the varieties of doxies in Britain, he reached Professor Cooney's desk, where his lesson plans laid open.

Glancing over his shoulder, Cole flipped through the book casually, thinking he might as well know what their next lesson would be about. His eyes caught the blue table labeled "Seventh Years" and he stopped. Turning to the section, he frowned down at the complex

lessons Blaine and the other seventh years undertook. No wonder he was so tired all the time.

He flipped through to December and stared at the words scrawled across the entire two week period before the holidays started.

*Occlumency/Legilimency*

*See Minerva about Pensieve*

A wide grin spread across his face as he flipped the book back to where it had been previously open to the third years' lesson about hinkeyunks for next week. Well...if Hummel was going to be thinking about Cross the way Marsh said he was, it was only fair that Blaine should know, right?

And if he and Marsh helped give Hummel a little push in the right direction, they weren't really doing anything wrong if he was already thinking about it anyway. He just needed proof that Hummel really *was* doing what Marsh said he was in thinking about Crosslike...that. The Pensieve would provide that. He knew Hummel wouldn't confess anything like that to Blaine, he was too stuck-up to admit he'd made a mistake.

Well, then Cole would just do it for him. He hummed happily as he stepped back into the corridor, feeling much better and thinking he might just go up to the party for a Butterbeer after all.

## Chapter Eight

It wasn't like their relationship used to be. It wasn't all loving looks and careful touches. It wasn't perfect. But it was...better, Kurt thought. They skipped the following week's Hogsmeade visit, choosing instead to spend the day together trying to reconnect, taking a long walk around the lake and talking about everything they'd been missing in each other's lives. It was nice laughing with Blaine again. It had been so often that they were bitter around each other that having a laid back conversation and simply...having fun with each other was depressingly uncommon.

"You remember when I wrote that?" Blaine said, pointing at the words carved into the old beech tree by the lake that Kurt had long considered their tree.

"Mhmm," Kurt said, smiling and touching the scored bark lightly. Blaine wrapped his arms around his waist. "It's true," he said, reaching up to touch the spot where Kurt's diamond necklace sat against the hollow of his neck. "I'll love you until the day I die."

"I know," Kurt said, smiling and touching their foreheads together. "Me too."

Despite their long talks and time, however limited, together with their new understanding, Kurt still felt like there was something in between them, like a wall solidly blocking complete connection and he was driving himself mad trying to figure it out.

Tuesday morning, Kurt made his way to Double Potions with Blaine, Flint and Thad. They took their usual seats at one of the front tables, where Wes and David were already sitting. Thad settled on Flint's lap and Kurt gave him a look of mingled amusement and skepticism. Thad blushed but stayed where he was, Flint's arms snaking around him to hold him in place. Flint whispered something in Thad's ear and Thad giggled.

Kurt smiled, though again he felt a faint twinge of jealousy. The two of them seemed to have no relationship problems beyond not sleeping in the same dorm room. It was a little upsetting to him given how perfect his relationship with Blaine had been the previous year; even over the summer when they weren't together he thought they were still closer than they were now.

He supposed it was true what they said, that all good things must come to an end...

But he didn't *want* it to end. He wanted to be with Blaine because he loved him. He *knew* he loved him and he *knew* Blaine loved him back. There was simply no explanation as to *why* this strange barrier

suddenly existed. He knew it wasn't his dream about Leighton. Yes, it bothered him and worried him but, he'd come to accept the fact that he couldn't control himself in his dreams. He wasn't going to cheat on Blaine with Leighton so why should he read into it any beyond the fact that he was a teenage boy who happened to have an attractive straight friend?

The fact that it *wasn't* the dream causing it was even more annoying because he had no idea what it was. He supposed it must be the fact that they were both still trying to adjust to the drastic change in their relationship from the previous year. He just wanted things to be the way they used to be.

Sighing and pulling out his copy of *Advanced Potion Making*, he doodled absently on the corner of his parchment as they waited for Slughorn to arrive.

He heard the Potion Master's deep laugh from the corridor. "No trouble at all, my dear boy!"

Kurt looked up to see Slughorn waddling into the room, chortling and patting Leighton, who was walking next to him, on the arm jovially. Kurt fidgeted in his seat, fixing his eyes firmly on his notes as Leighton and Slughorn walked past their table.

"Settle down, everyone, settle down," Slughorn said happily as he walked to his desk. "Leighton, m'boy, take whatever you need from the store room."

"Thank you, sir," Leighton said.

Kurt heard his retreating footsteps and chanced a look up.

"Mr. Cross is going to be doing some extra research today," Slughorn explained.

"Just ignore me," Leighton called as he emerged from the store room with an armload of ingredients.

Slughorn chuckled. "Yes, well, we're going to be work on Rejuvenation Potions today. Page fifty-eight in your books will give the ingredients and method. Be very sure to count the number of times your stir. It's vital to pay close attention. I expect an essay discussing the differences between this solution and Invigoration Draughts due next Tuesday. Well, hop to it," he said, clapping his hands together and beaming at them all.

Kurt sighed and stood, walking stiffly to the store room and keeping his eyes fixed straight ahead.

"Hey, Kurt," Leighton called, waving and grinning.

Kurt thought for a moment about ignoring him but before he could consider it further, he'd turned and walked to Leighton's table, where a cauldron was already simmering over the fire.

"Hey," Kurt said, glancing into the cauldron. "What's that?"



"Trying my hand at making Wolfsbane Potion," Leighton said, opening a package labeled 'aconite' and plucking a few of the small flowers from the long stems within.

"But...that's not on the syllabus, is it?" Kurt said, trying to remember everything he'd done the previous year.

"I know," Leighton said, tossing the aconite leaves and stems into the garbage. "I just wanted to try it. You know, for fun."

Kurt stared at him.

"What?" Leighton said, stopping what he was doing to look up at him.

"Nothing," Kurt said, looking away quickly. "I'm just...I've never heard of anyone doing extra Potions for fun." *Except for me.*

"Except for you, right?" Leighton said, laughing.

Kurt blinked in surprise. "Um...yeah," he said, frowning. "That's actually exactly what I was thinking."

Leighton grinned. "We'll be finishing each other's sentences any day," he said, shaking his head and laughing again as he chopped up the flowers he'd picked.

Kurt laughed nervously, avoiding his eyes.

"Hey," Leighton said, "you alright?" He reached out the touch his hand gently and Kurt's eyes snapped up, seeing the look of concern in his eyes as jolts of electricity shot up his arm from where Leighton's fingers were touching his own.

He swallowed hard and shivered, unable to tear his eyes away from Leighton's faintly worried gaze.

"I'm fine," he said at last.

Leighton smiled softly, giving his hand a quick pat before returning to his work. Kurt stood frozen on the spot for a moment before the sounds of the class around him brought him back.

He turned and quickly walked into the empty store room, searching through the shelves with shaking hands and not even remembering what he was looking for. Suddenly, arms wrapped around his waist and hot breath ghosted across his neck.

"I want you," a low voice hissed in his ear.

He yelped and pulled free, turning and throwing up his arms defensively.

"Easy, love," Blaine said, laughing and moving towards him. "I didn't mean to scare you."

Kurt took a few deep breaths, closing his eyes and willing his heart rate to slow.

"Sorry," Blaine said, still grinning as he pushed Kurt lightly up against the shelves and kissed his neck. "I promise I'll make it up to you."

Kurt shivered as Blaine pressed against him, sucking and nipping at the crook of his neck.

"Blaine," Kurt gasped. "We have class."

"Class can wait for a few minutes," Blaine murmured, pulling out his wand and flicking it at the door to the store room so that it closed and locked with a click. "I thought you wanted me to do this sort of thing."

"Ugh, I—ah—I do," Kurt said, twitching his hips as Blaine slipped one hand inside his robes and trailed his fingertips along the sensitive skin along the waistband of his slacks. "But I didn't, mmm, expect you to do it in the middle of Potions."

Blaine chuckled and dipped his hand down into Kurt's briefs, gripping him firmly and pumping at his growing erection.

"Ah, Blaine, *shit*," Kurt whined, dropping his head back against the shelves. Blaine, what's, yes, gotten into you?"

"I told you," Blaine breathed as he pulled his hand free to unzip Kurt's slacks. "I'm going to fix this. I'm going to show you how much I love you." He gave him a final kiss before dropping down onto his knees, pulling Kurt's cock free and wrapping his mouth around him, sucking hard.

Kurt groaned, biting down on his knuckles to keep silent as Blaine ran his tongue over his shaft, humming around him. Gripping the shelves behind him, Kurt moaned faintly, wetting his lips with his tongue and arching into Blaine's mouth.

"Blaine, ugh, yes, that's so good," Kurt gasped, his legs starting to tremble as Blaine sucked insistently. Okay, class could wait.

He glanced up at the door after a few minutes, wondering if anyone had realized they were gone. He turned back to Blaine and groaned as Blaine looked up at him, his hazel eyes dark and blown with lust.

Kurt closed his eyes and whimpered as Blaine bobbed his head, gripping the base of Kurt's cock with one hand as he lapped up the pre-cum leaking from him. "Oh my god, that feels *so fucking*, ugh, *so good*," Kurt groaned. "Blaine, I'm gonna—"

Before he could finish, Blaine ran his tongue along the underside of his erection and he was coming hard down his throat with a strangled shout into his hand clamped over his mouth. Blaine moaned and swallowed around him, swiping his tongue over the head to clean him off before tucking him back into his briefs and zipping him back up.

"How was that?" Blaine said as he pushed himself off the floor.

Kurt slumped back against the shelves, breathing heavily and laughing faintly. "G-good," he said, wiping away the sweat beading on his forehead.

Blaine grinned and brushed his robes clean, straightening his tie before fixing Kurt's robes for him. "Ready, love?" he said as he moved to pluck a few boxes from the shelves.

"Mhmm," Kurt said, shaking his head to clear the drowsiness sweeping through him.

"Well then, let's go," Blaine said, patting his ass and winking as he unlocked the door and walked back into the classroom, humming faintly.

Kurt followed slowly after him, suddenly feeling sated and much calmer. He returned to his table at the front of the class, where Blaine was already unwrapping their ingredients and setting up both of their cauldrons, smirking faintly.

Trying to act casual, Kurt sat down and pulled his book towards him, flipping through it to the page on Rejuvenation Potions and trying to ignore Thad's grin from across the table where he was showing Flint how to handle the Runespoor eggs they were using for their potion.

"I've got practice tonight," Blaine said, glancing over at Kurt. "You stopping by to watch?"

"I might," Kurt said, scowling at Thad, who was now giggling uncontrollably. "I was going to write Mercedes a letter. Sam asked her out for Friday and she wants to know what to wear."

"Well, feel free to stop by," Blaine said, smiling and squeezing his leg under the table. "I like it when you watch me practice. Gives me a reason to show off."

Kurt laughed lightly. "You don't need to show off for me, Blaine, you know I love you," he said, looking over at him.

"I know," Blaine said, leaning over to kiss him on the cheek. "I just like to make sure."

---

The rest of the week was busier than normal for Blaine as the Ravenclaw-Hufflepuff match was that Saturday. Kurt spent much of his time catching up on homework and writing letters to everyone back home—Mercedes had sent him three very anxious letters about her date and he was struggling to placate her.

Saturday morning, he made his way down to the pitch in the bitter cold, waving off Thad and Flint, who invited him to sit with Dan and the other Gryffindors.

"I'll sit with Wes and David," he said smiling. "I'll see you back at the tower later."

They waved to him before disappearing into the crowd. Kurt climbed up the stairs to the stands, trying to ignore the people jostling him and rubbing his arms to ward off the chill. Blaine had gone down to change with the rest of the team while Kurt was still at breakfast, giving him a long goodbye kiss, which—while leaving Kurt breathless and earning loud whoops from Jeff and Nick—seemed to be missing something,

that same infuriating wall that had risen making its way between them again.

He spotted Wes and David in their usual seats, a group of Slytherin boys sitting around them, all of them laughing about something. The boy next to David was wrapped in a Slytherin blanket, a green beanie pulled down over his head. Kurt tapped him on the shoulder, frowning. "Um, you're in my seat," he said, trying to be polite.

The boy turned and Kurt felt a jolt in his stomach as dark blue eyes twinkled at him.

"Hey, Kurt," Leighton said, grinning. "Sorry, I took your spot. I can move."

"No," Kurt said, "Er...I'll just go sit somewhere else."

"Don't be a tosser," Leighton said, laughing, his breath rising in a cloud in front of him. "You can sit next to me." He held his blanket open, grinning and patting the bench beside him.

Kurt bit his lip, hesitating for a moment before settling next to him, making sure their legs did not touch and keeping his thoughts firmly on Blaine. Leighton wrapped the blanket around his shoulders carefully, draping it over his knees before sitting back.

"Comfy?" he said, rubbing his bare hands together and blowing on them for warmth.

"Yeah," Kurt said. "And what is it with you boys and a lack of proper handwear? Honestly, you'll get frostbite."

Leighton laughed. "Kurt, I'm touched by your concern," he said. He bent over to pick something up, sitting back and holding up a large silver thermos. "That's why I have this." He opened the thermos and steam wafted from it.

"Butterbeer?" Kurt said as Leighton took a sip of the drink.

He laughed again, shaking his head. "I wish," he said. "Nah, it's just hot chocolate. Here." He held out the thermos to Kurt, who eyed it warily. Leighton rolled his eyes. "I swear I haven't got dragon pox." Kurt sighed, ignoring his smirk and accepting the thermos. He took a careful sip and made a noise of content as warmth flowed through him. "Mmm," he said, "that's actually really good."

"Potions aren't the only thing I'm good at mixing up," Leighton said, accepting the thermos back and taking another drink before closing it off and setting it between his legs. He shivered. "It's so damn cold today."

"Your observational skills astound me," Kurt said, smirking as Leighton glared playfully at him.

"Hey, Kurt," David said, leaning forward and frowning, "do you know what Jeff and Nick were on about this morning?"

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Oh, their 'brilliant plan'? I honestly have no clue. Probably something to do with filling the Hufflepuffs' robes with chocolate pudding," he muttered.

Leighton, who had been taking a drink of hot chocolate, choked. "W-what?" he gasped, laughing.

Kurt shrugged. "They mentioned it awhile ago," he said. "Blaine told them not to do it though so... No, David, I have no idea what they're doing."

"Your friends are crazy," Leighton said, shaking his head as David returned to talking to Wes.

"Keeps things interesting," Kurt said. The wind picked up, sending an icy blast through the crowd and Kurt shivered, wrapping his arms around himself.

Leighton sighed, rolling his eyes. "You don't have to sit so far away. I'm not poisonous." He scooted closer to Kurt so they were pressed against each other and tightened the blanket around their shoulders. Kurt tensed at the feel of their legs and shoulders brushing.

"Relax," Leighton said, laughing. "Geez, you act like I'm going to eat you or something." He grinned and Kurt smiled nervously in reply, suddenly feeling very hot around the collar.

The crowd started to cheer and Kurt looked up to see the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff teams striding onto the pitch, their robes a little bulky with the extra layers they were wearing beneath them.

"No sign of pudding," Leighton said, squinting at the Hufflepuffs.

Kurt snorted, shaking his head.

Leighton grinned and squirmed excitedly as Madam Hooch released the Bludgers and Snitch.

"It's just Quidditch, Leighton," Kurt said, laughing. "What happened to there being more important things in life?"

Leighton grinned. "Doesn't mean I can't enjoy it, does it?" he said, nudging Kurt and winking. "It's still brill."

"As long as you cheer for Ravenclaw," Kurt said with a sniff as Madam Hooch blew her whistle and the two teams rose into the air.

"Hmm, nope," Leighton said, "cheering for Hufflepuff. Love me some badgers."

Kurt scowled and Leighton gave him an innocent smile. "Jerk," he muttered.

Leighton smirked, rubbing his hands together and blowing on them again as he jiggled his legs to try and keep the blood flowing.

"Put your hands in your crotch," Kurt said offhandedly as he watched Blaine make an easy save.

"Excuse me?" Leighton said, freezing and giving him a wide-eyed look.

Kurt sighed and turned to him. "Your crotch, Leighton. It's one of the warmest places on the body. Haha, very mature," he said as Leighton sniggered, "trust me, it'll help keep your hands warm. Crotch or armpits."

Leighton stared at him, looking amused and skeptical.

"I'm not telling you to shove your hands down your pants," Kurt said, rolling his eyes. "Just...here." He took Leighton's hands—which were pale from the cold—and placed them between his thighs, which he pushed together.

"Better?" he said, quirking an eyebrow.

"Well, yeah," Leighton said, frowning, "but now everyone's going to think I'm groping myself."

Kurt snorted, gripping his face in his hands and shaking with laughter as Leighton grinned and his friends gave them both confused looks.

"Well, it's true," Leighton said. Kurt could tell he was just trying to make him laugh now. "But I guess this is the only action I'll be getting now until I get a girlfriend. Shame on you, Kurt Hummel, this is all your fault. I hope you're happy."

Kurt gasped with laughter, clamping a hand over his mouth to try and stay silent as Leighton continued to grin.

"I'll just be here, under the blanket...with my hands," Leighton said airily. "Thanks, Kurt, for everything you've done for me."

"Stop it," Kurt said, smacking his arm and struggling control his laughter.

Leighton fell silent, still smirking. "My hands are actually warmer now," he said offhandedly. "Here, see?" He lifted his hands from his lap and pressed them to the exposed part of Kurt's neck. They were still ice-cold and Kurt squealed, jumping and nearly falling out of his seat. Leighton laughed, grabbing him around the waist to keep him from falling. "Kurt, you're so graceful," he said jokingly.

"Shut up," Kurt said, holding his gloved hands to his neck and glaring at him. "You're an ass, you know that?"

Leighton beamed, wiggling his fingers threateningly. "Ooo," he said in a ghostly voice. "Icicle fingers."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "There's something seriously wrong with you," he muttered, lowering his hands slowly and keeping an eye on Leighton.

Leighton sniggered. He picked up the thermos of hot chocolate and held it out with an appeasing look. "Truce."

Kurt sighed. "Fine," he said in a voice of mock annoyance. He took a long drink, licking the chocolate from his lips as he passed the thermos back to Leighton. "Merci beaucoup," he said, smiling.

"Il n'y a pas de quoi," Leighton replied flawlessly.

Kurt stared at him. "You...you speak French?" he said.

"Oui," Leighton said before taking a drink of hot chocolate.

"I didn't know," Kurt said. "Well, obviously."

Leighton grinned, closing off the thermos. "My cousin goes to Beauxbatons. She's not very good at English so I learned French for when we visit them in La Rochelle over the holidays."

"Oh," Kurt said softly. "That's...cool."

Leighton shrugged. "I guess," he said, glancing at the match as Kal, one of the Ravenclaw Chasers, flew towards the Hufflepuff goal. "Why did *you* learn it?"

"Oh, well...I just think it's a really beautiful language," Kurt said, turning to face forward as well as Kal passed the Quaffle to Hanna. Leighton smiled. "Yeah," he said, nodding. "It's nice."

Kurt turned to him, frowning. "You keep surprising me," he said.

"Every time I learn something new about you, I mean."

Leighton chuckled, reaching down to get the hot chocolate again.

"Well, I could always just start telling you my life story," he said, grinning.

"That's alright," Kurt said, accepting the thermos to take another drink. "I like learning new things. And surprises."

Leighton's smile softened as he watched him, his blue eyes warm and searching. "Well, I'll try and remember that," he said, reaching out to take the thermos, his fingers closing overtop of Kurt's.

Kurt's breath caught in his throat and his hand shook. The thermos slipped from it and hot liquid spilled across his lap. He hissed in pain, leaping up as the hot chocolate seeped over his jeans, burning and immediately chilling in the cold air.

"Crap, sorry," Leighton muttered, fumbling with the thermos.

"You okay, Kurt?" David said, glancing over at him with concern.

"Fine," Kurt said through gritted teeth, though he was sure he'd burnt his thigh pretty badly. Tears stung his eyes as his leg throbbed.

"I'm so sorry," Leighton said, sounding distraught. He shoved the thermos into one of his friend's hands. "Here, come with me, I've got some sweats in my locker and there's Burn Paste in the Medic Kit."

Kurt glanced at Blaine, who was concentrating on the pair of Chasers zooming towards him.

"It'll just take a minute," Leighton said reassuringly. "I'm sure he'll understand. You're...injured, after all."

Kurt bit his lip anxiously. His leg gave another painful throb and he succumbed to the pain. "Alright," he said, stepping out into the aisle and allowing Leighton out in front of him. He followed him through the packed and noisy stands to the stairs, wincing as he stepped down them out to the ring of grass around the pitch.

Leighton glanced over his shoulder with a worried look as he led him into the changing room all four teams used for practice. He opened his locker and pulled out a pair of Slytherin sweatpants, which he tossed to Kurt.

"You can leave your jeans in the hamper, the house elves always fetch our things," Leighton said. "I'll try and find that Burn Paste. Give me one second."

Kurt sat down on one of the benches, tears burning his eyes again at the feel of the rough fabric against his sensitive skin. He slipped off his shoes and carefully pulled down his jeans, gasping as the chill air hit his legs.

Looking down, he grimaced at the harsh red burn covering his left thigh. He ran his fingertips over it, whimpering slightly. He looked up at the sound of approaching footsteps to see Leighton returning with a tube of something in one hand, frowning down at the label as he spoke.

"Okay, so it says to let it stay on the burn for at least—" he trailed off as he looked up at Kurt, who had stood up when he entered. His eyes widened slightly and a flush crept up his cheeks. After a few seconds, he blinked and turned his gaze back to the tube, blushing furiously.

"So, um, yea, it says to leave it on for, uh, a few minutes to let it work and then, er, then to just restrict, um, restrict...movement."

He held the tube out, keeping his eyes averted from Kurt.

"Thanks," Kurt muttered, taking the tube and sitting back down. He squeezed a little of the thick orange paste onto his fingers and rubbed it into the burn, hissing as he smoked and stung.

"You okay?" Leighton said, his back turned to Kurt.

"Mhmm," Kurt replied, wincing as he closed off the tube. "Just, um...burns, I guess."

"Well that seems counterproductive," Leighton said, sounding a little less nervous.

Kurt laughed. "No, it's fine," he said. "I think it means it's working."

"Oh...um, good," Leighton said.

That stayed in awkward silence for a few minutes as Kurt waited for the paste to work, staring around at the posters of safety tips that hung around the room. When his leg stopped stinging, he stood and wiped it clean with one of the towels sitting on a rack in the corner. He slipped on the pants Leighton lent him and pulled his shoes back on.

"Wow, this it like, the worst outfit I've ever worn," he said, wrinkling his nose down at the sweats in combination with his designer coat and boots.



Leighton turned around tentatively and laughed. "You look fine," he said. "Slytherin colors suit you."

Kurt gave him a look and Leighton grinned.

"What?" he said, shrugging and smirking. "It's true. Maybe we should go have the Sorting Hat re-Sort you."

Kurt rolled his eyes, tossing him the Burn Paste and gathering up his jeans and towel to throw in the hamper. Leighton was still grinning when he returned from the office.

"These actually do fit really well," Kurt said, tweaking the string of his sweatpants as he walked beside Leighton out of the changing room.

"Who knew you'd enjoy getting into my pants so much?" Leighton said airily.

Kurt stared at him for a moment before they both cracked up.

"You're horrible," Kurt said, shaking his head and pushing him.

Leighton shrugged, still grinning cheekily.

There was an explosion of sound from the stands overhead and Kurt looked up to see Ethan, the Ravenclaw Seeker, holding his fist up in the air triumphantly as the Ravenclaw supporters screamed their approval.

"Oh no," Kurt said, shoulders slumping. "I missed it."

"Sorry," Leighton said, looking guilty. "This is my fault."

"No it's not," Kurt said. "Stop it."

Leighton gave him a small, hesitant smile. He looked over Kurt's shoulder and frowned faintly. Kurt turned to see Blaine jogging towards him, pink-faced and grinning.

"Hey," he said breathlessly as he reached them.

"Hey," Kurt said, smiling.

"Oh, hi, Cross," Blaine said, frowning as he turned to Leighton.

"Hello," Leighton said, looking suddenly awkward. "I'll just...go. See you later, Kurt."

"Bye," Kurt called after him as he disappeared into the crowd now finding its way onto the pitch.

Blaine stared after him for a moment before turning back to Kurt. "So what did—" he trailed off when he saw what Kurt was wearing. "Why are you wearing Slytherin pants?"

"Oh," Kurt said, feeling himself turn pink. "I, um, spilled hot chocolate and burnt my leg so Leighton let me borrow these."

"Are you alright?" Blaine said, expression changing from confused to concerned.

"I'm fine," Kurt said, smiling. "I missed the end of the match though. I'm sorry."

"That's alright," Blaine said, taking his hand and kissing him on the cheek. "As long as you're safe. It was an easy win anyway. It probably

would have been over sooner if Cole would have stopped going on and on."

"About you?" Kurt said, laughing.

Blaine sighed. "Yes," he muttered. "Seriously, I don't know what to do. I mean...I feel bad for the kid but...I can't keep dealing with this. He's everywhere I turn. It's getting a little bit...creepy."

"Blaine, you have a stalker," Kurt said, smirking. "But who can blame him? Look at you."

Blaine gave a half-hearted smile.

"Hey," Kurt said, stopping him and frowning. "This is really getting to you, isn't it?"

Blaine nodded, running his fingers through his hair anxiously.

"Do you want me to talk to him?" Kurt said, squeezing his hand. "I promise I won't be mean."

Blaine looked hesitant for a moment before nodding. "If...if you don't mind," he said in a small voice. "I just...I don't want to be mean and he won't listen to me or take any of the hints that I'm not interested."

Kurt leaned forward to give him a gentle kiss. "I'll go hunt him down, okay?" he said as he pulled back. "You go on up to the party, I'll be up in a few minutes."

"Thanks, love," Blaine said, looking relieved. He paused before slipping his arms around Kurt and pulling him into a long, deep kiss, one hand sliding down to grab his ass. "I love you," he growled.

Kurt blinked in surprise with Blaine pulled back. "I-I love you, too," he gasped.

Blaine smiled. "Thanks again, love," he said. "I'll see you in a bit, okay?"

"Mhmm," Kurt said, still a little breathless. Blaine winked and waved briefly before jogging back towards the rest of the team in the center of the pitch, where Jeff and Nick were hoisting Ethan on their shoulders.

Kurt watched him go for a moment, smiling to himself and yet still feeling the strange sense that something was between them that he couldn't place. Shrugging it off, he set off towards where the commentator's booth rose in the center of the stands. A stiff wind blew through the stadium and he shivered, shoving his hands into his pockets as he walked in the opposite direction of the crowd heading back towards the Castle.

He caught a flash of bright red hair in the mass of students and picked up his pace.

"Cole!" he called, pushing past a few dejected-looking Hufflepuffs.

"Cole, wait!"

Cole turned at the sound of his voice and his eyes immediately narrowed when he spotted Kurt. Kurt slowed when he reached him and was shocked to see him standing next to Leighton's ex-girlfriend Penelope.

"What?" Cole snapped, glaring coldly at him.

Kurt forced himself to remain calm tried to smile warmly, though it might have looked more like a grimace. "Listen, Cole," he said. "I understand that you like Blaine, okay. But you really need to stop what you're doing. He'd not interested, alright? You're starting to go a little overboard."

Cole turned pink but his jaw was still set as he glowered at Kurt.

"*I'm* going overboard?" he said. "I'm not the one flirting with other guys and practically having eye sex with them all other the school."

"What?" Kurt said, staring at him in confusion.

"Oh get real, Hummel," Penelope said, rolling her eyes. "Like we don't all know you're about two seconds from jumping in the sack with Leighton."

"Excuse me?" Kurt said, placing his hand on his hip and turning to her.

"Sneaking off from the match and coming back wearing his clothes?" she said, eyeing Kurt's pants. "Really, it's getting pathetic."

"For your information, I had to change because I spilled something,"

Kurt snapped. "Not that it's any of your damn business."

"You don't deserve Blaine," Cole said, bristling indignantly. "He deserves someone who actually appreciates him."

"Oh like you?" Kurt said, laughing harshly. "You really think *you* would make him happy? Well I've got news for you, *elf*, Blaine thinks you're just a creepy little stalker but he's too polite to say anything so he asked me to. I hate to break it to you but *he's not interested.*"

Cole's eyes filled with tears, though he continued to glare at him.

Penelope's mouth hung open, looking shocked and perhaps faintly amused.

"Well, we'll just see about that," Cole said, sniffing and turning on his heel as he strode away, Penelope staring at Kurt for a moment longer before following after him.

Kurt scowled, shaking with sudden anger. Why didn't he just get the hint? And what were they talking about with him and Leighton? Sure, they were friends and sure, Kurt was...well, *mildly* attracted to him but...they'd never actually done anything beyond friendly.

Then again, everyone had assumed he was dating Blaine simply for the fact that they were close friends the year before. He rolled his eyes. The Hogwarts rumour mill was worse than McKinley's. Pushing away thoughts of Cole and Leighton, he walked back towards the Castle, head bowed against the wind.

He was sick of it all, the drama that came with high school. Yes, he loved Hogwarts, but he couldn't wait until he didn't have to deal with any of the drama anymore. It was tiring and pointless and...he hated it.

A blanket suddenly engulfed him, covering his head and torso and he flailed for a moment trying to get it off as someone laughed next to him.

"Easy," Leighton said as he pulled the blanket down to cover Kurt's shoulders.

"What the hell, Leighton?" Kurt said, with a little more edge than he meant to.

"Whoa," Leighton said, his grin fading. "Sorry. I just...you looked cold."

"No, I...I didn't mean to snap," Kurt said, shaking his head as he pulled the blanket around him. "I'm just...a little pissed off right now."

"Oh," Leighton said. He paused then said in a small voice, "is everything alright with Blaine?"

"Yeah," Kurt said, "Well, I mean...it has to do with Blaine." He trailed off, still seething about Cole and Penelope.

"You don't have to tell me if you don't want to," Leighton said hastily.

"Just...making sure you're okay, I guess."

Kurt gave him a strained smile. "I'll be alright," he said. "It's just...that Cole O'Brien kid has a major crush on Blaine and he's starting to get really annoying."

"Oh," Leighton said, sounding unsure as to how to take this statement.

"And for some reason he's hanging around your ex," Kurt continued with an annoyed sigh.

"Pen?" Leighton said, turning to him with a shocked look. "What...really? She used to make fun of him all the time. You know, for being so short and stuff."

"Yeah," Kurt said. He shrugged and fell silent, not wanting to make things even more awkward by telling Leighton what Penelope had said.

"That's got to be the strangest friendship I've ever heard of," Leighton said, laughing a little. He shook his head.

Kurt smiled a little as Leighton continued to laugh, but his laughter was infectious and soon he was cracking up as well, Cole and Penelope completely forgotten as they walked across the sloping lawns together, Leighton's blanket wrapped snugly around his shoulders.

---

Blaine sighed in relief as the warmth of the entrance hall hit him, immediately warming his tingling fingers and toes. He slapped his hands on his thighs to try and bring some feeling back to them and turned to look across the grounds to see if Kurt was heading back yet.

At first he didn't see him, but then he spotted the Slytherin Seeker and realized that the person standing next to him was Kurt, draped in Slytherin blanket and grinning.

Kurt said something and Cross laughed, nudging him and being much more flirty than any completely straight man should be. He'd known Kurt and Cross were friends, they shared a common interest in Potions and were in the Slug Club together but...Blaine hadn't realized they were so close. Kurt was wearing Cross' freakin' clothes, for Merlin's sake. Even though there was a perfectly good explanation for it, Blaine couldn't stop jealousy flaring inside of him. It intensified as Kurt hit Cross' arm playfully, Cross giving Kurt a fond look as the other boy rolled his eyes.

He tried to suppress the feeling bubbling in his gut. He knew Kurt loved him and Kurt had always been flirty. He'd been the same around Blaine before they were dating and even acted the same way around Jeff and Nick sometimes. Still...that didn't mean he had to like it. There was something about Cross that didn't sit right with him.

Kurt looked up and waved when he spotted him, pulling off the blanket from his shoulders and handing it to Cross, who smiled and said something that made Kurt laugh. Blaine's hand tightened around his broom and he took a deep breath to calm himself as Kurt jogged towards him.

"Hey," he said a little breathlessly as he reached Blaine, his cheeks pink from the cold.

"Hey," Blaine said, trying to keep his voice calm.

"I thought you were heading up to the tower?" Kurt said, allowing Blaine to take his hand as they set off up the marble staircase.

"Thought I'd wait for you," Blaine said, trying to push the thought of Cross from his mind. "So...what happened with Cole?"

Kurt huffed angrily. "He's a little brat," he said, suddenly annoyed.

"I take it he didn't listen to you?" Blaine said, his mood falling even further.

"No," Kurt said. "I don't get what his problem is. He says I don't deserve you."

"He—what?" Blaine said, stumbling a little on his robes.

Kurt nodded, rolling his eyes. "He seems to think he could take better care of you than me."

Blaine stared at him in disbelief.

"Don't worry about it," Kurt said, catching the look on his face. "Really, I'm sure it'll wear off eventually. It's a school crush, it'll burn out soon enough. They all do."

"But...that's...I mean, not *all* school crushes, right?" Blaine said, suddenly feeling panicky.

"What do you mean?" Kurt said, frowning at him.

"Well...I mean, *we're* not like that...right?" Blaine said.

Kurt stared at him, looking confused. "Blaine, this isn't *anything* like that," he said. "I love you. That's...that's not a crush."

Blaine let out an internal sigh of relief.

Kurt laughed at the look on his face and kissed his cheek. "I'm not leaving you any time soon, I promise," he said.

Blaine smiled, though inside his heart was still pounding as he thought of how Kurt had been searching for affection for so long and of how Cross had been looking at him. What if...? No. No, Kurt would *not* cheat on him. He pushed the thought away as quickly as it had formed.

"Are you alright?" Kurt said, looking worried as they climbed the stairs to the tower.

"Yeah," Blaine said, hastily. "Yeah, I'm...fine."

Kurt continued to look a little confused as they entered the packed common room, pushing through the silent, immobile crowd.

"What's going on?" Kurt said, frowning and standing on his toes.

Blaine pulled him towards the center of the crowd, where they found Jeff and Nick standing five feet apart in the empty space, screaming at each other.

"I thought you were my friend!" Jeff roared.

"I am your friend!" Nick retorted, red-faced and furious.

"You've got some way of showing it!" Jeff shouted, pointing to where the Chaser, Hanna, was standing slightly behind Nick with her hand in his.

"Oh, grow up, Jeff," Nick said, rolling his eyes. "You can't get everything you want. Get over the fact that for once *I* got the girl."

Jeff spluttered incoherently for a moment, at a loss for words.

"You...you pillock!"

"Tosser," Nick said, glaring at him.

"Wanker!"

"Arse!"

"Prat!"

"Piss off!"

"You piss off!"

Kurt clapped a hand to his mouth as Nick released Hanna's hand and shoved Jeff, who shoved him back with just as much force.

"You're a right git!" Nick shouted.

"Well you're a piss poor friend!" Jeff retorted. Blaine was shocked to see there were actually tears in his eyes.

"Just leave me alone!" Nick said, shoving him again.

"Not until you tell me why you did this to me!" Jeff shouted, eyes shining.

Nick huffed angrily. "I didn't do anything to you. You just think you're so *damn* fantastic. Why don't you just get over yourself?"

Jeff glared at him. "Why don't you take a flying leap off the Astronomy Tower? Everyone knows I'm the only reason you're popular anyway," he snapped.

Nick stared at him for a moment, shaking in anger before pulling back his fist and smashing it into Jeff's nose. Kurt gasped, a few girls screamed.

Jeff clutched his face with both hands. Blaine thought he saw a flash of orange at his mouth but then Jeff doubled over, groaning in pain and lowering his hands. Blood gushed from both his nostrils as he stared up at Nick in disbelief.

Nick simply glared at him before turning back to Hanna, who looked surprisingly calm as she followed Nick through the crowd towards the couches near the fire.

Half a dozen girls ran up to Jeff, looking concerned and offering him help. Jeff put on a strong face and allowed them to pull him up and lead him to the other end of the room, where they sat him down and immediately started doting on him, stroking his hair and asking him if he was alright.

Blaine stared, dumbfounded, between him and Nick, who were on opposite sides of the room. He caught Nick glancing at Jeff and turned to see Jeff flash him the ghost of a grin and a wink, which Nick returned, and suddenly it became clear to him.

"Those idiots," he muttered, shaking his head.

"I can't believe they're fighting," Kurt said, looking distressed. "Jeff and Nick not being friends is like...like Flint and Thad breaking up. It's just not supposed to happen."

Blaine chuckled and Kurt stared at him.

"This isn't funny, Blaine!" he said angrily.

"No, Kurt, it is," he said, biting back a laugh. "Here, just...follow me." He pushed through the muttering crowd and led Kurt upstairs to the dorm. "Ah, there, see?" He pointed to the box lying open on Nick's bed.

"Nosebleed Nougat?" Kurt said, picking it up and frowning at it.

Comprehension dawned on his face after a moment. "Those *idiots*."

"My thoughts exactly," Blaine said, laughing and sitting down on his bed. "But you have to admire them for their creativity. Very believable."

Kurt shook his head and rolled his eyes as he tossed the box back on Nick's bed. "What is *wrong* with them?" he said, plopping down next to

Blaine and tossing his coat onto his own bed. "Seriously, I will *never* stop asking that question."

Blaine chuckled and fell back onto the bed. "Ugh, I need a shower," he said, making a face at the now uncomfortably hot amount of clothing he was wearing.

Kurt leaned over him, smirking. "Would you like me to join you?" he said, wiggling his eyebrows.

Blaine grinned. "I think that's an excellent idea," he said, reaching up to trail his fingers over Kurt's neck and pull him down into a long kiss.

---

December rolled onto Hogwarts with a blast of snow that blanketed the Castle and grounds in a thick layer of sparkling white. Kurt spent the first Wednesday morning of the month screaming at Nick and Jeff, who had put on quite a good "make-up" conversation after their shouting match (which apparently earned Jeff five potential dates), for ten minutes for filling their pillowcases with the year's first snow and dumping it on him.

"—and I swear, I will skin you both alive if you so much as sneeze in my direction again, got it? You're lucky Thad spent the night in the Gryffindor tower because he would gladly help!" Kurt shouted to the giggling pair.

They muttered apologies, trying to look shame-faced, before bolting from the room to head to breakfast, their roars of laughter carrying easily from the common room.

"I'll kill them," Kurt muttered as he brushed snow from his hair. "I'll string them both up and cast permanent Tickling Charms on them. We'll see how much they laugh after *that's* over."

Blaine chuckled from where he was tying his tie. "Sorry, love," he said. "At least you won't have to deal with them doing something mental over the holidays. I think they'll try and tone it down a bit around your family."

"Either that or they'll do something even more ridiculous than usual," Kurt muttered, pulling out a set of fresh robes from his trunk and pulling off his pajamas. "I'm going to take a shower. Can you bring some toast with you to Defense since I won't have time to go to breakfast thanks to those morons?"

Blaine nodded, laughing. "Of course. Anything else I can get you?" "Just a goodbye kiss," Kurt said hopefully.

Blaine smiled and moved towards him, wrapping his arms around his waist and kissing him gently. "Love you," he said as he pulled back, smiling softly.

"Love you," Kurt said, rubbing their noses together briefly before turning towards the bathroom. "I'll see you in Defense in a few."



"Alright," Blaine called from the doorway.

Kurt hummed happily as he flipped on the shower. Not even Jeff and Nick's insanity could dampen his mood. Blaine had done a complete one-eighty over the past few weeks. He was still tired much of the time and just as busy, but he was no longer moody and withdrawn. It was like something had finally slid into place and he was juggling all his responsibilities and still finding time to spend with Kurt. Granted, the strange barrier still seemed to exist but Kurt had long since come to accept it as normal. They were finally happy again and that was all that mattered to him at the moment. Not to mention break would be starting soon and then he would have three glorious weeks with Blaine with no classes or Quidditch or patrols to distract him.

He took a long, very hot shower to wash away the chill of the snow. Still humming, he Charmed his hair dry and pulled on his robes, quickly running through his moisturizing routine as Thad wandered into the room, looking rumpled and still wearing his robes from the previous day.

"Well someone's back *very* late," Kurt said, grinning as Thad rooted through his trunk for new clothes.

Thad blushed, slipping off his shoes and robes to get changed.

"Good night with Flint?" Kurt said as he styled his hair, glancing in the mirror at Thad, who peeled off his shirt to reveal no less than a dozen hickeys down his chest and stomach. "I'll take that as a yes," Kurt muttered.

Thad turned a deeper shade of scarlet and quickly retreated to the bathroom, though Kurt thought he saw the faintest of smirks on his lips as he closed the door behind him. Rolling his eyes and laughing, Kurt stuffed his books into his bag, waving to Wes and David as they wandered in for their bags.

He made his way down to the second floor Defense classroom, where Blaine was waiting at their usual table with a small stack of toast, which he was guarding from Jeff and Nick.

"You just ate," he said, glaring at them. "This is for Kurt."

"Yes, it is," Kurt said as he approached. "And you really don't want to bother me again today."

They immediately sat back in their seats, adopting innocent expressions that no one was buying. Kurt rolled his eyes and sat down next to Blaine, picking up a piece of toast and kissing him on the cheek.

"Thank you," he said, sticking the toast in his mouth and digging his book, parchment and quill from his bag.

"You're welcome," Blaine said, squeezing his leg under the table.

"Oh!" Kurt said, quickly chewing and swallowing as he turned to Blaine. "I forgot to tell you. Slughorn's Christmas party is next Friday. You're coming with me right?"

"I suppose," Blaine said, shrugging. "Unless you had another date in mind."

"Yes, they're just lining up," Kurt muttered, rolling his eyes again as he took another bite of toast.

Blaine chuckled. "Of course I'll go with you, love. I'm sure it'll be fun."

"I hope," Kurt said, sighing as he finished off his toast. "If you don't want to go though, I understand. I'll always have Leighton to talk to."

"I want to go," Blaine said firmly.

Kurt was a little taken aback by the sudden hardness to his voice.

"Um...okay," he said, frowning. "If you're sure."

Blaine nodded stiffly.

"Right," Kurt said, shaking his head a little as he picked up another slice of toast.

Flint entered the classroom, looking exhausted, with Dan, who was smirking at him, and they both sat down at the next table over.

"So, I just saw Thad," Kurt said, leaning towards Flint, who blushed faintly. "He seemed to be, ah, a little worn out."

"He should be," Dan said, nudging Flint. "I think they're starting to give you and Blaine a run for your money for the title of 'rabbits'."

Jeff and Nick sniggered as Flint groaned and hid his face in his hands, muttering, "Shut up, Dan."

Dan winked at them before pulling out his book and turning to talk to the pair of Hufflepuff girls that had just sat down next to him. Kurt exchanged a grin with Blaine as Wes and David plopped down at the last seats at the table, discussing their holiday plans.

Kurt turned to Blaine. "Are you excited about going to Lima?" he said, lowering his voice as Professor Cooney wandered in, carrying a large, wooden basin carved with strange symbols around the rim.

"Mhmm," Blaine said, smiling. "I can't wait to meet everyone."

"Yeah, Mercedes is already planning a double date with us and Sam," Kurt said, rolling his eyes.

"So they're dating now?" Blaine said, smiling faintly.

"I suppose," Kurt replied. "Let's just hope he doesn't dump her. I fear for the man who dumps Mercedes."

Blaine chuckled softly and they fell silent as Professor Cooney set the strange basin down on his desk and turned to them.

"Settle down," he said, pushing his thick glasses up his nose. The low muttering and fidgeting stopped. "Now, as it says on the syllabus, we'll be spending the next few weeks studying Occlumency and Legilimency."

A few people, including Blaine, nodded, Kurt simply stared in confusion.

Cooney continued. "For those of you that do not know, the two make up a rather obscure and complex, but no less important, branch of magic that few wizards practice. They have, however, been found extremely useful in the past and so the Headmistress wishes for you all to have at least a rudimentary knowledge of the two, especially Occlumency."

He paused, glancing around at the many blank and perplexed faces and swept a hand through his fly-away hair. "I see not many of you have prepared for this," he said. "Very well, Mr. Anderson, can you give us a brief explanation of the two?"

Blaine sat up a little straighter. "Yes, sir," he said, smiling.

"Legilimency is the act of magical infiltrating the mind of one by the caster in order to search their memories and knowledge. Occlumency is the defense used against it by closing one's mind to their own emotions."

"Perfect," Cooney said, nodding. "Twenty point to Ravenclaw."

Blaine grinned and Kurt squeezed his hand under the table.

"So," Cooney continued, striding back to his desk. "For the next week and a half, you will be practicing the two on each other. You'll pair off and one of you will attempt to break into the other's mind, while the other defends against it. Obviously, the main focus is the defense portion. Occlumens often take years learning the skill, but a basic grasp of the concept is what we're going for. If you can defend yourself against a Legilimens, the same skill can be used in fighting the Imperius Curse and even in resisting the influence of Veritaserum. "I expect an essay, at least a full roll of parchment, discussing the skills needed to practice Occlumency and what difficulties you faced in attempting it, due when you return from the holiday."

The class groaned collectively.

"Now, now," he said, chuckling, "One essay won't do you any harm."

Kurt stared down at his hands, his heart thumping madly in his chest. He honestly didn't care about writing the essay. That wasn't the part that worried him. It was the part that Blaine would be using this...Legilimency against him, would have access to all his thoughts and memories, to a certain dream that Kurt could feel the blush creeping up his face just thinking about. He swallowed nervously and tried to refocus his attention on Professor Cooney.

"Now, I'm aware that you will all have certain things that you're not willing to share with your classmates," Cooney said. He gestured to the basin on his desk. "That's why I've borrowed the Headmistress' Pensieve. Any memories that you're not comfortable with others

seeing, you can leave in the Pensieve until our last class next Friday before you leave for break."

Kurt almost cried with relief, though it was almost immediately quashed by panic. What if Blaine asked him what he was hiding? He fidgeted in his seat anxiously.

Cooney smiled, adjusting his glasses. "So, pair off and read the chapter on Legilimency and Occlumency starting on page two hundred and thirty-five then we'll get started."

Kurt opened his book shakily to the chapter and started to read, trying desperately to concentrate, though the words kept slipping through his brain without leaving any sort of meaning. Blaine was reading next to him, his head resting on his hand as he scanned the pages of *Advanced Defensive Magic*, his fingers drumming absently on the desktop.

There was the occasional rustle as a page turned or a soft cough as his classmates read while Kurt was having an internal panic attack. On one hand, he could *not* put the dream in the Pensieve and risk Blaine seeing it. On the other hand, he could *put* it in the Pensieve and have to face awkward questions from Blaine. The two options warred in his brain as he continued to read. When he reached the end of the chapter five minutes later, he couldn't remember a word of it.

He tried to return Blaine's warm smile but his jaw seemed to be locked in place.

"Well, it looks like everyone's finished," Cooney said, standing and glancing around at them. "Anyone who feels the need to use the Pensieve can simply drop their memories in. As I said, you may retrieve them after class next Friday."

Kurt started to panic in earnest as a few students stood and moved towards the front of the class.

"Flint, for the love of Merlin, go," Dan said. "I really don't want to see what you and Thad do in that dorm room. Or in the showers. Or in the—"

"Okay, I get it," Flint grumbled, flushing as he stood.

Blaine stood as well and Kurt stared at him.

"That Reinhold thing," Blaine said in answer to his wide-eyed gaze.

"And everything with Jeremiah's friends. I really don't want to relive it."

"Oh," Kurt said. "Yeah, um, me too. About...Reinhold." He leapt up and followed Blaine to the front of the room, relief sweeping through him even as guilt twisted in his gut. He wanted to tell Blaine, but he was afraid to see the hurt and disappointment on his face. If he felt this bad now, he didn't think he could face the shame if he actually told Blaine about the dream.

He watched as the Slytherin girl at the front of the line touched her wand to her temple and pulled from it a strand of silvery, shining thought, which fluttered down into the Pensieve. Half a dozen other students did the same thing. Flint, who was in front of Blaine, removed strand after strand of memory into the basin.

"Christ, Flint," Kurt said after a long minutes of watching him. "Do you two ever stop?"

Flint grinned sheepishly before retreating to his desk, ignoring Dan's sniggers.

Blaine smiled a little sadly as he lifted his wand to his head and pulled the long threads of bad memory away. He watched the last one float down into the pool of liquid thought, which shimmered, a flash of Blaine being thrown into a broom shed rising to the surface for a split second before sinking back and swirling around the bottom.

He gave Kurt a kiss on the cheek and whispered, "I love you," in his ear before returning to their desk.

Kurt's stomach clenched painfully as he removed the dream from his mind along with the Reinhold memory and walked back to his seat, blinking back tears.

Blaine gave him a comforting smile. "Hey, it's alright," he whispered. Kurt tried to return the smile even though he felt sick to his stomach with guilt.

"Alright," Cooney said as he lifted the Pensieve from his desk and placed it in the cabinet in the corner, which he locked with a flick of his wand. "Now, for the next few minutes, you should all focus on clearing your minds, just like the book says. You cannot let your emotions control you or you will never be able to resist this type of attack."

The room was silent as everyone closed their eyes to clear their heads. Jeff and Nick were punching each other lightly under the desk to try and get the other to laugh.

Kurt took a deep breath and closed his eyes, trying to wipe his mind of all emotion. Hot shame kept bubbling up inside him though and when Professor Cooney told them to start practicing and moved their desks and chairs to one side of the room with a sweep of his wand, he was nowhere near ready to defend himself.

Blaine smiled as they stood a few feet apart in the empty space. "Don't worry, love," he said, taking in Kurt's anxious expression. "Just try and concentrate."

Kurt's wand shook in his hand as Blaine lifted his own, Jeff and Nick tittering a few feet away.

The room was suddenly full of cries of "*Legilimens!*" and Blaine gave Kurt one last reassuring smile before pointing his wand at him and saying, "*Legilimens,*" in a loud, clear voice.

Fuzzy, broken images flickered across his brain, though he could still see Blaine standing in front of him in the classroom. He struggled to fight against the feeling that his head was being opened up and examined but it was no use. The images became suddenly clear. He was standing in a cemetery, holding his father's hand as his mother was being lowered into her grave; he was eleven and glowing with excitement while he bought his first wand; a group of jocks were shoving him in the dirt and calling him a fag; Mercedes and Tina were helping him up after he'd been shoved into a locker; Karofsky was screaming and grabbing his face and kissing him—

"Stop it!"

The stream of memories broke and he suddenly realized he was on the ground, tears gushing down his face as Blaine ran to his side, his own eyes bright.

"Kurt," he said, wrapping his arm around him as he dropped to his knees. "Shh, shh, it's okay, love, I'm here."

The entire class was staring at them with wide-eyed expressions. Nick and Jeff exchanged a concerned look.

"Are you alright, Mr. Hummel?" Cooney said, giving him a worried look as he approached.

"I'm f-fine," Kurt said, trying to shake the suddenly vivid memory of Karofsky.

"Was that...that was him, wasn't it?" Blaine said softly. "Karofsky?"

Kurt nodded, wiping his eyes and taking a shaking breath. Blaine's expression was unreadable as he watched him. "Do you want to leave?" he said. "We...we can leave."

Kurt shook his head, sniffing. "No," he said firmly. "No, I'm alright. I just...I haven't thought about that day in a long time." Not since he ran into Karofsky back in Lima over three months ago.

"Why don't we switch," Blaine said, helping him up. "You can try later, okay? Maybe wait until Friday."

"Alright," Kurt said, nodding as the rest of the class slowly went back to their work.

Blaine moved back to his former position, smiling warmly. Kurt took a calming breath and lifted his wand.

"*L-legilimens*," he said.

Nothing happened.

"It's alright, love," Blaine said. "Just concentrate. I love you."

Kurt closed his eyes for a few seconds to try and calm himself down before trying again.

"*Legilimens. Legilimens! LEGILIMENS!*"

He let out a frustrated sob as there continued to be no effect. He suddenly felt bare and vulnerable and weak. He hung his head as tears stung his eyes.

"Kurt," Blaine said. "Kurt, look at me."

Kurt looked up and saw the blinding love in Blaine's eyes and his tension melted away.

"It's okay," Blaine said. "He can't hurt you here."

Kurt nodded and squared his shoulders. "*Legilimens!*" he said firmly. Flashes of scenes hit him, like skipping images on a broken reel. He caught glimpses of Blaine's parents holding a laughing boy of five or six, a young Blaine hugging an older woman with kind hazel eyes, an anxious Blaine walking onto the Quidditch pitch to loud cheers, Blaine watching him walk away after their kiss beneath the mistletoe a year ago. The images became fuzzy and faded and the classroom was clear again.

"What just happened?" Kurt said, frowning.

"Very good, Mr. Anderson," Professor Cooney called from where he was helping two giggling Gryffindor girls. "Excellent first attempt; ten more points to Ravenclaw."

"Um, I guess I just did Occlumency," Blaine said, looking a little confused.

"Oh...cool," Kurt said, though he was mildly jealous that Blaine had grasped it so easily when he himself had become a blubbing mess. They continued to practice for the next hour, during which Blaine threw off Kurt's repeated attempts at Legilimency with apparent ease and earned Ravenclaw another twenty points.

"It's not like I'm going against a *real* Legilimens, though, so it doesn't really count," Blaine said as they packed up their things when the bell rang.

"Stop trying to be so modest," Kurt said, faintly annoyed that Blaine had basically just insulted him so offhandedly. "We all know you're amazing at everything."

Blaine's mouth fell open in surprise but he didn't say anything as Kurt slammed his books into his bag.

"I've got Transfiguration," Kurt said, not looking at him. "I'll see you at lunch."

"Oh, okay," Blaine said. "I'll...see you later."

Kurt strode from the room without a backwards glance and made his way up to the fifth floor Transfiguration classroom, which was still locked as class didn't start for fifteen minutes.

He didn't know why he was so annoyed. He supposed it was the fact that Blaine took to easily to *everything* while he'd been reduced to tears and made to look helpless by him in front of the entire class. It

made him feel exposed, and the way the rest of the class had been muttered about him hadn't helped.

Sighing in annoyance, he pulled out his Defense book from his bag and attempted to read the passage on Occlumency again, though this time he found himself too angry at the way Blaine had said he wasn't a "*real* Legilimens" to focus.

The sound of approaching footsteps made him look up and he saw Leighton striding towards him with a few of his friends, all of them talking and laughing. One of them nudged Leighton and nodded in Kurt's direction and Leighton looked up, beaming.

"See you in Charms, Leigh," his friend called as Leighton stopped next to Kurt and the rest of them continued on.

Leighton waved vaguely to them, his eyes on Kurt. "Bonjour," he said, grinning.

"Hey," Kurt said, his stomach giving a little squirm as Leighton's blue eyes twinkled, though it was followed immediately by a surge of guilt. He suddenly wanted to hunt Blaine down and apologize.

"How're you?" Leighton said.

"Alright," Kurt lied.

"Ready for holidays?" Leighton said, tilting his head a little as he observed Kurt with a curious expression.

"More than you know," Kurt muttered.

Leighton laughed lightly. "Rough day?"

"Rough *year*," Kurt said with a sigh.

Leighton's gaze softened. "Everything alright?" he said, setting his hand on Kurt's shoulder.

"Yeah, I guess," Kurt replied, shrugging.

Leighton watched him closely in concern.

"Are you going to Hogsmeade this weekend?" Kurt blurted out, desperate for a change of subject.

"What?" Leighton said, looking taken aback. "Um, yeah, why?"

"Just...wondering," Kurt said, smacking himself internally.

"What about you?" Leighton said, absently combing his fingers through his tousled hair, which was now a little longer than when they'd arrived at Hogwarts. "Are you going?"

"Yeah," Kurt said, "I've still got my Christmas shopping to do."

"Me too," Leighton said, making a face. "I'm just glad I don't have to shop for Pen anymore. I'm awful at buying gifts."

Kurt laughed. "Well, if you're asking for help, I'd be happy to offer my services. If you don't mind hanging around Blaine part of the time. I'll have to kick him out while I'm shopping for him, though."

Leighton looked faintly surprised. "You want to hang out with me at Hogsmeade?"



"I will hang out with the giant squid if it means a chance to shop," Kurt said, grinning.

Leighton laughed, shaking his head. "Well, alright then," he said. "You can help me pick out something for my cousin. She's so picky. But what do you expect, she's French. She has more style in her pinky than I do in my whole awkward body." He grinned for a moment before his face fell. "Are you sure Blaine won't mind? I mean...I really don't want to get in your way."

"Nah, he won't care," Kurt said. "It's just shopping. He knows how much I love it. It won't take us long and then you can toddle on back to your friends and me back to Blaine. Plus, it's Thad's birthday on Sunday so I'll definitely need to spend some time with him. That is, if he isn't wrapped around Flint the whole day." He smirked.

"Brill," Leighton said, nodding and smiling. "It's a date then." He blanched. "I mean, no, not a date, a, um—"

"Leighton," Kurt said, cutting across his mumbling. "I get it."

Leighton gave him a relieved smile. "Alright then well...I'll see you Saturday."

"Saturday," Kurt repeated, smiling as the rest of the class started queuing outside the door and Leighton gave him a quick wave before setting off down the corridor to head to Charms.

"Oh, thank Merlin," Flint said as he approached. "Kurt, I need your help."

"With what?" Kurt said suspiciously, hoping sincerely that he was not going to start asking for sex advice. It was weird enough giving it to Thad.

"Thad," Flint said, dropping his voice as Professor Aldebrand appeared and unlocked the door to allow them all in.

"What about Thad?" Kurt said with a sigh as he led the way into the classroom.

"I don't know what to get him for his birthday," Flint said in a hoarse whisper.

Kurt rounded on him. "What?" he hissed. "Flint, it's in *four days*!"

"I know!" Flint said, throwing himself in his seat and clutching his head in his hands. "I just...I have no idea what to get him! I want it to be special, you know? Since it's his first birthday that we're together.

Plus, I'm getting him his Christmas gift to and I have *no clue*, Kurt."

Kurt stared at him for a moment before sighing. "Fine," he said as he unpacked his books. "I'll help you."

"Really?" Flint said, giving him a grateful look.

"Might as well," Kurt muttered. "I'm pretty much shopping for half the school now."

"What?" Flint said, frowning.

"Nothing," Kurt replied, shaking his head. "Just...I'm meeting up with Leighton Saturday to help him shop for his cousin while I shop for Blaine. Meet me at Brickston's at noon."

"Where?" Flint said.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "The bookshop, Flint."

"There's a bookshop in Hogsmeade?" Flint said, looking shocked.

Kurt gave him a dead-panned stare. "This is why you need me, Flint." Flint grinned shiftily and shrugged.

Kurt clucked his tongue in disapproval. "It's next to Madam Puddifoot's," he said. "And don't tell me you don't know where that is because I happen to know you took Thad there a few weeks ago to *not* drink coffee together."

Flint flushed a little but nodded. "Alright, that's...thanks, Kurt. Really, I'm horrible at this stuff."

"Apparently all men not in Ravenclaw are," Kurt muttered.

Flint chuckled as Jeff and Nick bounced into the room, Nick looking anxious as he made his way to Kurt.

"Kurt, I need your help with Hanna—"

"I'm not shopping for anyone else!" Kurt said loudly, causing a few people to turn around and stare at him in alarm.

Nick looked crestfallen but slouched over to his desk and sat down with Jeff, who immediately started talking. Kurt was sure he heard the words "Wet-start" and "Fireworks" and narrowed his eyes in their direction.

"Maybe I should help him, if only for Hanna's safety," he mumbled.

Flint bit back a laugh as Aldebrand moved to the front of the classroom and began the lesson.

Kurt hunted down Blaine at lunch and immediately pulled him in for a long kiss.

"I'm sorry," he breathed in his ear as he pulled away. "I was just jealous that you're so good at everything. Why do you have to be so perfect, Blaine?"

Blaine chuckled, looking relieved that Kurt was not mad at him. "I'll help you practice later okay?" he said, rubbing Kurt's thigh under the table. "You just need to relax, love."

"Well, you're always very good at helping me with that," Kurt said in a low voice, trailing his fingers up Blaine's forearm in a way that made the other boy shiver pleasantly.

"Always happy to help, love," he muttered, grinning.

Kurt resisted the desire to start ripping his clothes off then and there with difficulty. "You'd better come straight back to the tower after Herbology," he said in a warning growl.

Blaine licked his spoon clean with a lot more tongue than was absolutely necessary and Kurt squirmed in discomfort.

"You're an ass," he muttered, glaring at him.

"Well, you can punish me for that after Herbology," Blaine said, leaning over to kiss him on the cheek.

"It's times like these I'm glad we have Divination on Wednesday afternoons," Jeff said, glancing up from his plate where he was sitting across from Kurt.

"Too true, my friend, too true," Nick said, nodding over his glass of pumpkin juice as Hanna giggled next to him.

---

The corridors were empty and silent as they moved down them peering around corners anxiously as they went.

"Ow, you stepped on my toe, Marsh," Cole hissed.

"Well, maybe if you weren't so short, I wouldn't keep mistaking you for a house elf," Marsh muttered back.

Cole scowled at her and strode around the next corner without even looking.

"Peeves!" Marsh hissed, him back around the corner just as the poltergeist turned around to face where Cole had just been standing. Cackling and flipping through the air, Peeves zoomed off in the direction of the west wing and they both let out a sigh of relief.

"This was a stupid idea," Cole grumbled.

"Um, it was *your* idea, O'Brien," Marsh said, cocking an eyebrow.

"Not the memory part," Cole snapped. "The sneaking around in the middle of the night part. Even I'm not allowed out this late and I'm a Prefect."

Marsh rolled her eyes. "Yes, I'm well aware," she muttered.

Cole glared at her as she peered around the next corner to the second floor corridor where the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom sat, the walls bathed in pale moonlight streaming in through the windows, which rattled as snow flurries blasted against them.

They both shivered as cold leaked through the masonry into the corridor. Glancing over their shoulders, they hurried to the classroom door which was, predictably, left unlocked. Cole silently thanked that Professor Cooney was so scatter-brained sometimes.

"Where is it?" Marsh said, glancing around the room.

"There," Cole said, pointing to the locked cupboard sitting against the wall on the opposite side of the room. "I saw it when he was getting out the Sneakoscopes earlier today."

Marsh tiptoed across the room and he followed her.

"Locked," she said, rattling the handle.

"Step aside," Cole said imperiously, shaking back his sleeves and tapping the lock with his wand, muttering, "*Alohamora*." The lock clicked loudly and the cupboard swung open.

Soft, silvery, liquid light shimmered across their faces as they peered into the basin sitting on the lower shelf of the cupboard.

"Cool," Marsh said, reaching out to touch the swirling thoughts.

"No!" Cole said, staying her hand. "Don't touch it."

She pouted and he ignored her, prodding the pool of whirling memories with the tip of his wand. It churned and rippled for a moment until the surface pulled up a scene. It was semi-darkness in the room he was looking at, the sound of soft moans and pants reaching his ears as he squinted down into the Pensieve, his face only inches from the surface.

"Holy crap!" Marsh exclaimed as their eyes adjusted to the light of the memory and they saw Cross and Hummel wrapped around each other, kissing feverishly and exchanging some very inappropriate touches. Cole leapt back, blushing furiously at what he'd seen.

"Wow," Marsh said, eyes wide. "I...didn't expect it to be *that* juicy."

"It's not a memory," Cole said, his heart still beating very fast. He thought he might be sick.

"What do you mean?" Marsh said incredulously. "Looks pretty *memorable* to me."

Cole shook his head, taking a few calming breaths. "No, I mean...it's a dream. You can tell by the way they're kind of...fuzzy around the edges."

Marsh peered into the basin again. "Oh, yeaah," she said, nodding.

"Still though, this is pure *gold*."

Cole nodded, his mouth clenched tightly shut as he closed his eyes and tried to push away what he'd seen. It was vulgar and crude and...animalistic. He shuddered.

"Well, let's get on with it," Marsh said impatiently. "You said you know how to do this."

Cole steadied himself. "Um, yeah," he muttered. "I can get it." He moved towards the Pensieve, keeping his gaze averted from the scene playing out on its surface and touched his wand to the puddle of shining thought. A long strand of cloudy, fluid memory pulled away from the pool.

"Vial," Cole said, holding out his free hand.

Marsh reached into her robes and held out a tiny crystal bottle, which Cole uncorked with his mouth before dropping the thread of memory into it.

"Don't forget to—"

"I know," Cole snapped, glaring at her as he set the vial down and spat out the cork into his hand. "*Geminio*," he muttered, waving his wand at the smoky memory. The wispy fiber split in two so that there were two stands coiling and undulating around each other in the bottle.

Marsh squealed with delight, but fell silent at a scowl from Cole, who lifted one of the memories from the bottle and returned it to the Pensieve before corking of the vial and pocketing it.

"Now, we just wait until the holidays are over," Marsh said as Cole locked the cupboard again, "and then you'll have a very *single* Blaine Anderson to make your own."

Cole squirmed at the thought. "Remind me why we're waiting until *after* holidays?" he said as he followed Marsh out of the classroom, shutting but not locking it behind him.

"Because people are forgiving during Christmas," Marsh said. "Give them three weeks to be all disgustingly gooey and they'll be all over each other when they come back."

"Let them let their guard down. We'll be able to watch the whole thing play out soon enough, O'Brien, trust me." She grinned and nudged Cole's arm before setting off in the direction of the entrance hall while Cole went the opposite direction towards his tower.

He pulled out the little bottle of twisting memory, which shone and gleamed in the pools of moonlight. "We'll see who Blaine's interested in, Hummel," he muttered, turning the bottle over in his fingers. "We'll see who he's interested in when he sees what you've been dreaming." Slipping the bottle back into his pocket, he strode down the corridors, careful to check around corners as he went, feeling a sense of vindictive justice that seeped through him and spread a wide grin across his face.

## Chapter Nine

Blaine wasn't a jealous person. Really, he wasn't. He knew Kurt loved him and that he wouldn't cheat on him. But there was something about the way Cross laughed a bit too long at Kurt's jokes and smiled just a bit too softly that set his teeth on edge.

His fork shook in his hand as he glared at where Cross was sitting at the Slytherin table further down the Hall, chatting with Kurt, who was sitting backwards on the bench next to him. He wasn't possessive, wasn't about to start accusing Cross of trying to take Kurt or anything irrational like that, but he definitely wanted to make it perfectly clear that Cross, who could claim all he wanted that he was straight—Blaine wasn't buying, had no chance with Kurt. Because he and Kurt were in love, and love was a lot different than the flirty eyes they were making at each other.

It wasn't petty. After all, Kurt had been doing the same thing with Cole, and Blaine didn't even remotely *like* Cole. But Kurt liked Cross. Obviously he did, given the way they were always jabbering on about Potions or chatting in French when they met up in the corridors between classes.

Setting his fork down, he calmly stood and walked down the aisle to where Kurt was sitting and pulled him to his feet and into a searing kiss before he had a chance to do more than look up and smile.

Kurt tensed in surprise before groaning faintly and kissing him back, his fingers tightening in the back of Blaine's sweater as his soft lips searched Blaine's and his tongue glided across Blaine's wetly. Blaine held him there until they were both struggling for breath, finally pulling back with a light gasp and immediately searching Kurt's eyes, which were wide with surprise, his lips slightly parted in a small smile. Cross coughed awkwardly, staring at his plate, but Blaine ignored him. "Hey," Blaine said, making his voice low and rough, which always drove Kurt wild.

"Hey," Kurt said breathlessly, laughing lightly. "What was that about?" "You just look really good," Blaine said, eyeing his outfit. "You always do on days we go to the village. Well...you do all the time but...you know what I mean."

Kurt smiled and nodded. "I do," he said. He licked his reddened lips absentmindedly and Blaine found himself leaning forward to kiss him again, sucking gently on his lower lip.

"Blaine," Kurt hissed as they broke apart again. He was faintly pink. "There are people here."

"Who cares?" Blaine growled, very subtly shifting his hips against Kurt's, earning him a short, gasping whine from the other boy. Kurt gave him a warning look and Blaine reluctantly stepped back, keeping his hand laced with Kurt's and shifting to hide his growing erection. He smirked seeing Kurt pull his coat down to do the same. Cross frowned very faintly at his plate, chewing his lip and blushing. "Ready to go?" Blaine said, glancing at Kurt.

"Yeah," Kurt, still sounding uncomfortable. Well, that's what he got for wearing such tight jeans all the time. Blaine casually rocked back on his toes to admire the way Kurt's jeans hugged his ass, resisting the sudden urge to squeeze, or better yet smack it.

He'd been making sure to keep Kurt satisfied since he'd seen him flirting with Cross after the match. He was nearly killing himself half the time, what with patrols and the immense pile of homework they had to complete before term ended next week.

But he was going to make sure Kurt knew *exactly* what he was coming back to at the end of the day. To him. To Blaine. To the most mind-blowing sex he'd ever had. To blow-jobs in the bathroom during break and heated make-out sessions in the alcoves before they headed to breakfast in the morning. He'd make Kurt forget about Cross. He'd made him forget about everything but Blaine's name several times over the past week and a half. Sure, he was ready to fall over from lack of sleep, but it was worth it to see Kurt falling apart into a puddle of pleasure as he gasped and mewled and moaned his name.

"I'll see you later, alright, Leighton?" Kurt said, smiling at Cross, who nodded, his frown dissipating as he met Kurt's eyes.

*Straight my arse*, Blaine thought angrily as he slipped his arm firmly around Kurt's waist and steered him from the Hall, half-glancing over his shoulder at Cross, who was pushing his food around his plate. Blaine knew how this could end up if he played it wrong. Just last year he'd seen the same thing happen to Kurt and Flint's relationship. Flint had grown violent, had made stupid mistakes that had practically pushed Kurt straight into Blaine's arms.

Blaine wasn't going to do that, though. Flint was a great guy and all but Blaine was smarter than that. Plus, Blaine *knew* he loved Kurt. It wasn't just something formed out of a need to be accepted as it had been for Flint.

"So, what are we doing today, love?" Blaine said as they walked through the oak front doors out into the chill winter air.

Kurt still looked dazed as he answered. "Well, I thought we'd stop by Zonko's so I can get Finn's gift. Then if we can go to Honeydukes, my dad *loves* their Christmas cookies, sorry, *biscuits*, and then I'd like to

go to Gladrags. I saw a *gorgeous* cashmere sweater that would look great on Carole."

Blaine watched him fondly, wondering how he could even have been so cold and distant to him for so long. He prayed it wasn't too late to fix everything he'd broken. He loved Kurt. He just hoped that what he'd done, the way he'd acted, wouldn't be enough reason for Kurt to leave if Cross presented him with the opportunity for something else. Kurt glanced over at him, looking vaguely expectant.

"Blaine?" he said, waving his hand in front of his face. "Hello? Kurt to Blaine."

"Sorry," Blaine said, blinking and shaking his head. "I was...you're just so...stunning. I get a little lost looking at you sometimes."

Kurt smiled, his cheeks dusting very lightly in pink. "You're being very sweet today," he said, squeezing Blaine's hand where it rested on his waist. "It's nice."

"I'm glad you like it," Blaine said, grinning. "Usually you're making fun of me for my sappiness."

Kurt shrugged. "It's been awhile since you've been sappy," he said, looking down at his feet. "I missed it."

Blaine swallowed nervously and quickly leaned over to give him a warm kiss on the cheek. "I love you," he said. "I'm sorry about the way I acted. You...you didn't deserve it."

"It's okay," Kurt said, smiling over at him as they turned down the High Street. "You've been perfect lately. I just hope you're not killing yourself to try and make me happy." He looked mildly anxious as he said it.

"You're worth it," Blaine said, holding him close. "I love you so much, Kurt. I'd do anything to keep you."

"I love you, too," Kurt said. "I just want to make sure you don't make yourself sick."

"I'm fine, love," Blaine said reassuringly. "Trust me."

Kurt searched his eyes briefly before smiling, tightening his scarf, which was clear, vivid blue, as a cold breeze swept up the road, swirling little snow flurries around their feet.

"So, Zonkos?" Blaine said, nodding towards the joke shop.

"Zonkos," Kurt said, leaning against him as they turned towards the store and its brightly colored window displays, exchanging fond looks.

---

Taking a deep breath, Flint knocked on the door of the Seventh Year Ravenclaw boys' dormitory, tapping his foot anxiously as he waited, hands behind his back.

The door swung open after a moment and Thad appeared, yawning and stretching and blinking blearily. "Flint?" he said, frowning up at



him as Acorn trotted from the room between his legs with a soft meow. "W-what are you doing here? What time is it?"

"Nearly ten," Flint said.

"Ten?" Thad said, eyes snapping open. "But-but I set my wand for eight and Kurt said he..." he trailed off as he glanced back into the empty room. His eyes narrowed. "Kurt," he muttered, shaking his head and huffing angrily. He turned back to Flint with a pleading look. "I'm sorry, I promise I'll get ready, just give me ten minutes."

"Pet, stop," Flint said, pulling one hand from behind his back to grab Thad's arm.

Thad gave him a confused look.

Flint pulled his other arm from behind his back, holding out the breakfast tray he was carrying. "I thought...I thought you might want breakfast," he said nervously. "I mean...I know your birthday's not until tomorrow but, since we're going to the village today, I thought we could celebrate it now."

Thad stared down at the plate and teapot sitting on the tray for a long moment.

"P-pet?" Flint said, suddenly feeling anxious.

Thad held up a hand to silence him and gestured him into the room, closing the door behind him. Still not saying a word, he took the tray from Flint's hands and set it on his bedside table before turning back to Flint, his expression unreadable.

"Thad?" Flint said, frowning. "Are you—"

He was cut off as Thad literally flung himself at him, throwing his arms around his neck and crushing their lips together. Flint immediately reciprocated, holding Thad tightly around the middle and allowing him to walk him back towards his bed. Flint fell back onto the mattress, pulling Thad down with him and groaning as Thad straddled his hips and rolled down against him.

"I should do this more often," Flint said, closing his eyes as Thad nibbled on his earlobe.

Thad giggled against him, wiggling his hips from side to side to create the most delicious friction.

"Thad, you're, ugh, so unbelievable," Flint grunted, wetting his dry lips with his tongue as Thad moved down to his neck, one hand gripping Flint's shirt as he propped himself up on his elbow, the other wound in Flint's hair.

Thad giggled again, scooting down Flint's legs until he was sitting on the very edge of his knees. He glanced up at Flint, biting his lip and blushing faintly as he slid back onto the floor, glancing at the closed door before shimmying out of his pajama pants, his over-large t-shirt, one of Flint's, falling down to his thighs.

Flint swallowed hard. They'd done this plenty of times before, but Thad hadn't been giving him the little half-glances he was now as he walked his fingers up Flint's thighs and fiddled with the button of his jeans. Flint was actually starting to hurt at this point. And Thad was barely touching him, his fingertips brushing lightly over the bulge in his jeans. "Tease," Flint groaned miserably.

Thad giggled mischievously before slowly, teasingly, agonizingly slowly, popping the button of his jeans open and dragging down the zipper.

Flint sighed at the relief of pressure, closing his eyes as Thad tugged his jeans down his thighs. He blushed, still a little self-conscious about what they were doing because Thad had never looked at him quite like this before. But Thad was wiggling up his thighs, faintly pink and chewing on his lower lip, so he pushed it away. Thad ran a trembling hand down Flint's chest, flicking open the buttons as he went. He stopped when Flint's shirt hung open, looking unsure of himself.

"C'mere, you," Flint said, pulling him down into a kiss before bringing his hands to rest on his thighs lying on either side of his hips.

Thad whimpered and gasped as he pressed his hips down into Flint, his arms stretching up at an angle and framing Flint's face on the bed.

Flint turned his head to the side slightly and Thad pulled back, looking confused.

"Am I doing something wrong?" he said, head tilted curiously to the side.

"No," Flint said, brushing his fingers gently through his dark hair and smiling. "You know, we don't have to do anything if you don't want."

"I know," Thad murmured before kissing along Flint's jaw and brushing his lips over the shell of Flint's ear.

Flint shuddered as Thad's warm, stuttering breaths blew across the sensitive skin, his soft hands moved from the bed to graze across his neck and down his bare chest as he planted open-mouthed kisses across Flint's shoulder and collarbone.

Flint groaned and bucked his hips up into him, grinning as Thad mewled against his collarbone and returned the motion with more force. He gripped Thad's hips and pulled him down against him again and Thad let out a loud, broken moan that made Flint glance towards the door. There were still people in the common room, after all. But then Thad started rocking his hips in time to the way he was sucking and scraping his teeth across the spot behind his ear and his self-control flew out the window.

He grabbed Thad's chin in one hand and forced him into a rough kiss, wrapping his other arm around him to hold him in place as he dragged his hips up against him. Thad inhaled shakily, his nails scratching

across Flint's chest as his movements became more sporadic, rougher, needy.

Flint sucked hard on Thad's bottom lip, their teeth gnashing together almost painfully hard. He simply couldn't get enough of Thad. Of his taste or scent or touch. His brain was close to shutting down from sensory overload, but he wanted more.

Thad was panting into his mouth, his lips and tongue moving hungrily against Flint's as he ground down so hard their hipbones crashed together and he let out a whimper of pain. Flint stroked his thighs comfortingly, feeling the heat beginning to pool inside him, his hands shaking, his vision blurring. He dug his nails into Thad's legs as he came, biting down on Thad's lower lip and holding him in place.

Thad whined and drew his fingernails hard across Flint's chest, rocking against him and shaking as a low, smooth cry passed across his lips into Flint's mouth.

"*Flint*," he gasped as Flint pulled his teeth away and kissed him gently before allowing him to collapse in a heap on top of him.

Hot, damp air hit his slightly sweaty neck as they both tried to calm themselves down.

"I like doing that," Thad murmured against him.

Flint grinned, kissing his temple and squeezing his legs. "Me, too," he said.

Thad sighed heavily and sat up, looking positively adorable with his rumbled hair and sated smile. He leaned over to reach his wand from his bedside table, flicking it absently to banish the uncomfortable feeling in both of their boxers before tossing in on the bed next to him. Flint slid his hands up to slip them under the loose fabric bunching around Thad's hips. There was something about Thad wearing his clothes, looking so tousled and relaxed and content, that made him even more lovable than usual. "Happy birthday, you," he said, grinning.

Thad smiled faintly, his eyes fixed on where he was drawing little patterns on Flint's chest, tracing the outlines of sweat-glazed muscle absentmindedly.

"What's wrong?" Flint said.

Thad kept his eyes fixed on where his hands were splayed across Flint's stomach as he spoke. "Can I ask you something?"

"Yeah, of course," Flint said, frowning.

Thad looked up at him, his dark eyes vulnerable and nervous. "Do you ever think about..." he swallowed, ducking his head and blushing as he muttered, "sex...I mean...real sex?"

Flint's stomach squirmed as his heart rate skyrocketed painfully. "Um...I guess," he said, because 'every second I'm with you' didn't sound right in his head. "W-why?"

Thad glanced briefly up at him before saying, "I just...I was curious." Flint's mouth was suddenly very dry. "About if I thought about it or about...it itself?"

Thad shrugged. "A little of both, I guess," he said in a small voice. "Oh," Flint said, trying to sound less nervous than he was. He cleared his throat, which felt like it was closing off. "Um, did you, er...I mean, was that something you, um...wanted to do?"

Thad gave him a long, steady look, his dark eyes boring into him, followed by an infinitesimal nod. Flint's grip tightened instinctively on Thad's hips.

"B-but not now," Thad said hastily, turning pink. "I mean...I just...I want it to be...special. If that's okay with you...." He looked up anxiously.

Flint smiled and reached up to stroke his cheek. "I'd wait forever for you to be ready, Thad. As long as I get to hold you in the meantime. I love you."

Thad lay down so his head was resting at the crook of Flint's neck, their chests pressed together. Flint wrapped his arms around him and kissed the top of his head. "Why don't you eat and get ready and then we can go," he said, rubbing Thad's back gently. "I'm dropping you off with Jeff and Nick at the Three Broomsticks for a bit and then we'll spend the rest of the day together, alright? If it's not too cold we can walk around the lake."

Thad nuzzled his neck in agreement, sighing happily. "You're so warm and snuggly," he said. "Like a big teddy bear. Only you hug me back." Flint bit back a grin and squeezed him lightly. "Mmm, I always will," he said.

---

The tinkling bell over the door to Gladrags Wizardwear rang as Kurt pushed out into the cool December air. The chill hit his face and he shivered, switching his bags to one hand to adjust his scarf.

"Love, I'm carrying those," Blaine said with a sigh, slipping the bags from Kurt's hand.

"Oh, no, Blaine, I can carry it," Kurt said, frowning and trying to take them back.

"I know you can," Blaine said. "But I want to." He smiled softly and Kurt felt his heart do a pleasant little flutter in his chest.

"I missed this," Kurt said, smiling over at him. "You being a big sap. I really did."

"I'm glad you like it," he said, shifting Kurt's bags to one hand so he could slip his arm around his waist.

Kurt leaned into his hold as they walked, their feet crunching in the packed snow.

"So, are you finished shopping for everyone then?" Blaine said, running his thumb along the ridge of Kurt's ribcage.

"Everyone but you," Kurt said. "So you're being officially kicked out of the shopping party until I'm finished. You'll just have to huddle up in the Three Broomsticks with Thad and Jeff and Nick and their dates drinking Butterbeer."

Blaine grinned and gave a put-upon sigh. "Well, alright," he said. "If you insist."

"I do," Kurt said with a sniff. "And you're not allowed to peek to try and find out what your gift is, got it?"

"Will you punish me if I do?" Blaine said, his voice suddenly low and husky.

Kurt flashed him a smirk. "Maybe I would," he said. "But I might do it by withholding sex."

"As if you could resist my charms," Blaine said, his hand sliding from Kurt's waist to slip in the back pocket of his jeans and squeeze hard. Kurt squirmed. "Blaine, you're killing my self-control," he muttered. Blaine had been jumping his bones at every opportunity since he'd given him a blow-job in the Potions store room nearly two weeks before. Not that he was complaining.... It was nice to be touched again on a regular basis. And Blaine was showing more passion and intensity that he'd ever done before, doing everything to make sure that Kurt ended up completely incoherent and satisfied.

"Good," Blaine growled, squeezing his ass again.

Kurt gave him a stern look and he sighed, pulling his hand free and sulking playfully. "Later," Kurt said, taking his hand. "I promise."

Blaine perked up a little bit and smiled over at him fondly.

"Kurt! Hey!"

Kurt turned to see Leighton waving at him from the doorway of the Three Broomsticks as the door swung closed behind him. Blaine's hold on Kurt's hand tightened almost painfully and Kurt gave him a reproving look before raising his other hand in greeting to Leighton, who beamed at him.

"Hey," Kurt said as they approached. He frowned as he read Leighton's sweatshirt, which was a bright cobalt that matched perfectly with his eyes, displaying two crossed broomsticks under block lettering that said, "Quidditch Players Do It..."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Kurt said, quirk an eyebrow as he nodded to his sweatshirt.

Leighton laughed and turned around so he could see the lettering on the back under a Snitch with its wings outstretched.

*In the air,  
in the dirt,  
in the mud,  
upside down,  
on a broom...*

Kurt laughed and Leighton grinned over his shoulder at him. "That's ridiculous," he said, shaking his head. Leighton turned back around, rocking back and forth on his toes, hands in his pockets.

Kurt turned to Blaine to be taken aback by his clenched jaw and hard gaze. "Hey," he said, laying a hand on his arm. "What's wrong?"

Blaine blinked, shaking his head slightly and flashing him a grin.

"Nothing, love," he said, rubbing his arm gently. Kurt frowned, searching his face and the smile that didn't reach his eyes.

"Okay," he said eventually, smiling hesitantly. "I'll hunt you down when we're finished, alright?"

Blaine nodded, still smiling stiffly.

Kurt glanced through the frosted front window of the pub and saw Jeff and Nick sitting at their usual table, pressing their faces against the glass and making faces while Hanna and Jeff's date giggled. He pulled out his pocket watch and saw that it was just past eleven. "I guess Thad and Flint will be down a bit later," he said, turning back to Blaine. "I'll see you in a couple hours."

He bent forward to give Blaine a quick kiss only to have Blaine's arm slide around his waist to pull him flush against him in a deep kiss.

Blaine held him there for a full ten seconds, running his tongue along the back of Kurt's teeth and moaning faintly into his mouth.

Kurt squeaked as Blaine broke away, gently pushing his hips against him before stepping back. "See you later, love," he said, winking over his shoulder before pulling open the door to the Three Broomsticks.

Kurt thought he saw his eyes flicker towards Leighton for the briefest moment, his gaze hardening as they did. But then he was gone and the door was swinging closed behind him and Kurt was sure he was imagining things.

"Ready to go?" Leighton said, moving to his side.

"Yeah," Kurt said, frowning for another moment before smiling at him.

"Where to first?"

"Well, I think I should probably just go wherever you say," Leighton said, making a face. "I told you, I have no idea where to begin with this stuff."

Kurt laughed. "Alright, well, I have to meet Flint at Brickston's at noon so we've got about an hour until then," he said, glancing up and down the street at the shops. "How about Hooper's?"

Leighton scrunched up his face in consideration. "You don't think it's weird to get my cousin jewelry?" he said skeptically.

Kurt rolled his eyes and set off down the street. "Not at all," he said. "It's not like you're proposing to her or anything. Maybe a bracelet or something."

"Yeah," Leighton said, nodding as they approached a tiny shop with a hand painted sign in the window that read 'Hooper's: Silversmiths and Lapidarist'. "Yeah, you're right."

"I told you I was good at this," Kurt said as he opened the door and stepped into the dimly lit, slightly cramped store. Glass cases lined the walls, jewelry of all types gleaming in the light of the candles set across the surfaces.

A frail looking old witch wandered out from the back, pulling off her thick spectacles and smiling warmly at them. "Can I help you boys with anything?" she said.

"Yes, actually," Kurt said, glancing at Leighton, who was absently examining a set of wrought silver Swedish Shortsnout bookends sitting in one of the display cases. "We're looking for something stylish and delicate. I'm thinking, a silver bangle with a single, rough-cut, unpolished peridot inlay."

"You know your gemstones," the witch said, sounding impressed as she moved behind the cases, stooping over to open the back of one and lifting a small box from it. She gestured him towards her and held the box open. "This one has the peridot but it also has the two smaller cuts of smoky quartz on either side."

Kurt lifted the delicate band from the velvet-lined box and examined it.

"What do you think, Leighton?" he said. He glanced over his shoulder to see Leighton looking over a display of garnet rings. "Leighton!"

Leighton jumped and hurried over to him, looking sheepish.

"What do you think?" Kurt repeated, holding out the bracelet.

Leighton took it carefully, turning it over in his hand. "Yeah, I think Simone will like it," he said, nodding and smiling softly at Kurt. "You're much better at this than me. I don't even know what a peridot is. I probably would have just gotten her, like...socks or something."

Kurt shook his head, laughing as he placed the bracelet back in its box and pushed it across the counter to have it wrapped. "She's a lucky girl, your cousin," he said sarcastically as he moved with Leighton towards the register.

Leighton grinned as he pulled out his money bag, fishing out a handful of Galleons and passing them to the shopkeeper, who accepted them with a smile and dropped them in the till, passing Leighton his change. "Well, now what?" Kurt said as they waited for the witch to wrap the bracelet box in shining gold paper and tie it off with a dark green ribbon.

"Do you want to get a coffee?" Leighton said, shrugging.

"Sounds good," Kurt said, smiling.

"Here you go, dears," the old witch said, passing Leighton the small velvet bag holding the wrapped gift. "I have to say, you make a very sweet couple."

Leighton flushed and Kurt avoided his eye as he said, "Oh, er, we're...we're not a couple."

"Oh," she said, looking bewildered and vaguely embarrassed. "I'm sorry."

"It's fine," Kurt said hastily, eager to escape the awkward conversation. "Thank you for your help." He turned and quickly walked towards the door.

"Give me...one minute, Kurt," Leighton said, still standing next to the register.

Kurt nodded briefly over his shoulder before continuing outside. He leaned up against the doorway, watching his breath rise in little clouds in front of him as his heart rate slowed to a normal pace.

Leighton appeared after a minute, clutching his small shopping bag and still blushing faintly. "So...coffee," he said.

"Coffee," Kurt repeated, nodding and avoiding his gaze.

They walked in silence down the side street to the cozy coffee shop sitting beside Brickston's Books. The steamed up windows were decorated with intricate frost patterns and when Kurt pushed the door open, the dainty bell tinkling musically overhead, he saw that everything was draped in red and green and gold, fake snow falling gently on the couples sitting close in booths and at tables.

Kurt fought his way through the cramped room to a booth at the far wall and slid into the seat, Leighton plopping down opposite him and staring at the large poinsettia sitting between them.

A plump witch with her dark hair pulled up in a tight bun wove through the tables to them. "What can I get you, dears?" she said, smiling.

"Um, can I get a non-fat mocha, please?" Kurt said, reaching into his pocket for his money.

"I'll have the same," Leighton said, smiling. "And don't even think about it, Kurt."



Kurt leaned around the poinsettia to see Leighton paying for both of their drinks. He waited for the waitress to leave before frowning. "You didn't have to do that," he muttered.

Leighton sighed. "First off, this is stupid," he said, pushing the bright red flower to the side so he could look across the table at Kurt.

"Second, it's repayment for helping me, the clueless tosser that I am."

Kurt felt a faint shiver run up his spine as Leighton's smile softened, his blue eyes even more vibrant in contrast to gold silk of the tablecloth. His hands shook slightly as he pulled off his gloves and scarf and laid them on the table, staring around at the other patrons. It didn't help that the majority of them were couples and the majority of those couples were kissing.

"So," Leighton said, drumming his fingers on the table as he watched Kurt, his head tilted to the side. "What are you getting Blaine?"

"I saw a really nice dragon leather jacket in Gladrags that I think he'd like," Kurt said, smiling at the plump waitress as she set their drinks down on the table. The foam on Kurt's mocha was shaped into a little tree, Leighton's into a snow man. "That and he's been talking about a new Arithmancy book that he wants."

"Cool," Leighton said, grinning. "I've got a dragon hide jacket I wear when I ride."

"Ride what?" Kurt said, frowning.

"My motorbike," Leighton said, taking a sip of his drink and licking the foam from his lip.

Kurt stared at him. "You're joking," he said, half-smirking in disbelief.

"What?" Leighton said, laughing at his look. "Is it because I'm not a big hulking stud? Don't feed the stereotype, Kurt. Bikers can be gangly, awkward nerds, too."

Kurt snorted into his coffee, hitting himself in the chest as he coughed. Leighton smirked, sipping his drink.

"So you're serious?" Kurt said when he'd caught his breath. "You really own a motorcycle?"

Leighton nodded. "Well, *technically* it's my Dad's," he said, shrugging.

"My aunt, his sister-in-law, is Muggleborn and she got him into it before I was even born. He's got an old Triumph that he's made some, um, improvements to. He started letting me drive it around over the summer. We live in a pretty small Wizing village so I don't have to worry about getting in trouble. I can't actually get my Muggle license until I turn seventeen in January but..." He shrugged again.

"So you can drive a motorcycle but you don't know what a movie or e-mail is?" Kurt said, shaking his head in disapproval as Leighton grinned over his mug.

"What can I say?" he said holding up his hands. "I have selective learning when it comes to Muggle gizmos."

"Yes," Kurt said, rolling his eyes, "like most boys, you only like the loud, dangerous ones."

Leighton beamed, nodding in agreement.

Kurt rolled his eyes, taking another drinking of his coffee as they fell into a comfortable silence. When Kurt's mug was nearly empty, he glanced at his watch and saw that it was ten til noon. "We should probably head on over," he said as he pulled on his gloves and scarf. He paused. "Well, *I* should. You don't have to hang around with me anymore now that you've got your gift for Simone."

Leighton drained his coffee and shook his head. "Nope, you're stuck with me for the rest of the day. Or, at least until you're finished with your shopping and ready to hang out with your friends again."

"Um, Leighton, *you're* my friend too," Kurt said, cocking an eyebrow as he stood.

Leighton grinned. "You know what I mean. Your *real* friends. I'm just..." he trailed off, obviously unsure of where he'd been going with the statement.

"Very poignant, Leighton," Kurt muttered. "But I'd be happy for the company. You can model Blaine's jacket for me."

Leighton laughed. "Deal," he said as they walked back out onto the High Street and turned towards the little bookshop next door. It was relatively dark inside, like the jewelers, with tall shelves in narrow rows lined with leather-bound volumes rising up to the high ceiling. There was a small nook at the back, with a few wing-backed chairs grouped around a tiny fireplace.

"This place is actually really nice," Leighton said, running his fingers down the spine of one of the books.

"I'm guessing you didn't know it existed either?" Kurt said, giving him a dubious look.

Leighton chuckled. "I knew it existed," he said as he followed Kurt through the silent shelves past a rickety staircase that led to the small loft and the register. "I'd just never been here before. Hogwarts' library has always met my literary needs."

Kurt laughed softly, their voices muted in the still air. He glanced up at the tall shelves as they reached the section on Potions. He thought he could probably spend days reading his way through the heavy tomes. His foot caught on a loose floorboard and he fell spectacularly, landing hard and sending up a cloud of dust from the floor.

"You okay?" Leighton said, though Kurt could hear the laughter in his voice as he held out his hand to help him up.

"Fine," Kurt said, scowling at him and accepting his hand. "No thanks to you."

Leighton grinned and pulled him so swiftly to his feet that Kurt stumbled and fell into him. "I'll make it up to you," Leighton said, straightening his coat for him and brushing the dust off.

Kurt felt his knees wobble as he straightened up, little dust motes floating through the air between them, catching the firelight and sparkling like tiny flecks of gold. Leighton shifted almost imperceptibly closer, his blue eyes warm and inviting...

"Kurt, Cross, hey!"

Kurt jumped back, glancing over Leighton's shoulder to see Flint walking through the shelves towards them.

"Oh, hey, Flint," Kurt said, hastily continuing brushing his clothes clean.

Leighton looked flustered and confused. He turned away from Kurt and picked a heavy copy of *The Apothecarist's Index* from the shelf. "I'll just...be reading," he muttered, walking past Kurt towards the grouped chairs with his head bowed.

Kurt half-nodded, not looking at him as he passed.

"Alright," Flint said, grinning as he approached. "So...help?"

Kurt forced a laugh, still dwelling on the way Leighton had looked at him. It wasn't love that he'd seen.... He couldn't place the raw emotion that had flashed across the vivid blue in that split second. He thought of Blaine, of how hard he'd been working to make sure that he was happy and guilt seeped through him, bubbling up in his gut and creeping up to sting as tears in his eyes.

Blinking quickly, he turned to Flint and smiled. "Okay," he said,

"They've got a Runes section in the back of the shop."

He led Flint back to the aforementioned shelves and they settled on a first edition copy of a book of poems written in Runes that Kurt knew Thad would absolutely love. Kurt picked out a copy of *The Chaldean Method: Numerology Unearthed* for Blaine and they both climbed the creaking stairs to the register.

"What about his Christmas gift?" Flint said as the clerk wrapped Thad's book in dark blue paper.

"We can stop by Dervish and Banges," Kurt said thoughtfully. "They've got some interesting stuff there. I'm sure we can find something he'll like."

"Alright," Flint said, looking relieved as they paid for their books. "I was thinking he might like a necklace. Not like yours, though, I don't think he'd want something like that. Not that there's anything wrong with it! It's just—"

"Flint," Kurt said loudly, cutting across him as they walked back downstairs. "Calm down. I get it." He laughed at his sheepish expression.

Leighton appeared at Kurt's side, still looking mildly confused, though he flashed Kurt his usual, bright smile and fell into step next to him, his bag from Hooper's clutched in his hand.

They moved down the High Street to Dervish and Banges, which sold and repaired a variety of magical objects. The contents of the cluttered store were something like those of a junk shop, but with a lot more random loud bangs and puffs of smoke from the back workshop.

They rooted through the mishmash of random objects until they found a simple necklace with a thin, braided strip of leather strung with small, dark, hand-carved beads and a little silver charm of the Runic symbol for love, which was inlaid with a row of tiny, star-bright sapphires down the middle.

"I can't thank you enough for helping me with this," Flint said, looking a little guilty as he paid for Thad's necklace. "I'm so bad with this stuff."

"Something we share," Leighton said, looking up from the cracked Snitch he was examining and grinning.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Honestly, am I the only one who *is* good at it?" He clucked his tongue.

Leighton tossed the Snitch back and forth between his hands, shrugging. "Probably," he said. "You're just brill at everything, I suppose."

"I'm awesomeness," Kurt said with a sniff.

Leighton frowned as he considered the word. "Awesomeness," he repeated, still flicking the Snitch back and forth. "I like it," he said, grinning.

"Well, you have my permission to use it as you please," Kurt muttered, absently straightening his sleeves.

"Oh, you're too kind," Leighton said, smirking.

Flint accepted the package containing Thad's necklace from the shopkeeper. "Thanks again, Kurt," he said with a relieved smile. "I'll see you at the Three Broomsticks later, yeah?"

"Mhmm," Kurt said as Leighton set down the old Snitch and all three of them walked out into the street. "I shouldn't be too long."

Flint waved over his shoulder at them as he headed down the High Street towards the pub.

Kurt watched him go for a moment before turning to Leighton.

"Alright," he said. "You're going to be a mannequin now." He grabbed Leighton's sleeve and pulled him towards Gladrags, where a collection of holiday robes was on display in the front window.

"So demanding," Leighton said, though he was grinning as Kurt led the way into the brightly lit shop. Christmas carols were playing faintly from the wireless on the counter, where a young witch with blonde hair tied up in a messy bun chewed her gum and flipped through her copy of *Witch Weekly*, bobbing her head to the music.

"Here," Kurt said, moving towards the rack displaying the dragon hide jackets, which gleamed dully in the light. They were in an array of colors depending on the species of dragon. Kurt picked up a black one that read '*Certified Hebridean Black*' across the tag. He slipped it off the hanger and passed it to Leighton. "Try this on."

Leighton chuckled and pulled off his sweatshirt before slipping his arms through the sleeves of the jacket and holding his hands up.

"What do you think?" he said.

"It looks fine," Kurt said, scrutinizing him. "I think I might need the next size down, though. Blaine's shorter than you." He sifted through the rack as Leighton ambled off to look at something else. After a few minutes searching, he found a jacket in the right size and pulled it off the rack, turning to find Leighton and nearly dropping the jacket as he burst out laughing.

Leighton had clipped on a pair of bright red suspenders over his tucked-in, dark heather-grey t-shirt; the hems of his jeans were rolled up to reveal his high-top sneakers and a pair of dark sunglasses rested over his eyes. He'd tousled his hair to look windswept and was posing with his hands on his hips, pouting ridiculously.

"Told you I could pull off Biker," he said, tweaking the zipper of the jacket as Kurt laughed.

"You look more like a fifties hipster," Kurt said, shaking his head.

"Oh, you know I look good," he said, lowering the sunglasses to peer at Kurt over them.

"As long as you don't start jiving," Kurt said, rolling his eyes as he moved to the register.

Leighton did a goofy little dance, spinning around and rocking up on his toes only to trip and nearly knock over a display of scarves.

"Leighton, stop, you're so graceful," Kurt said, smirking as the clerk rang him up with a bored look.

Leighton beamed as he removed the sunglasses, suspenders and jacket, pulling his sweatshirt back over his head and shaking out the cuffs of his jeans. He slipped the little Hooper's bag in the front pocket, humming along softly with 'Jingle Bell Rock' crackling from the wireless.

Kurt slipped his Brickston's bag inside the one the witch behind the counter handed him. "Well, I'm shopped out, I think," he said as he walked out of the shop with Leighton.

"Kurt Hummel shopped out?" Leighton said, looking aghast.

"What *is* this world coming to?"

Kurt scowled at him and he laughed, swinging his arms back and forth absently.

"So are you going to join me and my 'real friends' for a Butterbeer?"

Kurt said, glancing over at him.

"Do you really need to ask?" Leighton said, giving him a pointed look.

"Oh, I forgot," Kurt said, rolling his eyes. "Your blood is fifty percent Butterbeer."

Leighton shrugged. "Maaaaybe," he said. He dropped back to tie his shoe and Kurt stopped a few paces after him, glancing up at the pale grey sky as snowflakes fluttered down on his shoulders.

"Hey, Kurt."

Kurt had barely turned to Leighton before the snowball hit him, exploding with a gentle *paff* across his face. He gasped and blinked as the snow immediately started to melt and cold trickled down his neck. Leighton was doubled over in laughter, clutching his side and nearly crying at the look of stunned and furious disbelief on Kurt's face.

"That's it," Kurt said after he'd regained some of his composure.

"You're dead, Cross."

Leighton sniggered, though his eyes widened as Kurt set down his bag under the bench on the side of the street and pulled out his wand. Yelping, Leighton took off down the street at a sprint, Kurt running after him full tilt.

"Damn...designer," Kurt grunted, struggling to run in his boots, which were definitely not made for this. He could hear Leighton's giggles drifting back to him.

"You won't be laughing for long!" Kurt shouted, gasping lightly as the road turned uphill.

They passed the Shrieking Shack and the street dipped back downward against. Kurt nearly stumbled on the packed, smooth snow and he could see Leighton was getting even further ahead. He flicked his wand, sending clumps of snow from the drifts on the side of the road flying at Leighton, who ducked and laughed as they soared overhead.

Kurt growled. "Think that's—funny—do you?" he shouted between gasps, the cold air stinging his lungs.

Leighton glanced over his shoulder, sticking his tongue out at him.

"Very—mature!" Kurt called. He took aim and flicked his wand again, smirking as something seemed to catch around Leighton's ankles and he went flying face-first into the deep snow bank.

Laughing in triumph, Kurt slowed as he approached, panting and catching his breath. He bent over, clutching the stitch in his side as he stopped.

"Nobody—messes—with a Hummel," he said, wheezing slightly. Leighton muttered something into the snow, his limbs sprawled in all directions.

"What was that?" Kurt said, smirking and moving closer.

Leighton lifted his snowy face from the drift, grinning. "I said nobody crosses a Cross." He grabbed Kurt's arm and pulled him down into the snow next to him, throwing handfuls in his face and laughing.

Kurt flapped his arms to try and push him away, attempting to stand only to fall straight back into the snow with a soft *whumf*.

Leighton was red-faced from laughing, snow still coating his clothes and face.

Kurt smacked him across the arm. "If I get sick, it's your fault," he snapped, biting back a grin.

Leighton flopped back in the snow, beaming innocently. "I'll make you soup and read you storied until you get better," he offered with a shrug.

Kurt rolled his eyes and pushed himself up into a standing position, brushing snow from his coat and jeans.

Leighton awkwardly straightened up, squirming and wriggling his whole body to shake the snow away. "Brrr," he said, shivering as he checked that his bag was still safe in his pocket.

"What did you expect?" Kurt said, scowling at him. "Jerk."

Leighton grinned. "Well, I guess we'll just have to go get some Butterbeers to warm us up," he said.

Kurt huffed in annoyance, ignoring him as they walked back up the street past the Shrieking Shack towards the village.

"Aw, come on," Leighton said, nudging him. "No one likes a frowny face."

Kurt glowered at him, arms folded firmly across his chest.

"No one wikes a frowny face," Leighton said in a playful voice. "You know you want to smile, Kurt. Don't fight it. Don't fight it, Kurt.

Don't—" He threw up his fist in triumph as a reluctant grin spread across Kurt's face, doing another ludicrous dance and nearly falling flat on his face.

Kurt rolled his eyes, laughing as he retrieved his shopping bag from where he'd left it as they reached the Three Broomsticks and Leighton held the door open for him with a flourishing bow.

"After you, good sir," he said in a refined voice.

"Why thank you," Kurt said with equal refinement. He saw Blaine sitting with Thad, Flint, Jeff and Nick at their usual table and moved towards them.

"Where are Hanna and Jaimie?" Kurt said as he sat down next to Blaine, who smiled and kissed him on the cheek.

"Went to go shopping," Nick said, sipping his eggnog, which Jeff was eyeing with disgust.

"I'll go get us drinks," Leighton said, grinning at Kurt before bouncing off through the crowd.

"Why're you all snowy, love?" Blaine said, brushing some half-melted snow from Kurt's coat.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Leighton thought he'd be clever and push me in the snow," he said.

"Oh," Blaine said. His jaw tightened a little. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Kurt said, smiling. "He was just joking around."

Blaine nodded slowly, his brow very faintly creased.

Kurt squeezed his hand and kissed him gently. "Love you," he whispered in his ear.

"I love you," Blaine said, eyes full of a jumble of emotions.

Leighton returned with two tankards of warm Butterbeer, sliding one of them to Kurt before taking a long drink of his own. Kurt laughed as he lowered his tankard, staring cross-eyes down at his foam mustache as he tried to lick it clean.

Jeff and Nick looked torn between laughter and disapproval of Leighton's Slytherin-ness, they both grinned, however, when he gave up on cleaning his lip and simply scooped the foam from his drink and gave himself a full beard with it.

"I'm Santa and you're all my elf bitches, got it?" he said, giving them all a stern look.

Thad giggled, Jeff and Nick exchanging a surprised, vaguely impressed grin.

"You're so weird," Kurt muttered, throwing him a napkin so he could wipe his face clean.

Everyone but Blaine was chuckling appreciatively, his jaw set and a look on his face like he had a bad taste in his mouth.

"Hey, you okay?" Kurt said, giving him a concerned look.

Blaine nodded stiffly, pushing his Butterbeer away.

"Hey," Kurt said, rubbing his leg under the table. "I love you."

Blaine smiled faintly, relaxing his shoulders. "I love you, too," he said, giving him another gentle kiss.

Kurt brushed their noses together briefly before facing forward again and taking a sip of his drink as he watched Jeff and Nick gaze wide-eyed at Leighton as he told them about pushing Kurt in the snow.



"Where have you been all our lives?" Jeff said in an awed voice.

"We bow to your ability to prank Kurt without being murdered," Nick added, bowing in his seat.

"Or threatened with murder," Jeff said, nodding.

"Or torture."

"Or disembowelment."

Leighton grinned, laughing lightly as he exchanged a smirk with Kurt. Flint stood and pushed back his chair, Thad standing next to him. "I think we're going to head out," he said, smiling over at Thad, who rocked up on his toes to kiss him on the cheek. "Walk around the lake."

"You kids have fun," Kurt said, giving Flint a knowing look.

Flint slipped his arm around Thad's shoulders, kissing the top of his head and leading him out of the pub, Thad's gifts clutched in his other hand.

Leighton chuckled. "Wow," he said, shaking his head. "They're worse than you and Blaine."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Blaine snapped loudly.

Kurt turned to stared at him in alarm, taking in his hardened gaze and clenched fist. Jeff and Nick's mouths were hanging open, their eyebrows raised.

Leighton blinked, taken aback. "Um...I just meant that you two have such a perfect relationship," he said, blushing faintly. "They're even worse because they're all...mushy all the time."

Blaine didn't reply, continuing to watch him suspiciously for a moment before turning back to his Butterbeer.

Leighton gave Kurt a mildly frightened look. "Um, I think I'm going to head back to the Castle," he muttered, eyes flicking nervously to Blaine.

"I'll walk you out," Kurt said, glancing at Blaine before standing and going with Leighton out into the street.

They stood there for a moment in silence. "I'm sorry," Kurt muttered, not looking at him. "For...that."

"It's fine," Leighton said, knocking their shoulders together. "At least he's not throwing books at me, right?"

Kurt grinned half-heartedly.

Leighton took a deep breath, closing his eyes and savoring the crisp air. "Well, I'll let you get back," he said. "I'm sure I'll see you around but, if I don't, see you Friday at the party?"

"Yeah," Kurt said, nodding and smiling. "I'll see you there."

Leighton looked like he was about to say something else, his lips parted and the breath in his lungs. But then he exhaled slowly, closing

his mouth and looking a little disheartened as he patted Kurt on the shoulder. "See you later, Kurt."

"Bye," Kurt said, frowning faintly as he walked away, hands in the pocket of his sweatshirt and head bowed. He ducked back into the pub and returned to his seat next to Blaine, who was swirling the contents of his drink around the bottom of the glass with an unreadable expression.

"Can I ask what that was about?" Kurt said in a clipped tone, low enough so Jeff and Nick, who were contemplating what pranks they could pull on Thad when they were in Ohio the following week, couldn't hear.

"Nothing," Blaine grunted, not looking up.

"Blaine," Kurt said, taking his hand. "What's wrong?"

Blaine turned to him with a miserable look. "Do you still love me?" he said in a low voice.

Kurt blinked in surprise. "What?" he said. "Of course I do. Didn't I just say it about five times a few minutes ago?"

Blaine swallowed and shrugged as he looked back down into his drink. Kurt watched him closely. "Blaine," he said, squeezing his hand. Blaine turned his eyes back to him again. "I love you," Kurt said softly. "Only you. No one else. Ever. Got it?"

Blaine wet his lips absently and nodded, smiling hopefully. "I love you," he said. "Please, *please* don't ever think I don't. I...I need you, Kurt."

"I know," Kurt said, nodding. "I need you, too."

"Promise?" Blaine said in a cracked whisper.

"I promise," Kurt said, smiling.

## Chapter Ten

Seeing Hogwarts decked for Christmas—with its massive Christmas trees in the Great Hall, the never-melting icicles hanging from the banisters, Peeves singing carols with his own inappropriate lyrics—made Kurt a little sad to know that he wouldn't be there for the holiday. The prospect of spending time at home with the two sides of his life coming together, however, was even more exciting.

As Sunday was Thad's birthday, Kurt, along with Blaine, Jeff, Nick and Flint, stayed holed up in the Ravenclaw common room, eating cake that Jeff and Nick had nicked from the kitchens as Thad opened his gifts, scowling at Jeff and Nick when he unwrapped a large ham from them both—in reference to his first attempt at flying a broom—as they both rolled around laughing and Flint gave them a confused look.

The last week before term passed easily enough as Kurt had made sure to finish all of his homework beforehand so that he could focus on preparing to go back to Ohio that Saturday. Blaine and Thad were excited as well—Thad was actually a little morose at the idea of three whole weeks away from Flint—but Jeff and Nick were absolutely ecstatic, bouncing off the walls every time the subject was broached.

"If you two don't stop," Blaine growled Thursday night as he was trying to help Kurt get in some last minute Occlumency practice before Defense the next day. "I swear I will put you both in detention for the whole of next term."

They immediately found seats on either side of Thad—who was reading the book Flint had given him for his birthday—poking him and giggling until he glared at them with a look that clearly threatened disememberment. They slumped back on the couch, pouting and fidgeting.

Friday morning's Muggle Studies Double Period was spent playing Muggle Board games that Professor Hector, the bubbly young witch that taught the class, used in her third year class.

"I don't understand the point of this," Thad said, pushing his knight across the chessboard to take one of Kurt's pawns and wrinkling up his nose. "The pieces don't even move when you tell them to."

Kurt exchanged a smile with Blaine, who was sitting next to him with Kurt's legs draped over his knees as he played with Kurt's phone and kneaded his calves with his other hand.

"And I still don't get the point of 'Go Fish'," Thad continued, frowning as he spoke of the game Kurt had tried to teach him earlier. "There aren't even any fish involved!"

Kurt bit back a laugh, Blaine chuckling softly next to him as Thad grinned and checkmated Kurt happily. Kurt sighed. "That's three in a row, Thad," he said, pursing his lips. "Really, you're not even trying, are you?"

Thad giggled as Kurt set the pieces back up again, clucking his tongue. "I will never be good at this game," he said sadly. Blaine squeezed his leg as Thad giggled again.

In Defense, they all took turns trying to practice Occlumency against Professor Cooney. Blaine did it easily, barely batting an eye when Cooney pointed his wand at him and said, "*Legilimens*."

Kurt still struggled with it; though he did manage to fight the spell to the point that the memories being pulled from him were fuzzy and blurred instead of as vivid as they'd been the first time Blaine had done it to him the previous Wednesday. He felt drained and a little sick when they headed to lunch though and was relieved that it had been his last class of the day.

"I can't believe we're leaving tomorrow," Thad said, picking at his shepherd's pie and glancing around at them all. "We're going to *America* tomorrow."

Jeff grinned and popped a sprout into his mouth. "It's going to be brilliant," he said around his chewing.

"Total awesomeness," Nick said, nodding sagely.

"As long as you don't set me things on fire," Kurt muttered as he took a sip of pumpkin juice.

Blaine chuckled. "Your dad's meeting us on the Platform, right?" he said, glancing over at Kurt.

"Mhmm," Kurt said, setting his goblet down. "He said everyone's excited to meet you all. Mercedes and Tina want us all to go out to dinner after we get settled in."

"What do you mean by 'all of us'?" Blaine said a little apprehensively.

"Everyone," Kurt said. "Us, Mercedes, Tina and her boyfriend, Finn, obviously Sam and if they're both going Puck will want to go. And Finn's girlfriend, I'd assume."

Blaine looked vaguely anxious.

"Relax," Kurt said, taking his hand under the table. "They'll love you. Finn does, that's for sure. I think he has a man-crush on you for introducing him to Quidditch."

Blaine smiled, looking slightly less tense at this.

Kurt was suddenly jostled closer to Blaine as Leighton wriggled his way between him and Thad on the bench, grinning. "Well, hello," Kurt said, raising his eyebrows at him.

"Hey," Leighton said, stealing Kurt's roll and biting into it.

"Don't you have food at the Slytherin table?" Kurt said, pursing his lips as Leighton took a drink of his pumpkin juice.

Leighton shrugged, grinning as he set Kurt's goblet down. He smacked his lips before turning to Kurt. "Don't eat dinner," he said.

"I—what?" Kurt said, frowning.

"Dinner," Leighton said slowly, miming eating. "That thing you—"

"Shut up," Kurt said, smacking him.

Leighton grinned.

"So, why should I not eat dinner?" Kurt said curiously.

"Because the food at the party will be brill," he replied as though it was obvious. "And there'll be Madam Rosmerta's mead." He sagged in his seat, dropping against Kurt as though he'd died simply from the idea of it.

"It's good I take it?" Kurt said, glancing at where his head was against his shoulder.

Leighton nodded, straightening up and glancing at the others. "Any of you guys going?" he said, snatching one of Kurt's sprouts and beaming as he scowled.

"Thought about crashing I," Jeff said, swirling his fork around his empty plate.

"The rest of our supply of Wildfire Whizbangs is begging to be set off," Nick said.

Leighton laughed. "I'm sure Slughorn would love that," he said, taking another sip of Kurt's pumpkin juice.

"Either that or have a heart attack," Jeff said thoughtfully.

"Or put us in detention until we're dead," Nick said, frowning faintly as Thad giggled.

"They're both likely scenarios," Leighton said, nodding in agreement.

He leaned forward to look across Kurt. "You're going, right, Blaine?"

Kurt turned to look at Blaine, who was staring down at the table as though he was trying to set fire to it.

"Blaine?" Kurt said, touching his arm tentatively.

Blaine jumped and blinked, turning to him. "What is it, love?" he said, smiling.

"You okay?" Kurt said softly.

Blaine nodded, taking his hand. "You want to go upstairs?" he said. "I still need to finish packing."

"Sure," Kurt said, frowning. He looked around at the others. "Thad, enjoy your evening with Flint. Jeff, Nick, don't set anything loose during Care of Magical Creature. Leigh, I'll see you later." They all nodded, Leighton grinning around his mouthful of roll and waving enthusiastically.

Kurt took Blaine's hand and followed him down the aisle between the Ravenclaw and Slytherin tables. They walked in silence for a moment, Blaine seeming oddly tense and stiff as they climbed the marble staircase.

"Are you alright?" Kurt said, giving him a worried look.

Blaine nodded jerkily.

"Blaine," Kurt said, stopping them in the corridor. "What's wrong?"

Blaine looked anxious for a moment, eyes darting around the empty hall before they settled on Kurt, who was shocked to see fear shining behind the hazel. He opened his mouth as if to speak but didn't seem to be able to put what he was thinking into words.

"Blaine," Kurt said, reaching out to take his other hand and stepping closer to him. "What's wrong?"

Blaine squeezed his hands and gave him a steady look. "I love you," he whispered.

"I know," Kurt said, frowning faintly. Blaine had been acting very odd the past two weeks. Half the time he was ripping both their clothes off and the other half he was skittish and quiet. "Blaine, what's wrong? I know something's wrong."

Blaine laced their fingers together and pulled him into a kiss full of questions Kurt couldn't place, though he answered in equal measure with reassuring love.

When Blaine pulled back, he licked his lips nervously. "I just...I want to make sure that the way I acted before isn't...you're not still mad about that, are you?"

Kurt smiled softly. "Of course not," he said. "I told you, you've been perfect lately and even if you weren't, I'd have...dealt with it. I told you, Blaine, I love you. I don't think there's anything you could say or do that would make me stop. Sure, I might get upset whenever you get moody but that doesn't mean I don't love you."

Blaine seemed to relax a little and he moved to wrap his arms around Kurt in a tight hug, kissing his neck and squeezing him so hard it almost hurt.

"Let me take care of you," he breathed, kissing the spot under Kurt's ear and breathing softly on the damp skin.

Kurt shivered and closed his eyes at the sensation, nodding against him as Blaine moved his lips down his neck to his collarbone, biting down gently through his robes. "Come on," he muttered, grabbing Blaine's arm and pulling him down the corridor.

Even as they half-ran back to the tower, they were exchanging touches and kisses, loosening ties and unbuttoning cuffs. The moment they were in the dorm a few minutes later, Kurt pulled Blaine against him in a needy kiss with a soft moan of longing, falling back onto the

edge of his bed and kicking off his shoes and they tried to rid each other of the layers of clothes between them.

Kurt slipped Blaine's robes back off his shoulders as he felt his own shirt being unbuttoned by one hand while another worked at his belt. He groaned as Blaine palmed him through his slacks, unbuttoning his own as he did.

Kurt latched onto Blaine's neck, sucking and biting as Blaine gasped and struggled to unbutton his shirt with trembling fingers.

"Blaine," Kurt breathed against him, attacking the skin Blaine was revealing with each undone button. "I love you."

"I love you," Blaine grunted as Kurt stroked him through his unzipped slacks. "Merlin, that feels—ugh."

Kurt scraped his teeth along the taut muscle under Blaine's ribcage, yanking his slacks down so he could mouth Blaine through his boxers, eliciting a long, drawn-out groan as he pressed his tongue to the damp spot forming on the fabric. He pressed wet kisses up Blaine's stomach and chest before pulling him down to meet his lips, their tongues exploring each other's mouths as they exchanged heavy breaths and ran their hands over bare skin.

Somehow, they ended up stretched across the bed, Kurt still wearing his loosened tie and Blaine with his white shirt hanging open across his chest as he gripped Kurt's face in one hand, sliding the other down to slip under the waistband of his briefs and rub along his jutting hipbone.

Kurt whimpered in longing and pushed up against Blaine, wrapping his legs around Blaine's waist and pulling him down against him.

Blaine swore softly, his head falling against Kurt's shoulder as they rocked against each other. Kurt pushed his head back into the pillow, biting his lip and letting out a short, soft moan each time he rolled his hips up into Blaine's, pulling himself up with his legs hooked behind Blaine's back.

"How's this?" Blaine breathed in his ear, holding himself up and splaying his legs out to his sides to gain leverage as he ground down against Kurt.

Kurt closed his eyes and let out a shaky breath in reply, licking his lips and swallowing hard as Blaine teased his ear with the tip of his tongue.

"Tell me that you like it," Blaine hissed.

Kurt whined in the back of his throat as Blaine jerked his hips hard against him.

"Tell me, Kurt," Blaine murmured, his lips brushed over Kurt's ear as he spoke.

"B-Blaine," Kurt gasped. "I I-love it. Yes, god, it feels, *ahh*, so good."

Blaine chuckled darkly against him, sending shivers racing down his spine.

"Blaine," Kurt breathed, chest heaving with each shallow gasp.

"Blaine, *Blaine*, oh god, you're so, *ugh*, good, *mmm*, yes."

Blaine rolled his hips over and over again into him and Kurt was started to feel dizzy with the pleasure of it all combined with the thrill of the possibility that someone could walk in at anytime as they hadn't locked the door.

Blaine slowed to an agonizing pace, each thrust dragging and purposeful and unbearably slow against him.

Kurt couldn't think straight anymore. It was the perfect torture. He wanted Blaine to move faster because he *needed* release but it felt so *damn good*. It was like every nerve in his body, every stretch of sweat-glazed skin hit by hot breath or shaking hands, was on fire, overly receptive to the slightest touch and he simply couldn't take it anymore.

"Blaine," he groaned. "*Please*."

"Please what?" Blaine murmured in a low growl.

Kurt whined and bucked into him. "Please, *ugh*, Blaine, do *something*."

Blaine smirked against his neck and sped up his pace slightly, tracing Kurt's jawline with his tongue.

Kurt had turned into a complete, babbling mess at this point, few actual words other than Blaine's name and random curses passing through his lips. Blaine was still moving much too slowly and Kurt reached up to grab his hips and force him down into him.

"Someone's anxious," Blaine muttered.

"Screw you," Kurt whined.

Blaine bit down lightly at the crook of his neck and rolled his hips faster against him, grunting faintly with exertion. Kurt panted hard, closing his eyes as the heat coiled inside him and his whole body started to tingle.

"Blaine, *ahh*, I'm—"

"Shh," Blaine said, silencing him with a kiss, which was good because two seconds later he was moaning loudly into Blaine's mouth and shaking against him, eyes rolling back as stars exploded across them. Blaine rolled his hips against him a few more times before his breath caught stuttering in his throat as it hit Kurt's mouth.

They collapsed against each other, their ragged breaths filling the heavy air and their heated skin flushed and sweaty.

Blaine lifted his head from Kurt's neck, smiling dazedly at him before planting a short, rather sloppy kiss on his lips. "I love you," he muttered, going back to nuzzling Kurt's neck.



"Love you," Kurt returned, sighing in satisfaction as Blaine pressed messy kisses across his shoulders and down his chest.

"You taste so good," Blaine mumbled from somewhere around his navel.

Kurt smiled, shivering as Blaine pulled down the waistband of his briefs to suck on his hipbone. "Blaine, you're going to leave a mark," he reprimanded, tilting his head to look down at him.

"Good," Blaine murmured, brushing his lips over the red mark. "That was everyone knows you're mine."

Kurt laughed. "There aren't exactly many people who see that particular part of my body."

"There had better be *no* other people seeing that part of your body," Blaine growled, moving to the other side of his hips.

"Well then tell Jeff and Nick to learn that there's such a thing as personal space," Kurt muttered, rolling his eyes. "Honestly, they just waltz into the bathroom when I close the door and then complain that I'm naked in the shower and that my bottles of soap are too heavy to be throwing at them."

Blaine chuckled and nosed his inner thigh, grazing him through his now uncomfortable briefs.

"Mmm, stop," Kurt groaned as his cock twitched. "I need to pack and shower."

"It can wait," Blaine said, tugging Kurt's briefs down and licking across the head of his already growing erection. Kurt twitched his hips into the touch.

"Blaine," he whined as Blaine sucked hard on the sensitive skin at the base of his cock. "Why're you so frisky?"

"Stop be so sexy and I'll stop being frisky," Blaine said, grinning up at him.

"Wasn't, *ah*, a complaint," Kurt said, letting out a low, soft groan as Blaine wrapped his lips around him and immediately started sucking and licking and bobbing his head.

Kurt gripped the sheets on either side of him, gritting his teeth to stay silent as Blaine hollowed out his cheeks, moaning around him. He closed his eyes, focusing on the incredible things Blaine was doing with his tongue as wet, slurping sounds filled the room. Blaine gripped his hips, rubbing the marks he'd left on his pale skin as he sucked so hard it almost hurt.

Kurt whined, arching his back and gasping. He thought he could probably stay like this forever, with Blaine's talented tongue and lips, but within minutes he was fighting back another orgasm. "Blaine, ahh, *there*...oh god, Blaine, I can't—" He called out Blaine's name in a

loud, keening note as he came down his throat, feeling his jaw working to swallow around him.

"Oh my god," Kurt whimpered, blinking away white lights.

Blaine licked him clean, removing his briefs completely and getting up to toss them and the rest of their clothes, including his own boxers, into the hamper. He rooted through his trunk, pulling on a pair of blue and bronze striped pajama pants, tossing Kurt a pair of sky-blue sweats with the Tornadoes logo across the hip.

"So, when do you have to start doing your application stuff?" Kurt said as he wiggled into the sweats.

"End of January," Blaine said, flopping down beside him and pulling him up to lie against his chest. "They'll do a screening of the applicants and then they have the first set of tryouts in February. If I do well, they'll call me back for a second tryout and interview. Only about a dozen people get through to the third try-out which is just after Easter."

"I can't wait to watch you play," Kurt said, tracing the trail of dark hair disappearing into his pajama bottoms. "You're going to look so good in that uniform."

Blaine chuckled. "Don't count your dragons before they're hatched," he said. "I don't want to jinx it."

"You're going to be amazing," Kurt said, slipping off his tie and tossing it on the floor. "And I'm going to come to all your matches and make ridiculous signs like 'Anderson for Minister of Magic' and 'My Man's a Keeper' and other embarrassing things I have yet to think up."

Blaine laughed, squeezing him tightly. "I can't wait. I'm sure Thad would help."

Kurt suddenly had a vivid image of sitting on the floor in a tiny apartment, painting banners with Thad and laughing as Blaine sat on the couch behind him, smiling fondly and rubbing his shoulders while Flint stopped Acorn from trailing wet paw-prints across the floor and Jeff and Nick gave them disapproving looks for their sexual innuendos. He smiled at the thought that they had moments like that to look forward to.

"I love you," he sighed, kissing Blaine's jaw.

"Love you," Blaine replied sleeping, kissing the top of his head and yawning.

"You know you still have to pack and get changed, right?" Kurt said, glancing up at him.

Blaine pretended to snore and Kurt rolled his eyes, sighing as he settled against him.

"Fine," he said, "you get an hour and then you're packing." He glanced up to see Blaine grinning and shook his head. Yawning, he closed his

eyes and let the steady sound of Blaine's heartbeat lull him into a light sleep.

---

Snow swirled against the windows of the almost empty Gryffindor common room, building little drifts against the glass on the outer sill. Flint ran his fingers absently through Thad's hair and down his neck, his other arm draped across the back of the couch. Thad was settled back between his legs and against his chest, curled up and reading the book Flint had given him for his birthday. A fire crackled merrily in the grate, warming them along with the blanket lying across their laps.

"What're you reading?" Flint said, sliding his arms around Thad's waist and resting his chin on his shoulder.

"*Luebha likaz Fhura*," Thad said, not looking up as his eyes flicked back and forth across the page of spiky runes.

"What's that mean?" Flint said, trying to decipher the title.

"*Love like Fire*," Thad replied, still not looking up.

"Read it to me," Flint said, smiling and kissing his neck. "Please."

Thad paused, lowering his book slightly. "O-okay," he said after a moment. He cleared his throat and read a little hesitantly.

"*Hi smula in mi hertan.*

*Dez yadaft ylo tahk fodija mi draumaz*

*Likaz haitin thawoja de hrima*

*Sayjanan luhz, bi utan sayjo wurdiz*

*Hwo iuwiz skuhd kwemas a mih*

*Yronja dez leubha likaz fhura in mi saiwalo."*

Flint smiled faintly. "Can you translate it for me?" he asked hopefully.

Thad blushed faintly but nodded. "So...the first two lines mean 'it smolders in my heart, this gentle glow that feeds my dreams'," he said, looking anxious. He coughed and continued, "Then it's 'like heat to thaw the freeze'...or ice, it's kind of a vague translation. 'They say lust, though I say fate, that you should come to me' or maybe with me, that one's open, too... 'And fuel this love like fire in my soul'." He blushed a little more, not looking at Flint as he muttered, "It, um, goes on pretty much the same from there."

Flint hugged him tightly. "I like it," he said, smiling. "It's...eloquent."

Thad turned his head, looking faintly surprised.

"Hey, I can use smart words sometimes," Flint said, laughing as Thad blushed scarlet.

"I didn't—I mean—I wasn't," he spluttered, looking guilty and apologetic.

"It's fine, pet," Flint said, kissing his flushed cheek. "I know I'm not all that bright."

"You're smart," Thad said earnestly. "Being more...articulate doesn't make me any smarter than you."

"No, being *you* makes you smarter than me," Flint retorted.

Thad ducked his head. "I'm not that smart," he mumbled.

"Stop it," Flint said sternly. "You know you are. You didn't continue Charms, Defense, or Transfiguration because you can do any spell just by reading about it."

Thad looked like he wanted to crawl into a hole and hide but Flint simply pulled him a little higher on his lap.

"You're so adorable," he muttered, kissing the back of Thad's neck.

"Now, go back to reading, I like watching you."

"You like watching me read?" Thad said foregoing his embarrassment momentarily for confusion.

"Mhmm," Flint hummed. "I love how you get this little frown on your face when you're concentrating on a translation and how you tilt your head to the side and bite your lip when you start a new page like you're anxious about what you're going to read. And how I can always tell what it's about even if I can't translate it all because your expression changes, even it's just the way the light shines in your eyes, I know what you're thinking."

Thad looked taken aback and touched, his dark eyes glittering and his lips parted.

"You...you really notice all those things?" he said in a small voice.

"Of course I do," Flint said, smiling softly. "I notice everything about you. I love you."

Thad marked his spot in his book and set it down beside him before turning in his seat and wrapping his arms around Flint's neck, hugging him tightly. Flint smiled and returned the pressure.

"I'm going to miss you," Thad mumbled into his neck. "I don't want to spend Christmas without you."

Flint kissed the top of his head. "I know, pet, me neither," he said sadly. The idea of spending their first Christmas together on opposite sides of the globe made him sick to his stomach. "It won't be too long, though."

"Yes it will," Thad said wretchedly, voice muffled. "It's not fair. I want you to come with me."

Flint held him a little closer as he heard the tears in his voice. "Shh, pet, don't cry," he soothed. "I'll write, I promise."

Thad lifted his head and Flint's heart broke a little seeing his tear-stained face. "It's not the s-same," he croaked. "I want to be *with* you. I want to kiss you on Christmas Day and—and spend New Year's with you while Jeff and Nick set off fireworks and—" He broke down,

sobbing against Flint's shoulder, his arms sliding down off Flint's shoulders to hang limp at his sides.

Flint swallowed hard at tears stung his eyes. He couldn't take seeing Thad like this, it made him feel absolutely hopeless. "I'm sorry," he whispered, rubbing Thad's back and sniffing. "I'm so sorry, Thad, I..." He didn't know what to say. He knew it was too late to add himself to the Portkey Thad and the others were taking—according to his father, regulations were very strict—and he couldn't afford to get one for himself.

Thad clutched at him desperately, shaking and weeping softly.

"I just want to b-be with you," he sobbed. "I don't want to be alone for three weeks."

"You won't be alone," Flint said, struggling to keep his voice steady.

"You'll have Kurt and the rest of those guys. Please don't be upset.

You're going to have fun, alright?"

Thad quieted his sobs long enough to give Flint a long, steady look.

"Nothing's ever as fun when you're not around," he said, sniffing. "All I can think about is how much I miss you." His lip quivered and he started to cry again, pressing himself to Flint's chest and shaking gently.

Flint closed his eyes to stop the tears from escaping as he held Thad against him. It was then that he decided he'd find a way to make it to Ohio for Christmas with Thad if it killed him.

---

Cole turned his quill over in his fingers, not taking in a word of what Slughorn was saying at the front of the class. He went to back to embellishing the large "BA + CO" on the corner of his parchment, sighing heavily.

He didn't realize the bell had rung until the girl sitting next to him stood and walked away with her friends and he looked up to see the class emptying. He hastily packed up his things, swinging his bag over his shoulder and moving towards the door.

It was a relief to finally be finished with the term. He'd been so focused on thinking about breaking up Blaine and Hummel that his grades had been starting to slip. Seeing them getting all touchy in the Great Hall at mealtimes or in the corridors between classes made him want to vomit and cry and break Hummel's stupid face all at the same time. Especially whenever he saw the way Hummel was practically eye-humping Cross every time they saw each other.

He thought it should be illegal for someone dating someone as perfect as Blaine to even consider flirting with another boy. He was *Blaine Anderson*. There was simply no comparison to him, much less Cross, who was gangly and awkward and pale.

Cole scowled and hitched his bag higher on his shoulder, jumping and yelping as a hand wrapped around his arm.

"Relax," Marsh said, giving him a critical look and cocking an eyebrow as she fell into step next to him.

"I am relaxed," Cole retorted, glaring at his shoes.

Marsh rolled her eyes. "You didn't look very attentive in Potions," she said. "Thinking of a certain hobbit?"

Cole flashed a glare at her for the name, which he was sure she'd picked up from the group of Slytherin boys that had adopted the name for Blaine.

"Chill, chill," she said, holding up her hands in surrender. "Just a joke."

"Just get to the point, Marsh," he said impatiently. "What do you want?"

"Well *someone's* moody," she said, making a face.

Cole ignored her.

"I was going to say that Anderson is going to Slughorn's party with Hummel," Marsh continued, pursing her lips.

Cole suddenly felt thoroughly depressed at the thought. Slughorn's Christmas parties entailed loud music, an abundance of Butterbeer and mead, and darkened, crowded spaces that Cole knew Hummel would use as an excuse to put his dirty hands all over Blaine. He scowled at the thought.

"Leighton's going to be there, too," Marsh said offhandedly.

"What's your point?" Cole grunted.

Marsh clucked her tongue. "My *point* is that if we can find a way to get Anderson away from the party, that will leave a whole night of mead and dancing open to Leighton and Hummel. And the combination of those things often leads to a much different kind of dancing." She smirked.

Cole blushed at the thought, suddenly thinking of the dream of Hummel's they'd stolen and feeling repulsed. "So...what should we do?" he said, trying to push the thoughts away.

Marsh tapped her lip thoughtfully. "I think I can convince Peeves to cause trouble in the Astronomy tower. Not that he needs much convincing." She paused. "Anyway, when he starts spreading mayhem, you go up to Slughorn's office and tell Blaine what's going on and that you need his help. He's Head Boy and apparently can't say no when it comes to his responsibilities. He's oddly obsessed with being perfect.... Just keep him busy for as long as possible. Hopefully Peeves will really cause some damage and he'll end up being too tired to go back to the party."

"But what if Hummel leaves when Blaine leaves?" Cole said, frowning.

"He won't," Marsh said. "Anderson will either insist he stay or Hummel will stay because he has Leighton to talk to...and do other things to." She smirked again.

Cole shuddered at the thought but kept his composure. "Alright," he said. "If you're sure Peeves will play along."

"He won't even know about Anderson," Marsh said, "He doesn't need an excuse to cause problems, especially on the holidays."

Cole nodded, wriggling a little at the prospect of spending time with Blaine, which he hadn't done in months since they never had patrols together, even if it meant dealing with Peeves.

"Just be at Slughorn's office around half nine, alright?" Marsh said, glancing at him and walking a little quicker as some of her friends hailed her up ahead.

Cole nodded again. "I'll be there," he said, nodding stiffly.

She flashed him a grin before running off to join her friends, leaving Cole feeling much more light-hearted than before as he made his way to dinner, a slight spring in his step.

---

"Grey or blue, Blaine? Blaine!"

Blaine jumped and looked up from tying his shoes at the two bowties Kurt was holding up.

Kurt pursed his lips and sighed impatiently. "Grey or blue?" he repeated.

Blaine glanced between the two ties and Kurt could tell he hadn't been paying attention to anything he'd been saying.

"Um...grey?" Blaine said hopefully.

Kurt narrowed his eyes at him for a moment before shaking his head and muttering, "You're lucky you're so good in bed."

Blaine smirked, standing up and straightening the cuffs of his dark button-down shirt. "How do I look?" he said, giving Kurt a sultry look.

"Dashing as ever," Kurt muttered, glancing at him over his shoulder in the mirror as he tied his tie.

Blaine chuckled and moved to stand behind him, slipping his arms around his waist and kissing the back of his neck. "You like very sexy, if I may say," he said, taking his Kurt's outfit.

Kurt smoothed down the front of his vest and smirked faintly. "Oh, I know," he said.

Blaine smiled against him and nuzzled his neck for a moment, inhaling deeply before backing away reluctantly. "Ready to go, then?" he said, holding out his hand.

Kurt checked his hair in the mirror before nodding and taking his hand with a quick kiss on the cheek. "You're all packed for tomorrow, right?"

he said, giving him a dubious look as they walked down the dormitory stairs to the common room.

"Yes, love," Blaine said in a tired voice, though he was grinning.

"Hey, I'm just making sure, Mr. Frisky," Kurt said with a sniff.

Blaine laughed softly. The common room was relatively full with everyone celebrating the end of term. Jeff and Nick were causing quite a commotion as they had kidnapped a pair of nifflers from the Care of Magical Creatures Professor's hut and had set them loose on the crowd. The two of them were howling with laughter in the corner as a group of girls had jumped on one of the tables to escape the furry little creatures and their search for shiny objects. Acorn, who was now fully grown with long, brown striped fur and incredibly bushy tail, was sitting on a chair, hissing and swatting at one of the nifflers.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "At least they're entertaining themselves here instead of crashing the party," he muttered, shaking his head.

"Honestly, I'm frightened as to what they're going to do when we get to Ohio. "

"Well, on the plus side, you'll be able to lock them in your basement if they misbehave," Blaine said.

"True, true," Kurt said, nodding as they descended the spiral staircase. They walked along, chatting about their plans for the next few weeks, to the sixth floor corridor, where music was drifting out into the hall from Slughorn's office ahead.

"Wow," Kurt said, stopping in the doorway and blinking in surprise.

The office, which Kurt had always thought was rather large, was packed with people, both students and witches and wizards he was sure were ex-members of the Slug Club. He recognized a few of them, including a young woman with bright blonde hair he had seen play Chaser for the Appleby Arrows over the summer.

The lights were lowered and Kurt could hear music coming from the far end of the office, where most of the people were gathered. A long table lined with food sat on the opposite end of the room; red and green silk was draped from the ceiling, making the space feel even more crowded than it actually was.

"Kurt!"

Leighton seemed to simply pop into being as he appeared through the crowd, grinning broadly and looking much more put together than he usual did when out of uniform in a crisp, pale green linen shirt rolled up to his elbows and a pair of dark skinny jeans, though he was still wearing his sneakers.

"Leighton, you've discovered fashion," Kurt said, looking over his outfit with approval.



"It's your fault," Leighton said, picking at his shirt. "You make me want to be a better dressed person, Kurt."

Kurt laughed, rolling his eyes.

"Hey, Blaine," Leighton said, turning to Blaine a little anxiously.

Blaine gave him a very strained smile.

"You guys want something to drink?" Leighton said, half-turning towards the table in the corner.

"I think we can manage on our own," Blaine said, still smiling in that pained way.

"Oh, um, alright," Leighton said, looking a little disheartened. "I'll...see you around then, I guess." He raised a hand in farewell, giving Kurt a sad look before disappearing into the crowd.

Kurt opened his mouth to reprimand Blaine but found he was already being tugged across the room in the opposite direction as the food.

"Where are we going?" Kurt said, glancing longingly back as his stomach gave a loud growl.

Blaine glanced back over his shoulder with a small smirk and a wink but didn't say anything.

Kurt apologized hurriedly to the people they were running into, swearing as someone stepped on his foot. "Blaine, where are we—" He fell silent as Blaine pulled him into an alcove at the back of the office and immediately pushed him against the wall, kissing him fiercely. Kurt struggled a little trying to push him off. "Bl—stop it. Blaine—op," was all he managed to get out as Blaine's lips and teeth and tongue attacked him in a one-sided kiss.

Blaine realized he wasn't kissing him back and pulled away, frowning.

"What's wrong?" he said.

Kurt wiped a hand across his mouth, straightening his vest. "Blaine, this is neither the time nor the place for that," he said. "I love that you've been so affectionate lately, but I'd really just like to enjoy the party."

Blaine looked vaguely upset for a moment, frowning faintly, but then gave him a small smile. "Alright, love," he said. "Let's go get you something to eat, then."

"Thank you," Kurt said, allowing Blaine to take his hand and walk him back across the room to the long table.

Blaine passed Kurt a glass of mead, picking one up for himself and draining it in one gulp.

Kurt stared at him. "Everything alright?" he said, taking a sip from his own glass and making a noise of content. It was mildly sweet, with the faintest hint of fruit and the underlying burn of alcohol that lingered on the tip of his tongue.

"Fine," Blaine said, smiling as he poured himself another glass of mead.

Kurt watched him closely. "Are you sure?" he said as Blaine swallowed another mouthful.

"Absolutely," Blaine said, nodding. He smiled and trailed his hand down Kurt's arm. "I love you."

"I love you, too," Kurt said, still a little unsure as to exactly what his problem was. He shook his head and picked up a scone from the plate on the table and bit into, watching the crowd absently.

"'Ello, love."

Kurt yelped in surprise and nearly spilled his mead all over himself.

"Leighton, why do you keep doing that?" he scolded, smacking Leighton's arm as the other boy grinned over his Butterbeer. "And you sound ridiculous with a cockney accent, just so you know."

Leighton smirked. "So did I tell you?" he said, nodding at Kurt's glass.

"Brill, isn't it?"

"It's good, yeah," Kurt said, nodding as he took another bite of his scone. "Blaine pretty obviously likes it." He turned to Blaine, smiling and blinked in surprise at the way his glass was shaking in his hand, a look of furious disbelief on his face.

"Blaine?" Kurt said, reaching out to touch his arm.

Blaine shrugged him off, eyes fixed on Leighton, who looked confused and perhaps a little scared.

"Don't call him that," Blaine said in a low, warning voice.

"I'm sorry?" Leighton said, half-glancing at Kurt.

"Don't call him that," Blaine repeated, practically growling at Leighton.

"C-call him what?" Leighton said, now looking seriously concerned.

"Don't call him 'love'," Blaine said, setting down his glass because his hands were shaking so badly.

"Blaine, calm down," Kurt said incredulously.

Blaine continued to glare at Leighton. Kurt sighed in annoyance. "We'll be right back," he said, glancing at Leighton, who nodded anxiously.

Kurt set down his drink and grabbed Blaine's hand, pulling him through the crowd and out into the corridor. "Okay," he said when they were alone in the dimly lit hall. "*What* is wrong with you?"

"He can't call you that," Blaine said, glancing to Slughorn's office.

"That's...that's my name for you."

Kurt stared at him. "Really?" he said. "You're really pulling this, Blaine? He was just joking around. God, why do you hate him so much?"

"I don't hate him," Blaine said, though the look on his face suggested otherwise. "I just...that's *my* name for you. I don't want anyone else using it."

"Blaine, it's really not a big deal," Kurt said rolling his eyes. "It's not like he's in love with me. He's straight, alright? He was just being...well, being Leighton. Can you just...can't we enjoy our evening? Please, I'm so sick of all this drama, I just want to have a good time with my boyfriend, please."

Blaine opened his mouth to speak but was just off by the sound of approaching footsteps. They both turned to see Cole running towards them looking flustered.

"Blaine," he gasped, skidding to a halt beside them and nearly toppling into Blaine. "There's—Peeves. I was on patrol—in the Astronomy tower. He's smashing the place up something awful."

Blaine blinked at him, a jumble of emotions crossing his face.

"I need help," Cole said, straightening as he finally caught his breath.

"Please, I can't handle him on my own."

Blaine opened his mouth to say something, turning to give Kurt an imploring, apologetic look. Kurt shook his head slightly, silently begging him for *once* to forego his responsibility.

"Blaine, he's really destroying the place," Cole said.

Blaine glanced at him before turning back to Kurt, mouthing, "I'm sorry," and shrugging. Kurt tried not to look at hurt as he felt.

"It's alright," he said, forcing a smile. "I'll...I'll see you back at the tower later."

Blaine nodded and gave him a gentle kiss, squeezing his hand before setting off down the corridor with Cole half a pace behind him. Cole looked vaguely triumphant and Kurt could already hear him chattering away to Blaine, who had his hands stuffed in his pockets, his shoulders slumped.

Kurt suddenly felt tears stinging his eyes as Blaine disappeared around the corner. Yes, Blaine had been all over him lately, but when it came down to it, if he was needed for Head Boy or Captain duties, Kurt felt like he always came in second. It was Blaine's infuriating need to please people. He wanted to make everyone happy, no matter how he felt about it himself and he didn't even seem to realize that it affected Kurt's happiness.

He was happy with the return of physical intimacy to their relationship, but Blaine didn't seem to realize that their relationship had become practically just that. Sex and superficial conversations. They used to be able to talk for hours about...everything. Now they mostly just sat in silence reading or doing homework or ending up tangled together on one of their beds. It was like the wall that had risen between them was slowly expanding, even though *physically* they were closer than ever. He sniffed and hastily wiped his eyes.

"Hey, you alright?"

He turned to see Leighton standing in the doorway, watching him closely with a look of genuine concern. Nodding, he forced a smile.

"I'm fine," he said.

"You don't look fine," Leighton said, stepping out into the corridor to lean against the wall next to him. "Everything alright with...with Blaine?"

"Yeah," Kurt said even as his voice shook. "Yeah, everything's fine he just...had to leave. Peeves is smashing up the Astronomy tower or something."

"Oh," Leighton said, frowning faintly. "Sorry."

"It's fine," Kurt lied, staring down at his hands.

"D'you...d'you want to go back into the party?" Leighton said, reaching out to touch his arm gently.

Kurt shook his head. He suddenly didn't feel much like partying anymore. "No...I think...I think I'll just to bed. Or...maybe take a walk or something."

Leighton sighed. "Tell you what," he said, smiling. "Why don't you come with me? This party's boring anyway, there's no one exciting here."

"Um, where exactly are we going?" Kurt said as Leighton tugged his elbow and led him down the corridor.

"It's a secret," Leighton said, grinning over at him.

Kurt rolled his eyes but smiled, feeling a little better as he followed Leighton through the Castle. When they were descending the marble staircase, it dawned on Kurt where he was taking him.

"Won't your friends think you're a traitor for letting a Ravenclaw in your common room?" he said offhandedly as they turned down the dungeon corridor.

"Shhh," Leighton said, holding a finger to his lips. "They don't need to know."

"Somehow I feel they'll recognize me," Kurt said. "And my outfit isn't exactly subtle."

"Well, here, we'll fix that," Leighton said, smirking as he reached over to tug on Kurt's bowtie so it can undone and hung loose around his neck.

"I don't think that will change much," Kurt said, rolling his eyes as he took off the tie and stuffed it in his pocket.

"Worth a shot," Leighton said with a sigh.

They'd reached the end of the corridor now and Kurt frowned as he looked around the dead-end.

"Um, Leighton?" he said, turning to him. "I thought we were going to your common room?"

"We are," Leighton said. He turned to face a blank stretch of wall and said, in a loud, clear voice, "Salazar."

Kurt jumped as the wall ground open to reveal a low-ceilinged chamber filled with a greenish glow. Leighton led the way inside, waving to a few of his classmates that hailed him. The room was nearly as crowded as the Ravenclaw tower had been, with only a handful of students hanging around, though Kurt supposed a good number of them were at the party. Slughorn was Head of Slytherin, after all.

Low-backed, black and dark green leather couches were gathered around the large stone fireplace on one side of the room. There were snakes everywhere, on the legs of the dark wood cabinets, wound around the pillars on either side of the fireplace, and engraved on the tables scattered around the room.

"Someone likes snakes," Kurt said thoughtfully.

Leighton chuckled. "Don't you guys have eagles all over your common room?" he said as he moved to plop down on one of the empty couches.

"Not really," Kurt said thoughtfully. "I guess it's just a Slytherin and Hufflepuff thing. Gryffindor doesn't have lions all over the place, either."

"Hmm, weird," Leighton said, making a face. He turned to Kurt as he sat next to him. "Feeling a little better?"

"A bit," Kurt said, shrugging.

Leighton pulled his wand out of his pocket and flicked it, Conjuring up two glasses of mead, one of which he passed to Kurt. "Merry Christmas, Kurt" he said, clinking his glass with Kurt's before taking a sip.

"Merry Christmas," Kurt replied, smiling as he took a drink, listening absently to the broadcast of Celestina Warbeck coming from the wireless on the table in the corner.

"So you're going back to America tomorrow, right?" Leighton said, propping his feet up on the table.

"Mhmm," Kurt said, swallowing another mouthful of mead and nodding.

"Sounds like fun," Leighton said, grinning. "I've never been there but I hear it's great. Simone's Mum took her to New York a few years ago because she was considering going to the all-girls school there instead of Beaubaxtons."

"Wexley's?" Kurt said.

"Yeah," Leighton said, nodding. "She decided to stay in France, though. I almost wished she would have gone to Wexley's so she would have learned English."

Kurt laughed. "Not at all selfish of you, Leigh."

"Hey, I'm just, saying, I had to learn French," Leighton said, shrugging.

"I thought you *liked* French," Kurt said, raising an eyebrow.

"I do," Leighton said.

"Well then why—nevermind," Kurt said, rolling his eyes. "You're so weird."

"You love it," Leighton said, smirking as he flicked his wand to refill their quickly emptying glasses.

An hour and three glasses of mead a piece later, they were both giggling a lot more than usual, their voices a little slurred as they talked. They had the room to themselves by now, everyone else either still at the party, which Leighton assured him would go on for hours, or in their dorms.

"Have you ever played Quidditch?" Leighton said, turning to Kurt with slightly unfocused eyes.

"Not really," Kurt said, hiccupping and giggling as he added, "But I've ridden a broom."

Leighton shoved him playfully. "That's gross," he said, setting down his empty glass and frowning at it as though unsure as to whether or not he wanted to refill it.

"No, but really, the only Quidditch I played was last year with Neff and Jick, I mean Jeff and Nick, and Blaine," Kurt said.

"Were you any good?" Leighton said, sniggering.

"I was awesomeness," Kurt said seriously.

"Well then you're playing with me when we get back from break," Leighton said in a stern voice, poking him in the shoulder.

"Leighton, that's inappropriate," Kurt scolded, swatting him around the head.

Leighton snorted and tried to push himself up only to stumble and fall back onto the couch against Kurt, giggling. His expression turned suddenly serious as he looked at Kurt, their faces only a few inches apart.

"J'ai beaucoup appris de vous," he said softly.

Kurt blinked. "What do you mean?" he said, his breath catching at the intensity behind Leighton's dark blue eyes. "What...what did you learn from me?"

Leighton shrugged, straightening up into a sitting position. "Just...I dunno," he said, frowning a little as though unsure as to why he'd said it. "Stuff."

"Stuff," Kurt repeated, staring at him. A fit of giggles overtook him suddenly and soon Leighton was joining in.

The announcer on the wireless proclaimed that the next song would be 'Christmas Waltz' and Leighton started clapping excitedly.

"Oh, oh, I know this one," he said, jumping up and nearly breaking his neck as he tripping over the table.

\*"You're kidding," Kurt said as the gentle, playful melody of flutes and strings kicked in.

"Nope," Leighton said. "Simone made me do a duet with her last Christmas."

"Well, sing then," Kurt said, grinning.

Leighton stared at him for a moment before shrugging. "Alright," he said, clearing his throat as the vocals started up.

*Frosted window panes*

*Candle gleaming inside.*

*Painted candy canes*

*On the tree.*

Kurt blinked in shock. He was sinking an octave lower than the soprano on the radio with a slightly rough but surprisingly soft, melodic voice that held no trace of the awkward, self-proclaimed nerd that Kurt had gotten to know over the past four months.

*Santa's on his way,*

*He's filled his sleigh with things,*

*Things for you and for me*

As he sang the last line, Leighton gestured for Kurt to sing the next part, grinning. Kurt sighed but stood up and picked up where he left off, walking around the table away from him.

*It's that time of year*

*When the world falls in love*

*Every song you hear*

*Seems to say*

He glanced back at Leighton expectantly to see his mouth hanging open in shock at his voice, though he joined in, a little shakily at first, for the chorus.

*Merry Christmas,*

*May your New Year*

*Dreams come true*

Kurt smiled at how well their voices melded together, still a little surprised at the fact that Leighton could *really sing*.

*And this song of mine*

*In three-quarter time*

*Wishes you and yours*

*The same thing too*

The break started up and Kurt laughed as Leighton started waltzing around the room, surprising light on his feet for someone who was

both drunk and usually tripping all over himself. His hands were up like he was dancing with an imaginary partner and Kurt found himself unable to stop giggling at the attempted serious look on Leighton's face.

Kurt yelped in surprise as Leighton, rather than dancing passed him, grabbed his hand and spun him around, laughing as he did and leaving them both a little dizzy. Kurt stumbled away when he'd stopped spinning, bumping into the table and trying to compose himself as the song picked back up, Leighton still dancing around the table.

*It's that time of year*

*When the world falls in love*

*Every song you hear*

*Seems to say*

Leighton stopped spinning to join in, standing on the opposite side of the table and grinning as he sang straight to Kurt.

*Merry Christmas,*

*May your New Year*

*Dreams come true*

Leighton started walking around the table towards him, still smiling and swaying a little, though Kurt didn't know if it was from the music or the alcohol.

*And this song of mine*

*In three-quarter time*

*Wishes you and yours*

*The same thing too*

Leighton stopped in front of him, meeting his gaze as they both held out the last note. He stopped singing and something seemed to shift in his gaze, his eyes suddenly blooming with something like realization. His smile faded, his expression softening as they last few instrumental notes played across the radio. His eyes flickered down to Kurt's lips before returning to his eyes as he leaned forward and kissed him gently.

Scattered applause crackled from the radio as Leighton pulled back but not away and the announcer went on to say something about the next song. Kurt blinked in surprise, not even a hundred percent sure if what had happened had actually happened.

Leighton looked just as shocked, blue eyes wide and lips parted as he stepped back from Kurt. He swallowed nervously.

After a full ten seconds of silence, Kurt finally got his voice to work.

"Leighton, I can't—"

"I'm so sorry, Kurt," Leighton breathed. He held a hand to his mouth, looking completely floored at what he'd done. "Oh my god, I'm so sorry. I don't...I don't know why I just did that. I...crap, I'm sorry."



He turned away from him, dragging his fingers through his hair and letting out a sound of frustration.

Kurt's whole body was numb with disbelief. Leighton has kissed him. *Kissed* him. His mind was moving at a snail's pace as it tried to process this sudden information.

"Leighton," Kurt began, trying to at least for some semblance of a sentence. "I—" He stopped as Leighton turned back to him and was shocked to see tears in his eyes, a tortured expression on his face.

"Leighton?" Kurt said, suddenly concerned.

"I'm so *confused*," Leighton said, his voice cracking.

Kurt stared at him, taken aback.

"I've never, *ever* questioned..." he trailed off, tears sliding down his face as he gripped his hair.

"Your sexuality, you mean?" Kurt said softly.

Leighton nodded, squeezing his eyes shut and collapsing on the couch. He rocked back and forth, elbows on his knees and fingers digging into his scalp.

"I don't even know who I am anymore," he croaked.

Kurt moved to flip off the radio before sitting down next to him, placing a hand gently on his back.

Leighton seemed to calm at the pressure and he sniffed loudly as he looked up at Kurt. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "I shouldn't have done that. I know how happy you are with Blaine. I don't want to screw anything up for you." He wiped his eyes hastily. "I really like you, Kurt. I just...I don't understand what I'm feeling anymore."

Kurt smiled comfortingly. "It's alright," he said. No, he hadn't expected Leighton to kiss him and no, he hadn't kissed him back, it had barely been a second long. But something seemed to open up when their lips had met. It was like the wall between him and Blaine had suddenly crumbled down as he realized that the thing that had put it there was that he was afraid he was falling in love with Leighton because of their, apparently mutual, attraction. But when Leighton kissed him, while it had made him shiver and left his lips tingling, was absolutely nothing like kissing Blaine. There wasn't love behind it. Even as he patted Leighton's back he felt incredibly light-headed at the sudden realization.

"Kurt?" Leighton said, turning to him.

"Yeah?" Kurt said.

"What...what am I?" he said, his voice full of uncertainty and perhaps fear.

Kurt took a moment to consider the question. "Well," he said slowly.

"Are you attracted to girls?"

"Yes," Leighton said, nodding.

"But you're also attracted to guys," Kurt said. "So you're bi, then."

Leighton shook his head. "Not guys," he said. "Just you."

Kurt felt a shiver run down his spine at the look Leighton was giving him, like he was trying to search his soul for the answers to the questions rising up inside him.

"I'm sorry," Leighton said, shaking his head. "I shouldn't be putting this on you. This is probably really weird for you, having someone you thought was straight kissing you."

Kurt smiled, almost laughing miserably. "I've had worse kissing from supposedly straight guys before," he said.

Leighton frowned faintly at him but Kurt shook his head and said, "Nevermind."

Leighton returned to staring at his lap.

"Leighton," Kurt said, squeezing his shoulder. "I'm sorry I can't give you whatever it is that you're looking for right now but if you need to talk, I know how hard it can be coming to terms with something like this. I mean...it was easy for me, I kind of always knew."

Leighton nodded, tears welling in his eyes again. "Thank you," he said.

"And I'm sorry...I really, *really* am. I don't want to lose you as my friend, Kurt."

Kurt smiled and stood up, pulling Leighton up with him and giving him a reassuring hug. "You're welcome. And you don't have to worry. I've had people do a lot worse things than kissing me and I'm still their friends."

Leighton gave a watery chuckle, smiling anxiously as Kurt pulled away.

"Are you going to be okay?" Kurt said, hand still on his shoulder.

Leighton nodded, wiping his eyes again. "Yeah," he said. "I'm going to La Rochelle Sunday so...I think I'll talk to Simone about it."

"Good idea," Kurt said, nodding. "You'll have lots of time to...think things over."

Leighton sighed heavily, running his fingers through his hair again.

"I'm really sorry, Kurt," he said guiltily.

"Leighton, it's alright," Kurt said, smiling. "You just focus on figuring yourself out okay? Don't beat yourself up about it."

"Thank you," Leighton whispered, tears slipping down his cheeks again. "For...everything."

Kurt gave him another, slightly sad, smile and a brief hug. "I've got to get back to the tower," he said. "Are you sure you're going to be okay?"

Leighton nodding, smiling for the first time since he'd kissed him.

"Yeah," he said, "I'll be fine. Go on, I'm sure Blaine's waiting for you."

Kurt patted him on the shoulder before turning to leave.

"Kurt?"

Kurt turned back to see Leighton twisting his hands nervously. "Do you think...could you not tell Blaine? I mean, if you have to, I understand, I just...I don't want him to think I'm trying to take you from him. Cause I'm not. I...I like you Kurt but I don't want to be the one to come between you. It was a really stupid mistake...."

"Okay," Kurt said. "Yeah, I...I wasn't going to tell him anyway. It was nothing, really. I'm a little tired of drama and this wouldn't help to stop it."

Leighton shuffled his feet guiltily.

"I'll see you later, Leigh," Kurt said, giving him a final smile and a small wave before walking through the opening in the wall out into the corridor. The entrance slid closed behind him and he immediately broke into a run, grinning so broadly his face hurt.

He felt bad that his realization had to come at this expense, at Leighton's pain and confusion, but at the same time it was helping them both. Kurt no longer felt like there was something between him and Blaine and now Leighton was going to be able to come to terms with his sexuality, whatever it may be.

Five minutes later he was gasping out the answer to the eagle knocker's question and flying into the common room.

Blaine, who'd been sitting in an armchair by the fire, leapt up as he entered. He looked relieved. "There you are," he said. "I was starting to worry. I'm sorry about earlier, I shouldn't have—"

Kurt silenced him as he crushed their lips together, wrapping his arms around his neck and kissing him with all the relief and love rushing through him. Blaine kissed him back, fisting his hands in his shirt.

"I love you," Kurt blurted out the moment he pulled back. "I love you, Blaine Anderson. I love you and I will never love anyone else."

Blaine blinked in surprise, looking dazed. "I-I love you, too," he gasped. He grinned sheepishly. "I thought you were mad at me. Honestly, I was worried you weren't coming back."

"I'll always come back," Kurt said. "I love you." He suddenly couldn't say it enough, just like he couldn't stop grinning.

Blaine laughed and kissed him slowly. Kurt marveled in the way their lips fit so perfectly against each other, how with every breath and touch they were so in tune with one another. Blaine pulled back for air after a long minute, kept his forehead pressed against Kurt's.

"Do you want to sleep in my bed tonight?" he said, smiling.

"Yes," Kurt answered immediately. "I want to every night, if that's okay with you."

"Of course it is, love," Blaine said, giving him a soft peck. "I don't know what's gotten into you but I like it."

Kurt grinned, rubbing their noses together. "I just love you," he said softly.

"I love you, too," Blaine said, taking his hand and pulling him towards the stairs. "Everyone else is asleep so we'll have to be quiet."

"So, no wild sex until we get to Ohio?" Kurt said in a disappointed voice.

"Unless you want to do it in the common room," Blaine said, laughing. Kurt yawned and stretched, feeling his earlier adrenaline wear off as the effects of the alcohol return. "Actually, sleep sounds really nice. Especially when it's with you."

Blaine coughed, though Kurt could hear him say 'sap' through it. They both changed into pajamas before crawling into Blaine's bed together, Blaine pulling the hangings closed around them before snuggling against him, one arm draped around Kurt's hips, the other stretched above his head, playing with Kurt's hair.

"We're going to America tomorrow," Blaine said drowsily.

"Mhmm," Kurt hummed in reply, closing his eyes contentedly.

"Jeff and Nick said they're going to teach your brother Quidditch," Blaine muttered. Kurt could tell he was almost out.

"That will certainly be a sight," Kurt said, grinning as waves of warmth and sleep washed over him.

"I don't know who'll be injured more this week," Blaine murmured.

"Your brother from Jeff and Nick or Jeff and Nick from Thad killing them for all the pranks they've got planned."

Kurt laughed softly with him, pressing back into his warm weight as Blaine's arm tightened around him and they both drifted off to sleep, still smiling and mumbling 'I love you's.

## Chapter Eleven

The Hogwarts Express rattled and swayed on the tracks, its compartments filled with chattering students returning home for Christmas holidays. Kurt was crammed into a compartment with Blaine, Jeff, Nick, Thad and Flint, their trucks tucked overhead or under their seats. Acorn was curled up on Thad's lap, purring happily and eyeing Jeff and Nick's chess pieces through slit pupils. Kurt had sent Pavarotti back to Ohio the previous morning.

"A full three weeks away from Hogwarts," Jeff said as his queen tackled one of Nick's bishops. "I don't know how I'm going to survive."

"No sock-hockey," Nick said morosely.

"No Christmas feast," Jeff said with a sigh.

"No inappropriate methods of waking Kurt and Thad up on Christmas morning."

"No we can still do that."

"You'd do better not to," Kurt said, narrowing his eyes at them. "I swear if I wake up covered in snow, soaking wet, or am in any way moved from the position in which I fell asleep I will make sure that a certain part of your anatomy finds its way into the nearest paper shredder."

They both sniggered, exchanging knowing smirks before returning to their game.

Kurt watched them closely for a moment before turning back to Blaine, who had Kurt's feet in his lap and was rubbing his calves gently.

"Mercedes said when we get back and unpacked, we're all going out to Breadstix."

"What's that?" Blaine said curiously.

"A restaurant in Lima," Kurt explained. "It's...well, it's about the only place in Lima to eat that's not fast food."

"So, when you say everyone is going, you mean *everyone* is going?" Blaine said a little nervously.

"Mhmm," Kurt said, nodding. "Well, Finn's girlfriend can't come, she's going to a play with her dads. And Tina said Mike is going to be spending the weekend with his grandparents."

Blaine nodded slowly.

"They're all going to love you," Kurt said, reaching out to take his hand reassuringly. "Stop worrying already."

Blaine gave him a strained smile and returned to kneading his legs. Kurt rolled his eyes and looked across at Thad, who was leaning against Flint's shoulder looking completely dejected, his eyes turned

down at his lap as Flint kept his arm draped around his shoulders, a rather hopeless expression on his face as he watched Thad. Ever since breakfast that morning Thad had been bursting into spontaneous tears every few minutes at the thought of spending the holidays separated from Flint. Despite Kurt's—and Jeff and Nick's—reassurances that they'd be back at Hogwarts together before he knew it, he seemed inconsolable.

The door to the compartment slid open and Nick's younger sister Vanessa peeked in, her dark hair pulled in pigtails by red and green ribbons.

"Nicky," she said, turning to her brother. "Do you have any money for the trolley?"

Nick glanced up from the chessboard to frown at her. "Where's the pocket money Mum gave you?" he said, giving Jeff a warning look as he tried to move his pieces while he wasn't looking.

"I spent it," Vanessa said. "Duh."

Jeff sniggered and Nick scowled at him. "On what?" he said, turning back to his sister.

"Stuff," Vanessa said, placing her hands on her hips. "Now do you have money or not?"

Nick sighed and grumbled moodily as he dug into his trunk for his money bag and passed her a few Sickles. "You owe me, Nessa," he said, jabbing a finger at her.

"Do not," she said, sticking her tongue out. "This is repayment for me and Jenny walking in on you and Hanna snogging last week."

Nick glowered at her, turning very faintly pink as Jeff fell about giggling, his hand clamped to his mouth.

"Just go away, Nessa," Nick mumbled, shoving his best friend off his seat.

Vanessa grinned. "Bye, Nicky. Have fun in America." She flounced off happily and Nick stood to close the door, muttering something about his desire to be an only child as Jeff picked himself up off the floor, still tittering.

The lunch trolley showed up a few minutes later and Kurt got up to use the bathroom as Jeff and Nick started flicking Every-Flavor Beans at Thad in an attempt to cheer him up.

Keeping one hand on the rail along the wall to keep steady, Kurt walked down the aisle past other compartments full of students, hilly, snow scattered fields rolling past outside. He reached the end of the carriage where the door that read 'boys' lavatory' sat and saw that it was occupied so he leaned against the wall, gazing out through the window at the scudding clouds. The door opened and he turned to see Leighton stepping out into the hall, frowning faintly and wiping his

hands on his jeans. It looked as though someone had spilled something on his leg.

He spotted Kurt and froze, coloring and looking suddenly anxious.

"H-hey," he said.

"Hey," Kurt replied.

"Pumpkin juice," Leighton said.

"What?" Kurt said, frowning.

Leighton gestured to the dark spot on his jeans. "Someone spilled pumpkin juice on me," he said. "I didn't like...wet myself or anything."

He laughed, but it sounded forced and nervous.

Kurt smiled half-heartedly. Without the loosening effects of the alcohol, the situation between them had suddenly become much more awkward.

They stood there, avoiding each other's eyes for a moment.

"I'm sorry," Leighton muttered. He sighed and ran his hand through his hair. "I really screwed this up, didn't I?"

Kurt looked up to see him wearing an expression of broken regret, his eyes fixed on his hands.

"I-I've been thinking," Leighton said softly, his brow furrowed and his blue eyes flicked up to Kurt, who felt something in his chest twist painfully at the way his gaze pierced him. "A lot."

"Yeah?" Kurt said.

Leighton nodded. He took a deep breath, exhaling slowly before speaking, eyes meeting Kurt's steadily as he did. "I...I don't know what I am exactly," he said, "I mean...gay or whatever but...I like you, Kurt. I don't know exactly what it is I feel yet but...I like the way I feel around you. I know you love Blaine and I know he loves you and I can't offer you love but...if he ever...hurts you...I'm here. Even if you don't feel anything back for me, I'm here for you. I'd...take care of you."

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small box tied off with a blue ribbon. Smiling sadly, he passed it to Kurt, who accepted it with a small frown as Leighton continued, "I got this for you in Hogsmeade. I just...I thought it...suited you. You don't have to wear it and I'm not trying to, you know, steal you from Blaine or anything. I shouldn't have kissed you. It was...it wasn't my place. I just wanted you to know you're important to me. I'm really glad I picked your compartment in September."

He smiled softly, his eyes bright with unshed tears. "I want you to be happy," he said, smiling. He nodded down to the box in Kurt's hand.

"Go on then. Open it."

Kurt pulled the ribbon gently to untie it before lifting the lid off the tiny box. He stared down at the little silver ring resting in the velvet

interior. There were a pair of hands clasping a heart of aquamarine with a tiny crown inlaid at the top.

"It's a Claddagh Ring," Leighton said, smiling. "It's an old Irish tradition. The hands symbolize friendship, the crown is for loyalty and the heart is for, well, love, obviously. You wear it a certain way depending on what kind of relationship you're in. Don't worry, it's normal for friends to give them to each other. Yeah, it's more...traditionally given by couples but...it's still normal. I got it before...well, before I knew what was going on so there's nothing...romantic behind it. Like I said, you don't have to wear it if you don't want to."

Kurt lifted the ring from the box, watching the way the sun caught the pale blue stone, leaving flecks of light across the walls. Leighton was smiling softly, head tilted slightly as he watched Kurt admire the ring. "Leighton," Kurt said, returning the ring to the box and closing it gently. "It's...it's lovely, really. I just...I don't think I can accept this. I don't really think it's a good idea for me to have this given...given the circumstances." He felt another painful twist in his chest as he passed the box back to Leighton, whose expression fell into one of hurt and rejection.

"Oh," he said, taking the box from Kurt. "O-okay, that's...yeah, that's fine. I understand."

"I'm sorry," Kurt said, reaching out to grip his arm comfortingly. Leighton gave him a strained smile and shrugged. "It's fine," he said, though his eyes were shining with tears. "Really, I understand. I'll see you after break, Kurt," he said, his voice cracking a little as a tear slid down his cheek.

"Leighton, don't—" But he'd already shrugged Kurt's hand off his arm and turned to walk back towards his compartment, slipping the box in his pocket as he went, his shoulders slumped and his head bowed. Kurt felt a surge of guilt. He knew Leighton's intentions were pure. Knew that he wasn't trying to force himself between him and Blaine. But he also knew that no matter what Leighton said, there *was* something beyond friendship that he felt, so wearing jewelry from him would mean more than friendship even if it wasn't supposed to. And he *knew* Blaine wouldn't like it. Blaine, who gotten so upset for Leighton unintentionally using Blaine's nickname for him...who would completely lose his mind if he found out Leighton had kissed him. Kurt had simply had enough drama and it was his intention to stop it. Sighing heavily, he stepped into the bathroom to splash cold water onto his face, staring at his own pale reflection in the mirror and wondering when exactly his life had become so damned complicated. He wiped his face dry and made his way back to the compartment,



keeping his eyes fixed ahead for fear that he might catch sight of the look of hurt in Leighton's eyes if he looked around.

"Hey," Blaine said, laughing lightly as he sat back down. "Get lost?" Kurt gave him a small smile and took one of the cauldron cakes Blaine had gotten him.

"You okay?" Blaine said, watching him closely as he unwrapped a chocolate frog.

"Mhmm," Kurt said, nodding as he chewed. He swallowed and gave Blaine a genuine smile, leaning over to kiss him on the cheek.

The remaining hour ride to King's Cross was relatively uneventful, though Kurt was sure he saw Cole pass by at least four times, twice with Leighton's ex. Something about the two of them together made him feel extremely uneasy.

Jeff and Nick were practically having kittens by the time the train pulled up to Platform Nine and Three-Quarters at five o'clock. Thad, however, was sitting with his head buried in Flint's shoulder, shaking gently with what was unmistakably tears. When the train lurched to a stop, Jeff and Nick immediately grabbed their trunks—to which their brooms were strapped—and hauled them out into the aisle, giggling and chattering excitedly.

Blaine picked up his trunk and Nimbus and made to leave, turning to Kurt expectantly.

"Go ahead," Kurt said softly, nodding to Thad. "We'll be there in a minute."

Blaine nodded sadly, giving hand a squeeze before following after Jeff and Nick.

Kurt glanced at Flint, who gave him a hopeless look, on the verge of tears himself at the sight of Thad sobbing quietly against him. Kurt sat down on Thad's other side and place a hand on his back.

"Thad?" he said softly.

Thad made a small noise of acknowledgment but didn't lift his head.

"Thad, if you don't want to go, you don't have to," Kurt said. "We'll understand."

Thad straightened up, his eyes red and puffy but his expression firm.

"N-no," he said, shaking his head. "I w-want to go. I just...I don't want to go w-without Flint."

Flint looked tortured, his arm around Thad's shoulders. He looked up and gave Kurt a significant look, silently communicating with him. Kurt nodded and stood, pulling Acorn off Thad's lap and tucking him safely in his basket before hauling Thad to his feet and hugging him.

"You'll be fine, alright?" Kurt said, squeezing him tightly. "I promise we'll keep you entertained. We can turn Nick and Jeff into a pair of puppies and watch them play in the snow together."

Thad gave a muffled, watery chuckle against him, returning the pressure of his hug. Kurt gave him a final squeeze before holding him out at arms length. "Why don't you head out, we'll get your trunk." He picked up the basket holding Acorn and paced it in Thad's arms. Thad gave Flint a quick kiss on the cheek before ambling out into the crowded hall, looking fractionally better.

"So, what's up?" Kurt said, turning to Flint as he hauled his trunk from under his seat, setting Pavarotti's on top of it.

"I'm going to figure out a way to be there," Flint said, tugging both his and Thad's trunks off the overhead rack. "For Christmas, I mean."

Kurt straightened up, pulling his trunk out into the hall, Flint close behind. "How?" he said, glancing over his shoulder. "Those Portkeys aren't exactly cheap."

Flint nodded. "I know..." he said. "I think...I'm going to sell my Falcon." Kurt stared back at him, nearly plowing over a pair of first years as he wasn't watching where he was going. He apologized hastily and glanced back at Flint again as he leapt lightly onto the Platform, pulling his trunk and Pav's cage down with him. "Flint," he said, "That's...that's your broom."

"I know," Flint said as he jumped down next to him.

"But...how will you play Quidditch?" Kurt said, frowning.

"I'll figure something out," Flint said, shrugging as they rolled their trunks across the crowded Platform. "Use a school broom or something. I figure if I beg my dad, he can pull some strings to push the paperwork through. I'm going to be there."

Kurt smiled. "You'd do anything for him, wouldn't you?" he said as they approached where Jeff and Nick were jumping around Thad like a pair of grasshoppers while Blaine shook his head, grinning.

"Yeah," Flint said, watching Thad lovingly. "He's worth it." He paused.

"But...don't tell him. Just in case. I don't want him getting his hopes up and then it ends up falling through last minute."

"Sure," Kurt said, though he knew it would be hard keeping the secret once Thad started crying again.

"And your dad won't mind?" Flint said, lowering his voice as they reached the others.

"Not at all," Kurt said. "He's going to be dealing with Jeff and Nick. I can't imagine you'd be much worse."

Flint chuckled as they stopped. Kurt stood on his toes looking for his father. "That man," he muttered, fishing his phone from his pocket and shivering in the chill on the Platform. "Honestly." He selected his father from his contact list, still glancing around as the line rang.

"Hello?" his father's voice came from the other end.

"Dad? Where are you? We're—wait...wait, I see you, nevermind." He ended the call and waved to catch the attention of the man pushing through the crowd in a baseball cap and work coat.

"Hey," Kurt said as he reached them.

"How are you, kiddo?" his father said, pulling him into a one-armed hug, an empty, battered thermos in his other hand. "You boys ready to go?"

"Yeah," Kurt said. He glanced at Thad, who suddenly looked morose again. "Just...one sec."

Thad set Acorn's basket on top of his trunk and didn't hesitate to throw his arms around Flint's neck, tears returning to his eyes as he clung to him.

Flint kissed the top of his head. "Don't worry, pet," he said, brushing away Thad's tears with his thumb. "I'll see you soon."

Thad nodded against him before lifting his head from his chest. He chewed his bottom lip for a moment, blushing faintly before pulling himself up and kissing Flint.

It definitely wasn't like the kiss he'd given Flint when they'd separated in June, which was sweet and relatively short. No. Thad was full-on devouring Flint's face in the middle of the Platform.

Nick and Jeff stared with slack jawed expressions, eyes bugging out of their heads. Blaine laughed softly. Kurt's father looked both confused and mildly uncomfortable. Kurt simply rolled his eyes and waited for it to pass.

"I love you," Thad breathed when he pulled away a full minute later.

"L-love you, too," Flint said, looking dumbstruck and dazed.

Thad wiped his eyes hastily, hugging him briefly before returning to Kurt's side and his trunk, apparently oblivious to the fact that there were at least a dozen people staring at him.

"Okay," Kurt's father said, attempting to end the awkward silence that had fallen over them. Nick and Jeff still looked like they were trying to catch flies with their mouths hanging wide open as they stared at Thad. "Everyone get your trunks, we've got about a minute."

They gathered around him, clutching the handles of their trunks with one hand—Thad had strapped Acorn's basket to the top of his—and reaching out to touch the dented thermos, which was glowing faintly blue with the other. Thad glanced over his shoulder at Flint, who smiled and raised a hand briefly in farewell.

Kurt gazed around the Platform absently, heart beating a little faster than normal in anticipation of the sensation he was about to feel. He froze as he caught sight of a pair of dark blue eyes glancing in his direction through the crowd.

"Okay, boys, hold on," Kurt's father said as the flow around the thermos grew.

Leighton smiled a little sadly at Kurt and waved as something pulled behind Kurt's bellybutton and he was sudden spinning very fast, bumping into Thad and Blaine on either side of him as Acorn meowed and spat loudly from inside his basket. Just as he was afraid he might get sick, Kurt's feet hit solid ground and he would have toppled over if not for Blaine's hand on his arm.

"Thanks," he said, smiling as he straightened up and looked around the snowy yard.

Thad was pulling himself up, muttering and brushing snow from his jeans. Jeff and Nick let out twin squeals of, "Snow!" and promptly leapt backwards into the nearest drift, waving their arms and legs and making snow angels.

"There was snow at Hogwarts," Kurt said, cocking an eyebrow as he tugged his trunk across the sidewalk past the covered and empty swimming pool.

"But this is Ohio snow," Jeff said, leaping up happily and skipping towards him.

"It's better," Nick added as he slid across the slightly icy walkway beside his best friend.

"And why's that, exactly?" Blaine said curiously as they followed Kurt's father through the sliding door into the living room.

"Because we've never seen Ohio snow before," Jeff said, as though it was rather obvious.

"Duh, Blaine," Nick said, shaking his head.

Kurt rolled his eyes and stomped the snow from his feet on the welcome mat. There was a loud, excited cry of, "Kurt!" and he was swiftly pulled into a bear hug by a tall, gangly, grinning someone.

"Finn, I can't breathe," Kurt gasped, struggling against his brother's grip.

"Sorry, dude," Finn said, pulling back and beaming happily. "Just missed you."

"Apparently," Kurt said, massaging his ribs and coughing.

Finn looked a little sheepish for a moment before the grin returned to his face. "Hey, Blaine," he said, almost with as much excitement, though he did restrain himself from trying to crush Blaine's ribcage.

"How're you?"

"Good," Blaine said as he unstrapped his Nimbus from his trunk.

"You?"

"Great," Finn said, his eyes widening as he spotted Blaine's broom.

"Wow, is that a *real* broom? Like...one that flies and everything?"

Blaine grinned, nodding and passing his Nimbus to Finn, who accepted it with an expression of amazement, turning it over in his hands. "So cool," he almost squealed.

Nick and Jeff exchanged matching grins and moved to stand on either side of Finn.

"We'll show you how to ride one," Jeff said, grinning with a little more mischief than Kurt liked.

"I've you like," Nick added. "We can play Quidditch."

"Quidditch is the best, as I'm sure you know," Jeff said, Nick nodding sagely on Finn's other side.

"Really?" Finn said excitedly. "Wow, yeah, that'd be awesome!"

"Brilliant," Jeff said, with an air of settling the matter.

"Awesomeness," Nick agreed.

"Just don't 'teach him' the way you taught me," Thad muttered as he opened Acorn's basket, allowing the slightly shell-shocked cat to scramble from his basket and run immediately under the couch.

"You boys get settled in, alright?" Kurt's father called from the kitchen, where he was rooting through the fridge for a drink. "There's plenty of room if you all want to crash in the basement. You know where the sleeping bags are, right, Kurt?"

"Yes, Dad," Kurt called in reply.

"Alright, I've got to get back to work," his father said, taking a drink from his diet soda before setting it on the counter. "You're going out with Mercedes and them tonight, right?"

"Yes," Kurt said, sighing.

"Don't forget, no magic," his father said warningly.

"We know, Dad," Kurt said.

"Alright, well...just checking," he said. "I'll see you boys later. It's good to have you back, kid."

Kurt smiled. "Good to be back," he said.

His father nodded, smiling faintly before turning on the spot and Disapparating.

Jeff and Nick had moved away from Finn and were now examining the television set with confused expressions.

"What's this do?" Jeff said, pressing one of the buttons.

They both shrieked as the screen came to life and sound blared from the speakers, jumping back and hiding behind Kurt.

"You two are such Purebloods," Thad muttered, bending over to try and coax Acorn from under the couch.

Jeff was looking at the TV like it was possessed, Nick peering cautiously around Kurt and pulling out his wand to prod it experimentally.

"It's a television," Kurt said, shrugging them off with an exasperated sigh. "You're both idiots." He flipped the set off, moving to drag his trunk towards the stairs and ignoring their shouted thanks.

"Finn, Thad, do you think you can manage them while I take this upstairs?" Kurt said, glancing briefly at Jeff and Nick, who had moved to the kitchen and were poking the toaster warily.

"Um, yeah," Finn said, giving the two Beaters a very confused look as Nick hit the button on the microwave and the both screamed when it started up.

"I'll deal with them," Thad said, straightening up with his arms wrapped around a struggling Acorn. He gave Jeff and Nick a warning look. "Behave."

"Yes, mother," Jeff said, sitting moving to sit on the couch and crossing his arms moodily, Nick plopping down beside him with an equal dose of chagrin.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "You coming?" he said, looking to Blaine with a steady gaze.

"Yes," Blaine said hurriedly as he caught his expression. He grabbed his trunk and followed Kurt upstairs to his bedroom.

Kurt swung the door open, taking in the familiar, untouched room and the eagle owl sitting on his desk. "Hey, Pav," he said, stroking the owl's head. Pavarotti nipped his finger gently before winging off through the open window, which Kurt immediately closed, shivering at the chill.

"I like this," Blaine said, gesturing to the bulletin board full of pictures above Kurt's desk and setting his trunk against the wall.

"You really want to talk about that right now?" Kurt said, turning to face him.

Blaine turned slowly towards him, grinning. "Not really," he said, moving to shut and lock the door. He pulled out his wand and flicked it, muttering, "*Muffliato*" to ensure that no one would overhear them.

"We'll have to be quick though," Kurt said as Blaine cleared the space between them in four steps. "Finn's the nosiest housemate I've even met. But you've already seen that side of him."

Blaine grinned and trailed feather-light kisses up his neck and jawline before grazing his lips over his ear. "Mmm, but you love being interrupted, don't you," he murmured. "It's like you want people to watch, you naughty boy."

Kurt laughed lightly. "Blaine, are you trying to talk dirty to me?" he said glancing down at him.

"Maybe," Blaine muttered, kissing the spot under his ear and draping his arms around his hips. "Why, don't you like it?"

"I never said that," Kurt said, closing his eyes as Blaine bit down lightly on his neck.

Blaine chuckled against him before leaving a wide, wet streak along his jaw with his tongue, blowing gently on the spot and sending shivers down Kurt's back. He pushed forward, forcing Kurt back until his knees hit the edge of the bed and he fell backwards, pulling Blaine with him.

Blaine hurried to unzip both of their coats, discarding them and kicking off his shoes as Kurt slipped out of his own, thankful that he'd decided not to wear boots that morning. Straddling Kurt's hips, Blaine began undoing the buttons on Kurt's shirt, kissing the pale skin as it was exposed. When the fabric hung open, Blaine pushed it away and sat back to admire him, groaning faintly.

"It should honestly be illegal to look like that," he said, eyes raking Kurt's torso.

Kurt smirked and reached up to fiddle with the hem of Blaine's dark, long-sleeved henley. Blaine pulled it off quickly before returning to kissing across Kurt's neck and chest. Kurt closed his eyes and let his head fall back against the mattress.

He didn't know why he felt so excited about doing this with Blaine here, in his room, when they'd done it a thousand times before. He guessed it was the fact that it was *his* bed, *his* home, that they were finally together in a bed that didn't belong to the school or the Leaky Cauldron. Suddenly, he started thinking about what it would be like when it was *their* bed, in *their* home and he quivered with excitement.

"You alright, love?" Blaine said, lifting his head from where he was nibbling on Kurt's collarbone.

"Mhmm," Kurt said, nodding and smiling at him. "I love you."

Blaine's gaze softened. "I love you, too," he said. He captured Kurt's lips in a gentle kiss, moaning faintly into his mouth as their lips and tongues seemed to work of their own accord, it was so familiar now. He rocked his hips very lightly and Kurt gasped at the jolt of pleasure. Blaine began moving his hips steadily against him, slow and careful as he was much more focused on kissing Kurt, one hand wound in his hair, the other cupping his face and gliding his thumb over his cheekbone.

Kurt bit back a groan, even though he knew no one could hear them. There was something about the fact that the only sound in the room was their shallow gasps and gentle creak of bedsprings that increased the intensity of every movement, every tender touch and soft brush of lips that Kurt didn't want to disappear.

When they exchanged breathless cries bearing each other's names and Blaine fell against him, kissing the crook of his neck and whispering, "I

love you," intermittently, they lay there for a long time, enjoying each other's warmth and catching their breath.

Blaine rolled off Kurt onto the bed next to him eventually, lying on his side and propping himself up on his elbow, brushing his fingers through Kurt's hair. "You're so beautiful," he said softly. "It really does blow me away sometimes that I was lucky enough to have someone like you fall in love with me."

Kurt smiled and took his hand, pressing their palms flat against each other before threading their fingers together. "I love you, too," he said, wondering vaguely if he would ever get tired of saying it, or, for that matter, hearing it. He didn't think it was possible.

He suddenly felt a twinge of guilt about Leighton kissing him. He didn't want drama, didn't want Blaine to start thinking that Leighton was going to try and break them up...but he wanted to be honest. Blaine had always been honest with him, even if it did take him time sometimes. Even though Leighton had asked him not to tell, he couldn't hide it from Blaine; he knew the guilt would start eating away at him soon enough. It was even worse than with the dream. The dream had meant nothing, had simply been his mind's way of overcoming the lack of physical contact. But the kiss...it had meant something to Leighton, and Kurt, though he felt no such love towards him, still wanted to be his friend.

"I have to tell you something," Kurt said, meeting his gaze nervously.

"What is it, love?" Blaine said, smiling.

"You have to promise not to freak out," Kurt said hastily.

Blaine laughed faintly. "Alright," he said, shrugging.

Kurt bit his lip anxiously, taking a deep breath. "It's about...Leighton," he said.

Blaine's jaw tightened immediately and his gaze hardened. "What about him?" he said, his voice shaking slightly with anger.

"Last night," Kurt said slowly, trying to meet Blaine's eyes despite the fact that it felt like they were burning into his own. "After you left...I didn't stay at the party. I...I went down to the Slytherin dungeons with Leighton."

Blaine's expression suddenly changed from angry to fearful.

Kurt pressed forward. "I...well, we both got a little...well, we were drunk," he said, guilt seeping through him with each word. "And...well, um...h-he...kissed me."

The silence rang out between them, filling the air and siphoning away the warmth that had existed just moments before.

"Blaine?" he said after a full minute's silence, feeling anxious. "...say something. Please." He could almost hear Blaine's brain clicking away in his head as he stared at him, his expression unreadable.



"He kissed you," Blaine said in a flat tone.

Kurt nodded, suddenly feeling very small. "But, it was really nothing, Blaine, he was drunk and he apologized and he feels horrible and I swear, he knows full well that I love you and you love me. Please, don't...don't be mad at me."

"I'm not mad at you," Blaine said, lying back on the bed and dragging his fingers through his hair. He sighed heavily.

"Don't be mad at him, either," Kurt said. "He's...he's really confused right now and I can promise you he feels horrible about it. He didn't want me to tell you because he knew you'd think he was trying to break us up but he's not."

Blaine nodded absently.

"I love you, Blaine...only you," Kurt said, reaching out tentatively to take his hand.

Blaine returned the pressure and tilted his head to look at him, smiling faintly. "Thank you for telling me," he said.

Kurt let out an internal sigh of relief. "So, you're not mad?"

"Oh, I'm mad," Blaine said, sitting up and moving closer to him. "I'm pissed, actually. But I also know that kicking his ass isn't going to fix anything. Like you said, you don't...like him that way. Right?"

"Right," Kurt said, smiling and leaning up to kiss him. "Thank you for being so understanding. Like I said, he's...really confused right now."

"I can imagine," Blaine muttered, frowning. He shifted uncomfortably.

"I really need to change."

Kurt laughed and the atmosphere lightened immediately.

Blaine gave a reluctant smile and stood, picked his coat up off the floor to retrieve his wand, picking Kurt's up off the floor and tossing it to him. When they were cleaned up and changed, they made their way back downstairs.

"Well, you two certainly take a long time to walk up a set of stairs," Jeff said with a knowing grin.

"Or maybe it was coming down the stairs that took so long," Nick said, sniggering.

"Maybe you should both shut up before I lock you outside," Kurt said, quirked an eyebrow as he shunted Jeff aside so he moved closer to Nick to leave him and Blaine room to sit.

Finn was sitting on the recliner, looking a little wary of Jeff and Nick, who had pulled their wands out and were Levitating objects around the room. Kurt was pretty sure they were just doing it for Finn's reaction.

"Stop it," he scolded, forcing their arms down so the remote control and pillow they were Levitating fell to the ground. They both grinned but complied.

Thad sat on Jeff's other side, scratching behind Acorn's ears absently and looking sad again.

"Why don't we all go for a walk," Kurt said, keen to distract Thad. "We can show you around until it's time for dinner."

"Brilliant," Jeff said, leaping to his feet and pulling his coat back on, stuffing his wand in his pocket.

"You'd both better be good," Thad said, narrowing his eyes at them as Acorn leapt from his lap and he stood to pull on his hat and gloves.

"Thad," Nick said, looking hurt. "We're always good."

Kurt snorted, rolling his eyes as he wrapped his scarf around his neck. He held out his hand for Blaine, who looked at him for a moment before taking hold of his scarf and pulling him close so they were flush against each other.

"I love you," Blaine whispered, searching his eyes.

He saw the faint fear and uncertainty in Blaine's eyes and suddenly realized why exactly he'd been so snippy towards Leighton. It wasn't that he didn't like him, it was that he was afraid Kurt was going to get sick of the way he was acting and leave him for Leighton. The thought felt like a knife sinking into his gut.

"I love you, too," Kurt said reassuringly. "I'm not leaving you. I swear."

Blaine smiled in relief and tilted his head to kiss him softly.

"Are you two coming or are you going to be rabbits for the rest of the day?" Jeff called from the doorway where he was standing with Thad, Nick and Finn.

"Shut up, Jeff, or I'll confiscate your fireworks," Kurt said.

Jeff clamped his mouth tightly shut, exchanging a scared look with Nick, who clamped a hand to his mouth.

Blaine took his gloved hand in his own and they followed the others out into the snowy front yard and out onto the sidewalk. The street was relatively empty, a few cars driving by every now and then, their drivers casting confused looks in their direction when Nick and Jeff waved furiously.

"Would you two stop," Kurt said after one of the drivers watched them for so long, frowning, that he nearly crashed into a lamppost.

The both sniggered but kept their arms at their sides. "There's the park," Kurt said, pointing through the grove of trees they were passing towards the field where Finn and his friends often played football during the summer.

"Whoa," Finn said, turning to them, looking excited. "We should totally play football while you guys are here."

"Foot...ball?" Jeff said, frowning. Nick looked equally confused.

"You've never heard of football?" Finn said, wide-eyed. "It's awesome! You have this, well, a football and there's a quarterback and you have to make sure you throw it before you get tackled and you try and get touch-downs, but field goals are good, too."

Jeff and Nick looked at him as though he'd grown a second head, even Blaine looked faintly bemused. Thad was smiling, though, with a slight air of smugness about him.

"You know about football?" Kurt said, giving him a surprised look.

Thad nodded, still looking a little superior about having the knowledge about sports that Jeff and Nick did not. "When I was visiting Flint over the summer, he was playing with his neighbors, you know, the American Muggles. He tried to show me but it was really confusing."

"Naw, it's easy," Finn said, grinning.

"So," Kurt said as Finn launched into an in-depth explanation of football for Jeff, Nick and Blaine. "Flint playing football and getting all sweaty, I bet you enjoyed that."

"Maybe," Thad said, smirking and blushing. He bit his lip. "Especially when he took his shirt off."

"Thad, you wildcat, you," Kurt said, laughing.

Thad stared down at his feet, looking mildly pleased with himself.

They walked around the neighborhood for an hour or two, Kurt and Finn taking them to random spots; they decided to stop at the little coffee shop that Kurt always went to in the mornings when he went to McKinley and get drinks.

"No, no, no, decaf for you two," Kurt said sternly as Nick and Jeff tried to order their drinks. They both folded their arms and pouted, sulking over to a booth and slumping down in their seats.

Kurt shook his head as he paid for their coffees and his and Thad's tea. They gathered together in a booth, pink-faced from the cold. Finn continued to try and explain to Jeff and Nick that footballs didn't move on their own, a concept they had yet to grasp.

"These are actually really good," Blaine said, holding up the biscotti he was eating. "I prefer Ginger Newts, but still." He shrugged and dipped the cookie into his coffee before taking a bite.

Kurt smiled and sipped his tea, sighing as it warmed him to his numb fingertips. He glanced over at Thad, who was staring into the depths of his drink, chin resting on his hand, his dark eyes full of tears.

"Hey," Kurt said, leaning towards him. "I know you miss him but you can't let yourself be miserable the whole time. Remember how I was away from Blaine all summer? At least it's only a few weeks."

Thad nodded but that didn't stop a tear from sliding down his cheek and dropping into his tea.

Kurt exchanged a hopeless look with Blaine, who shrugged sadly. He patted Thad's back gently, hoping more than anything that Flint figured out a way to make it for Christmas before Thad completely fell apart.

When they were finished with their drinks, they made their way back to Kurt's house, Finn laughing at Jeff and Nick as they regaled him of their 'traditions' at Hogwarts.

"Man," he said as they stomped their shoes clean in the entryway. "I wish I went to school their. It's so boring at my school. The only tradition we have is the talent show and it's so...well, boring. Rachel's the only good one in it every year."

They changed out of their wet, snowy clothes and into clean ones and at seven o'clock, they piled into Kurt's Navigator—which had been lying dormant since he'd left in September—to drive to Breadstix.

"Thad, get off my lap," Jeff said, squirming uncomfortably in the back seat where he was jammed in with Nick, Thad and Finn.

"I'm not on your lap," Thad snapped.

"I'll sit on your lap, Jeff," Nick said, batting his eyelashes.

"Why, I thought you'd never ask," Jeff replied, giggling ridiculously.

Kurt saw Finn giving them a confused look and exchanged a grin with Blaine, who was holding his hand over the center console.

"I love that you know how to drive one of these," Blaine said, fiddling with the heater with a look of interest. "All those buttons scare me."

"Says the man who can save a goal from fifty feet in the air on a broomstick," Kurt said.

"But that's Quidditch," Blaine said, as though that was a valid argument.

"Of course," Kurt muttered as he pulled up at a stoplight.

"Kurt, what're those for?" Jeff said, leaning up over the console to point at the red light.

"They tell you when you can go," Kurt said as the light turned green and he turned left.

"What, they can't just use Extrasensory Charms?" Nick said, frowning from his seat.

"No, they're Muggles, you mental—" Thad cut himself off, shaking his head and staring out through the window, muttering something.

Kurt grinned as they pulled into the Breadstix parking lot, parking near the entrance and shutting off the car, feeling reluctant to leave the heat.

"Food!" Jeff screamed, scrambling over Thad and throwing open the door so he, Thad, and Nick toppled out onto the snowy pavement.

Thad immediately stared smacking them both with his glove, shouting

about their mental state as they giggled, Finn climbing out of the other door and looking confused.

"They're a little weird," he muttered as Kurt stepped out next to him, shutting the door behind him and locking the car.

"You're just now realizing this?" Kurt said, giving him a dubious look.

"Well, no," Finn said, scrunching up his face. "They're just...*really* weird."

"Get used to it," Kurt mumbled as Thad appeared around the side of the car, muttering furiously and ripping his gloves and hat off with such force, Kurt was sure they'd done him some personal harm. Jeff and Nick followed after him, tittering.

Blaine came to Kurt's side and took his hand, looking suddenly nervous.

"They'll love you," Kurt said, knowing exactly what was going through his mind. Blaine swallowed anxiously as they followed after Finn and the others into the restaurant.

Kurt had barely taken three steps inside and was just about to take off his coat when there was a loud squeal and Mercedes and Tina nearly tackled him to the floor in twin hugs.

"We missed you!" Tina said.

"You should have texted to say you were on your way," Mercedes said reprovingly when she released him.

Kurt, for the second time that day, was left coughing and rubbing his aching ribs. "I don't know how many more attack hugs I can take," he muttered.

"So this is Blaine?" Mercedes said, ignoring him and turning to eye Blaine closely.

Blaine smiled anxiously.

Mercedes narrowed her eyes at him for a moment before her face split into a broad grin and she pulled him into a hug. "I'm just messing with you," she said, laughing. She stood back and allowed Tina to hug him, both of them giving an approving nod as they looked him over.

"And let me guess," Tina said, turning to the other three boys and pointing to them in turn. "Jeff, Nick, and Thad?"

Jeff and Nick exchanged gleeful looks and said in unison, "We're Lima famous!"

"You're right, they are weird," Mercedes said as they high-fived each other.

"Alright, enough of this, I'm hungry," Kurt said. "Where's everyone sitting?"

"In the back," Mercedes said, taking one of his and one of Blaine's hands and pulling them through the restaurant. Blaine looked both

confused and pleased by the turn of events and Kurt mouthed, "I told you so," behind Mercedes back to him.

The small back room of the restaurant only had a few booths and one large table for groups, where Puck and Sam were already sitting.

Mercedes took her seat next to Sam, Tina plopping down next to her.

Jeff and Nick sat down opposite Puck and Sam, eyeing them like they were fresh meat and exchanging wicked grins.

"Hello," Jeff said, tilting his head to the side.

"Sup?" Puck said, leaning back casually in his chair. Sam gave them a little half wave.

"You're Muggles aren't you?" Nick said.

"What's a Muggle?" Sam said, frowning.

The two Beaters half-glanced at each other. "Nothing," they said simultaneously.

Kurt gave them a warning look before sitting down between Thad and Blaine across from Mercedes and Tina, Finn taking the spot next to Puck and high-fiving him as he told him his plans for them planning football at some point in time over the next three weeks.

Kurt found, as they talked, that it was incredibly difficult to keep his mouth shut about magic given that his whole life revolved around Hogwarts. Blaine was at a loss when Sam asked him what kind of job he was going into after school and responded eventually with a muttered, "Journalism." Kurt knew Blaine's second choice for a job if he didn't make the Tornados was to write for the Quidditch column of the Daily Prophet.

Jeff and Nick seemed to be in their element, however. They spent the night with their wands under the table, giggling when Thad's spoon flew out of his hand when he went to take a bite or at how Kurt's pasta slid around his plate away from his fork. Blaine gave them both threatening looks but they simply beamed innocently, knowing he couldn't do what he could at school by giving them detention or deducting House Points. When the check came an hour later, Thad looked like he was seriously considering pulling out his wand and turning both of them into slugs.

"This was fun," Mercedes said as they trooped out into the parking lot bundled in jackets, gloves and scarves. "We're meeting up the day after Christmas then for sure?"

"Definitely," Kurt said, nodding. "You, me, and Tina can sit around with hot chocolate cheering on our boyfriends."

"They're going to kill us," Blaine muttered. "I don't think it's really fair doing 'Americans vs. Brits' seeing as there are only three of use and five of them."

"Mike will be on your team," Kurt said. "Then it will be 'Wizards vs. Muggles'."

"Brilliant," Jeff crowed, appearing at Blaine's side.

"Can we do some modifications on the ball first?" Nick said, popping up next to Tina.

"No, you most certainly may not," Kurt said.

"But, Kurtsie," Jeff whined, slumping over and dangling his limp arms at his side as he threw a mild tantrum.

Mercedes and Tina were giggling at the two. They'd warmed to them almost immediately and found their antics hilarious.

"Thad will back us up, won't you, Thad?" Nick said, peering over to where Thad was standing between Kurt and Mercedes.

"No," Thad said bluntly.

"But, wildcat," Jeff said, whining again.

Thad glared at him.

"You are just too cute," Mercedes said, smiling at Thad. "Seriously, Kurt, can you just leave him here?"

"I agree," Tina said.

Thad blushed, staring down at his feet.

"I think Flint would protest...a lot," Kurt said.

They'd reached Kurt's Navigator, where Finn was standing with Puck and Sam, finalizing their plans for meeting up after Christmas.

"Well, I guess we'll see you the week after next, then," Kurt said, turning to give Mercedes and Tina brief hugs.

"I can't believe you get three whole weeks off," Mercedes grumbled.

"We don't even get out until the Monday after next. And that's two days before Christmas."

Kurt grinned. "I much prefer Hogwarts break system. But then again, we're in school until the end of June."

"True," Tina said thoughtfully.

"See you guys, later," Mercedes said, raising a hand in farewell as she and Tina followed Sam to his old truck.

"Bye," Kurt said, waving with the others and rolling his eyes as Jeff and Nick jumped up and down, both arms flailing as they waved.

Puck gave Jeff and Nick a strange look, shaking his head as he walked towards his own car and Kurt unlocked his Navigator so they could all pile in.

"I'm exhausted," he said as he turned the key in the ignition. "You know it's one o'clock in the morning at Hogwarts?"

Blaine nodded, yawning hugely.

"How can you two think about sleep at a time like this?" Jeff said incredulously.

"Boring old tossers is all you lot are," Nick said, clucking his tongue.

"Nick...Nick, look," Jeff said, tittering as he nodded to Thad, who had fallen asleep on his shoulder the moment they'd sat down.

"Aww," Nick said. "The little wildcat's tired."

"If you wake him up, he will kill you," Kurt said, glancing at them in the mirror. "Just letting you know."

They shook with silent giggles as Thad shifted, snuggling a little further down Jeff shoulder and muttering something in runes.

Kurt was glad he knew the roads so well, as he was pretty sure he'd almost drifted off a few times on the way back. He was half-asleep when they stumbled into the house fifteen minutes later, Jeff and Nick waking Thad gently and helping him inside with uncharacteristically careful steps.

Kurt's father and Carole—who'd been out Christmas shopping the whole day—looked up as they entered.

"How was dinner?" Burt said.

"Good," Kurt said, stretching.

"What are you guys getting into tomorrow?" Carole said, smiling.

Kurt shrugged. "Probably just hanging around the house. Jeff and Nick want to go skating but I think we're doing that later."

"Alright, well, get some sleep," Burt said, returning to his dinner.

Kurt muttered reply, feeling dead on his feet. He moved towards the stairs, gesturing for Blaine to follow as Thad, Nick and Jeff fished pajamas from their trunks.

"Night," Finn said, yawning as Kurt and Blaine stopped at Kurt's room.

"Night," Kurt said with a yawn. He and Blaine quickly changed and returned downstairs. He led the others to the basement, retrieving sleeping bags and blankets from the closet and passing them around. Thad immediately curled up on the recliner and was asleep in what seemed like seconds. Jeff and Nick stretched out on the floor, leaving the couch for Kurt and Blaine to sleep on.

It was a little cramped, trying to keep himself on the small couch, his back pressed to Blaine's chest under an old quilt.

"Love you," Blaine muttered, kissing the back of his neck.

"Love you, too," Kurt replied. "Only you," he added with a smile.

Blaine smiled against him and squeezed him around the waist. Still smiling faintly, they drifted off together to the sound of Nick and Jeff whispered and giggling quietly from the floor nearby.

---

They spent the following week simply hanging around the house or out in the snow or at the park down the street. As Finn still had school, they were waiting to play any Quidditch until that weekend. Thad received three letters from Flint over the course of five days, which he kept folded under his pillow, along with the book Flint had given him



for his birthday, at night. He was relatively cheerful most of the time thanks to Jeff and Nick shenanigans—though Kurt thought that hiding all his pants in the tree behind the house that first morning was more for their own benefit than for his—but there were times when Kurt would catch him separate from the rest of them, head hung and eyes filled with tears as he clutched Flint's letters like a lifeline.

That Saturday morning, Kurt went upstairs before the rest of them were up to find an unfamiliar snowy owl tapping at the kitchen window.

"Well, hello," he said, opening the window to allow the bird to hop inside and hold up its leg. "Who are you from?"

He saw his own name written in Flint's untidy scrawl and hurried to open the envelope, thankful Thad was still asleep and hoping that it was good news.

*Kurt,*

*I've got the Portkey. My Dad got the paperwork pushed through and I'm set to leave Wednesday mid-day, so, early morning there. Since that's Christmas Day, I really want to surprise Thad so, don't tell him I'm coming, just make sure he knows he'll see me soon.*

*Thanks!*

*Flint*

Kurt sighed in relief as he turned over the letter and jotted out a reply, tying it to the owl's leg and allow it to take off through the window, which he closed behind it.

"Who was that to?"

Kurt jumped and turned to see Thad standing at the basement door, dressed in one of Flint's t-shirts and a pair of sweat-pants, his hair tousled and his eyes still half-closed.

"No one," Kurt said hastily.

Thad blinked, looking taken aback by his abrupt reply.

"Want some tea?" Kurt said, hoping to distract him.

"Um, sure," Thad said, yawning and rubbing his eyes.

Kurt hurried to find teabags and mugs, heating a pot of water with his wand and filling their cups, digging sugar from the pantry and milk from the fridge.

"Here we are," he said, smiling as he passed Thad his mug.

"Thanks," Thad muttered, moving to sit on the couch and stare out through the sliding door at the snow-covered back yard.

Kurt sat next to him, sipping his tea and savoring the momentary silence while Nick and Jeff were still asleep.

Thad sniffed next to him and Kurt turned to see tears sliding down his face.

"Hey," Kurt said, hurriedly setting down his tea and placing an arm around Thad's shoulders. "Shh, Thad, stop, it's alright. You're going to see him soon, okay?" He took Thad's tea from him and set it on the table.

"I just r-really miss him," Thad said, leaning against Kurt's shoulder and sobbing brokenly.

"I know," Kurt soothed, practicing all of his self-control not to tell him about Flint's letter. "I know but I *promise* you'll see him really soon, okay?"

Thad nodded even as a fresh wave of tears swept over him.

The basement door opened and Jeff and Nick emerged, hair sticking up randomly as they moved to raid the pantry. Blaine followed not long after, smiling as he moved towards Kurt, though his expression fell as he caught Thad's tears. Kurt gestured hopelessly at his best friend.

"We're teaching Finn Quidditch today," Kurt said, "that'll be fun, right?"

Thad sobbed even harder.

"What's wrong?" Kurt said, alarmed.

"F-Flint likes Quidditch," Thad said, his face a picture of misery.

Kurt sighed and continued to rub his back comfortingly as Jeff and Nick ambled in clutching mixing bowls full of cereal. They took one look at Thad, exchanged a significant glance, and nodded at each other.

"Thad," Jeff said, looking to Kurt, who stood and allowed him and Nick to sit on either side of him.

"You know we love you," Nick said.

"But you're making us sad," Jeff said.

"We don't like being sad," Nick said, Jeff shaking his head.

"But we are when you're sad," Jeff said, Nick nodding in agreement.

"So please...don't be sad," Nick said, leaning against him with an expression like a hopeful puppy.

"We promise you can throw snowballs at us and bury us in the drifts and you can even win at Exploding Snap," Jeff said, tilting his head to catch Thad's eye.

"Pleeeeeease?" they said in unison.

Thad lifted his red eyes to look between them and gave the smallest of smiles. They grinned and ruffled his hair happily, ignoring his protests as they set down their cereal and hugged him.

"Fine, fine, I get it!" Thad said, giggling as he tried to throw them off.

They released him and returned to munching happily on their cereal.

Finn came downstairs ten minutes later, already bundled in his coat and hat and looking excited.

"You're teaching me Quidditch today, right?" he said, pulling his gloves on and nearly bouncing on his toes.

"Yes, Finn, just like we said yesterday, and the day before and the day before," Kurt said, rolling his eyes.

"Cool," Finn said with a grin. "I can't wait."

"I had no idea," Kurt muttered. Finn perched on the armchair, waiting a little impatiently for them all to eat and get changed. When Blaine, Jeff and Nick returned with the brooms, he actually squealed a little.

"Where are you teaching me?" Finn said as they trooped out to Kurt's Navigator and piled in.

"McKinley," Kurt replied a little stiffly. He wasn't thrilled about returning to his old school, but it was the only place that had a pitch they could use. Blaine squeezed his hand reassuringly as they pulled out of the driveway and onto the main road.

Finn squirmed excitedly when they pulled up to McKinley twenty minutes later and everyone climbed out into the chill air. Kurt stared around the parking lot as a flood of memories—good and bad—washed over him.

"You alright, love?" Blaine said, leaning towards him.

Kurt nodded stiffly. "I'll be fine," he said, forcing a smile.

Blaine smiled and kissed him on the cheek before leaping lightly from his seat with his broom. Kurt sighed heavily before climbing out of the car, locking it behind him and watching their breath rise in little clouds in front of them.

"The pitch is around back," Kurt said, taking Blaine's hand and gesturing for the rest of them to follow. They walked around the school to where the snowy field with bleachers rising on either side sat.

"Crap," Kurt muttered as he saw a several figures zooming low of the ground, tossing a dark red ball around. One of the boys threw the ball into a large black basin at one end of the field and few of the others let out a call of approval.

"Who're they?" Jeff said, frowning as they stopped at the edge of the field.

"That would be the Titans," Kurt said. "School Quodpot team," he said in reply to the others' confused looks. He gripped Blaine's hand tightly and moved to sit down on the bleachers. "We'll just wait. They can't stay here all day."

One of the players, however, had already alerted his teammates to their presence and they were all landing together, striding towards them, laughing and talking.

"Well, well," one of the boys, a burly, dark-skinned one wearing a red sweatshirt with 'McKinley Titans' across the front, said. "What have we here?"

"Hummel, you came back," another one said. "Karofsky, did you see?"

"I did," a voice said.

Kurt's hands shook as Karofsky pushed his way to the front of the group, sneering at Kurt.

"Thought you didn't miss us, Hummel," he said eyeing Kurt closing and turning his broom in his hands.

"I didn't," Kurt said stiffly.

"Wait," Jeff said, glancing at Kurt. "*You're* Karofsky?"

"Yeah," Karofsky grunted. "Who're you?"

Jeff exchanged a grin with Nick. "We're your worst nightmare."

The Titans all laughed, taking in their appearance and thin frames.

"Look," the dark-skinned boy said. "We get that Hummel wanted to bring all his little British fairies back with him but we're practicing right now so, why don't you just go?"

"Hang on, Z," Karofsky said, holding up his hand. "How about we teach these little punks a lesson in what a *real* sport is?"

"What's that supposed to mean?" Nick said, quirking an eyebrow.

"That crap you play called, Quidditch," Karofsky said. "It's totally gay."

Kurt knew immediately that he'd crossed a line at the way the two Beaters' gazes hardened.

"Insult me?" Jeff said, standing up and gripping his broom. "Fine."

"Insult Quidditch?" Nick said, standing with him. "You will pay."

Karofsky and his teammates howled with laughter.

"Alright then," Karofsky said. "How about you see how well you play our game on our turf. If Quidditch is so great, you shouldn't have any trouble with Quodpot."

"I'm sure we won't," Nick said with a sniff.

"One ball and eleven players," Jeff said as they leapt down the bleachers onto the ground. "I don't think it could get easier."

"But you're forgetting that the Quod explodes if you don't score soon enough," Karofsky said.

"Try facing down two Bludgers with nothing but a piece of wood to defend yourself with and then we'll talk about it," Jeff said, glaring at him.

"Blaine, are you joining us?" Nick said, glancing to Blaine, who had been staring Karofsky down for the past five minutes.

"Yeah," he grunted. "I'm in. Finn, do you think you'd want to try? You can use a school broom."

"Sure!" Finn said, his apprehension about Karofsky vanishing as he leapt up.

"Here, use mine," one of the Titans said, tossing his borrowed broom down. "We've gotta go, Karofsky. There's too many of us anyway."

Seven of the eleven boys left, leaving Karofsky, Azimio and two other boys—who were just as burly—remaining. Finn picked up the broom he'd been left and Blaine gave him a quick lesson.

"Here, hold there," Blaine said, placing Finn's hands on the handle.

"Now, kick off *gently*. Good."

Finn looked at Kurt excitedly. "Kurt! I'm flying!"

Despite the situation, Kurt found himself smiling at his enthusiasm. "I can see that," he said, nodding.

Finn made a little noise of excitement before turning back to Blaine.

"Alright," Blaine said, straddling his own broom and hovering beside him. "You'll want to put your feet in the stirrups. Good. Now, lean forward on the broom when you want to speed up, lean to the side when you want to turn, and push down or pull up when you need to go up or down."

Finn leaned forward a little on the broom and laughed as it moved forward. "So cool!" he shouted as he sped up.

"Are we playing or not?" Azimio said.

"Oh we are," Jeff said, scowling at him.

"We most definitely are," Nick said, with a look of equal distaste.

Kurt sat down next to Thad, feeling vaguely apprehensive as he watched Blaine, Jeff, Nick, and Finn move towards the center of the pitch to face the remaining Titans players, Finn still wobbly on his broom.

"Do you think they'll be okay?" Thad said nervously as Karofsky picked up one of the leather balls from a box of them sitting in the snow.

"They'll be fine," Kurt said, grimacing as they took off and Finn promptly ran into one of the other Titans. "Well...the others will be."

Kurt watched as Jeff, Nick, and Blaine put Karofsky and his teammates to shame, scoring five goals—by throwing the Charmed Quods into the basin at the end of the field, which contained a solution to remove the spell—within ten minutes. Finn was practically separate from the game, though he did manage to catch a pass from Blaine, which he immediately dropped, the ball falling to the ground, where it sat for a moment before exploding with the force of a large firecracker that Kurt knew would leave anyone holding it with singed clothes and hair and ringing ears, though they had also been known to knock several players off their brooms.

"Whoa!" Finn shouted from ten feet over the explosion. "Did you see that?"

Thad, who had jumped at the noise, was gripping Kurt's hand tightly, looking shaken and worried.

"Thad it's fine," Kurt said, patting his arm. "They don't hurt that much, really."

Thad gnawed on his bottom lip, still clutching Kurt's hand and watching Jeff, Nick, and Blaine with an anxious expression. Jeff and Nick were practically cackling as they zipped around, flying circles around Karofsky and his teammates and scoring goal after goal with apparent and increasing ease.

When the score was fifteen to three, Karofsky landed with the rest of his team and snatched up the box of remaining Quods, storming from the pitch as Jeff and Nick shouted triumphantly overhead.

"Forfeit!" Jeff cried. "We win, we win, you suck, we win!"

"We're brilliant!" Nick said, flipping over in mid-air as Blaine hurried to help Finn, who didn't seem able to remember how to land his broom.

"Yeah, well, you're still a bunch of fucking fairies," Karofsky shouted, his friends nodding in agreement.

"Hey," Thad said, leaping up to stand on the bench they were sitting on. "Just stop being so mean."

Karofsky snorted, stopping and setting down the box of Quods as his teammates walked past him into the locker rooms. "What are you going to do about it, *fairy*?"

Thad glowered at him. "I'll turn you into a fat ugly toad, you big bully," he said, pulling out his wand. "And then I'll tell my boyfriend what you said and he'll kick your ass."

Kurt exchanged a shocked look with Blaine, catching Jeff and Nick's dumbfounded expressions.

"Your boyfriend?" Karofsky said, snorting again. "Which one's he?" he said, nodding to Jeff and Nick.

"Neither of them," Thad said, still scowling. "But he could teach you a thing or two about manners with his fist. He's stronger and smarter and much better looking than you."

"Can be all that great if he's a fag," Karofsky said, sneering.

Thad growled, his wand emitting red sparks at the insult. He took a calming breath. "You're just jealous that you're not dating Kurt," he said smugly.

Karofsky's face twisted in anger. "Shut up, you little fairy," he hissed.

"Make me," Thad retorted with a sniff.

"Whatever," Karofsky grunted, picking up the box of Quods and turning towards the locker room.

Thad turned gleefully to Kurt. "Kurt, did you see that?" he said excitedly. He was shaking and Kurt could tell he'd been petrified as he was standing up to Karofsky.

Kurt grinned and opened his mouth to reply.

"Hey, fairy!"

Thad turned at Karofsky's call, a look of faint curiosity on his face.

"Catch!" Karofsky said, lobbing one of the softball-sized Quods at Thad, who caught it instinctively and looked down at it with a small frown. His eyes suddenly widened as he realized what he was holding.

"Thad, dro—!"

*Boom!*

The Quod exploded in his hands, the force of it sending him flying backwards into the air above the bleachers. He landed with a sickening crack across the bottom bench and snowy ground, still and immobile, his gloves and coat singed and his eyes closed.

Kurt stared at him in shock, leaping up and bounding down the stairs and Jeff and Nick let out twin roars of fury and took off after Karofsky, who seemed shocked by what had happened.

"Thad," Kurt said, kneeling by him as Blaine and Finn hurried to his side. "Thad, can you hear me?"

Thad right arm was bent at an awkward angle and he could see blood seeping across his left leg where the corner of the bench had cut his thigh. Finn moved to lift him so he could check his leg.

"Don't!" Kurt said, stilling his hands. "He landed funny, there might be something wrong with his neck. Finn, I need you to call the hospital, then call Dad, okay?"

Finn nodded anxiously and pulled his phone from his pocket before moving away, hand over his ear as he spoke with the dispatcher on the other end.

"Dammit, why isn't there a place like St. Mungo's around here?" Kurt muttered. Hot tears stung his eyes as he looked at Thad's broken arm and bleeding leg.

Jeff and Nick landed next to them, dismounting their brooms and dropping the Thad's side with matching fearful looks.

"Karofsky's gone," Jeff said.

"Disapparated before we could catch him," Nick said, his voice cracking.

"Merlin, is he going to be okay?" Jeff said, taking Thad's small hand as tears slid down his face. He and Nick looked expectantly up at Kurt and Blaine.

"I...he landed strange," Kurt said, his own voice breaking. "I heard something crack but it might have been his arm. There's...there's no Wizarding hospitals near here so he'd going to have to go to a Muggle one."

Jeff and Nick looked like they disapproved but didn't say anything as Finn returned.

"The ambulance is on its way," he said anxiously. "So is Dad."

Kurt nodded. "Call Mom, too okay?"

Finn stared at him.

"What?" Kurt said.

"You...you've never call her mom before," Finn said softly.

Kurt blinked as he realized he was right. Then the gravity of the situation hit him again. "Well, she's 'mom' now, okay?" he said. "Just call her."

Finn nodded, smiling very faintly before lifting his phone to his ear again.

Within minutes, the sound of sirens reached their ears and they quickly hid their brooms and wands as the Muggle medics hurried across the field towards them. Kurt knew all they would see was a crumbling wreckage instead of a school, but he still felt wary as they approached them.

"Get back," one of them, a young man, said, pushing Blaine aside. They all stepped reluctantly back from Thad to allow the two medics to get to him.

"What's his name?" the other, a middle-aged woman, asked, looking around at them.

"Thad," Blaine said. "Thad Jenkins."

"Thad?" the woman said, lifting his eyelid and shining a light in it. "Can you hear me?" She glanced up at them "What happened?" she said.

"He...fell," Kurt said, not really sure what else to say.

"Pulse is steady," the man said, his fingers on Thad's wrist. He pressed a button on the radio strapped to his shoulder. "I've got a male victim, eighteen years of age, fractured right radius and ulna, clean break; there's a deep cut in the back of his left thigh that will need stitching; possible neck injuries; ETA twenty minutes."

"Copy that," a voice crackled from the other end.

"Will he be okay?" Jeff said, stepping forward as they strapped a neck brace to Thad.

"He'll live," the woman said, pushing a thin board under Thad's neck and head before helping the other medic lift him onto the stretcher.

"But we have to have the doctors check him over. He could have hurt his neck."

"Can we ride with him?" Nick said hopefully.

"Sorry, boys," the man said. "Only family members ride along. Do you know where his parents are?"

"He's staying with me for the holidays," Kurt said. "My dad will be the one to contact. We'll make sure his mother knows."

"Thanks, boys," the woman said. "We'll take care of him. You can stop by and see him as soon as the doctors have looked him over."

They nodded mutely. Kurt watched in disbelief as they carried Thad to the ambulance and loaded him in the back, the woman leaping in with him as the man closed the doors before climbing into the driver's seat.



They flipped on the sirens and lights and pulled out of the snowy parking lot.

They all listened to the retreating blare of sirens for a full minute until they were left in silence with nothing but the sound of the snow falling around them, the site of Thad's blood smeared on the bleachers, and their numb shock.

After a long, stunned silence, Blaine spoke. Softly, nervously and with the air of someone relaying bad news.

"Someone needs to tell Flint," he said.

Kurt, who hadn't even let his mind travel beyond his concern for Thad, felt like someone was tying his insides in knots as what Blaine said hit home.

"He doesn't have a phone, does he?" Jeff said softly.

Kurt shook his head.

"So...he won't know for at least a few days," Nick said slowly.

Kurt nodded. "I...I'll write him," he said. "Once we know he's okay, I'll write him."

He didn't want to think about the prospect of Flint waking up in two or three days time to a letter that said Thad was in the hospital. The thought made him sick to his stomach.

"Kurt?" Jeff said tentatively.

"Yeah?" Kurt said, turning to face Blaine because he simply couldn't take the site of Thad's blood anymore.

"Do you think he'll be okay?" Nick said in a small voice.

He looked to both of them. He'd seen them both joke around and prank Thad and call him a bookworm for over a year, but seeing their faces, the looks of fear and concern and their tear-filled eyes, he realized just how much Thad really meant to them.

"I...I hope so," Kurt said, wiping his eyes as Blaine pulled him into a tight hug.

"Kurt?" Nick said with a certain amount of hesitance.

"Yeah," Kurt said as Blaine pulled back, keeping their hands clasped.

"Would it be weird if we asked for a hug?" Jeff said, his expression nervous and hopeful.

Kurt smiled. "Not weird at all," he said, releasing Blaine's hand and holding his arms open.

They shuffled awkwardly forward and both hugged him at once.

"Hey, Nick?" Jeff said.

"Yeah?" Nick replied, both of them still hugging Kurt, who hugged them right back.

"I'm scared for Thad," Jeff said in a small voice.

"Me, too," Nick said, sniffing.

They pulled back from hugging Kurt, took one look at each other, and embraced, tears running silently down their faces.

Blaine slid his arm around Kurt's waist.

"That's Dad," Finn said, nodding at the truck pulling into the parking lot. They quickly gathered up their brooms and Thad's wand, leaving the school broom in the snow.

"Come on," Kurt said, tugging Blaine's hand and pulling him towards where his father had just leapt onto pavement. "Why didn't you Apparate?" Kurt said as he approached.

"Can't Apparate into the hospital, not with all those Muggles," his father said. "I'm heading there now, who's coming with me?"

"Can't we all go?" Kurt said, glancing around at the others, who nodded, even Finn.

"You sure you're okay to drive, kiddo?" his father said, eyeing him closely.

"Yeah," Kurt said, wiping his eyes. "I'm alright."

"Alright well, Finn, why don't you ride with me," Burt said, "You know how to get to the hospital, right?"

Kurt nodded, already pulling out his keys.

"I'll see you there in a few minutes then," his father said as he pulled open the door of his truck, Finn climbing in the other side. "He'll be alright, okay?"

Kurt nodded, hoping more than anything that he was right as he walked across the parking lot to his car, Blaine, Jeff and Nick striding alongside him through the snow.

## Chapter Twelve

Blaine shifted in the uncomfortable, plastic hospital chair, glancing up at Kurt, who sat next to him in the dimly lit waiting room, chewing nervously on his fingernails—which in and of itself was a sign of how distressed he was. Jeff and Nick were pacing back and forth, occasionally glancing at the clock on the wall or each other.

They'd been waiting for an hour, though it felt like days, for news about Thad. Nick and Jeff harassed every employee they saw but they were getting no news.

Kurt's father was making phone calls to try and get in contact with Thad's mother and Finn was talking to his mother in the hallway, looking concerned and casting nervous looks in Kurt's direction. Despite how worried he was about Thad, Blaine couldn't help but feel his focus wandering to the same place it had been over the past week: to the fact that Cross had kissed Kurt.

He'd blown it off when Kurt had told him for the same reason he'd tried his absolute best to be supportive of Kurt's friendship with the Slytherin Seeker. He knew how set in his mind Kurt could be about certain things and Blaine was willing—or at least *had been* willing—to push aside his jealousy at seeing how much Kurt enjoyed spending time with Cross.

It wasn't even really the fact that Cross had kissed him that bothered him the most. A mix of alcohol and Kurt's lucid, lithe body would probably drive any man to do it. It was Kurt's reaction that concerned him most, that Kurt had actually *defended* Cross, called him confused and begged Blaine not to be angry at him.

Blaine scowled. *Confused*. Obviously he wasn't too confused to know he wanted to kiss Kurt, to forego being 'straight' to kiss someone who was very obviously taken.

He sighed. The fact that Kurt was not angry at Cross, did not denounce him then and there as he had done with Karofsky, and later—if only momentarily—with Flint the year before, made him anxious. That, along with the fact that Kurt had not immediately told him, made him wonder if a part of Kurt had *wanted* Cross to kiss him. No, he didn't think Kurt had cheated on him but he found himself burning to ask Kurt if he'd, even for any space of time, kissed Cross back. He was both curious and terrified to learn the answer.

Blaine knew Kurt loved him, but that didn't stop the twinge of fear he felt every time he thought of Kurt leaving him for Cross, for someone who had never snapped at him or given him the cold shoulder or made

him cry. It had gotten to the point that he was having nightmares about walking in on Kurt and Cross doing a lot more than kissing. Kurt's hand closed over his and he looked up to see him smiling gently, eyes red from crying.

"I love you," he mouth, squeezing his hand.

"I love you, too," Blaine said softly, returning the pressure and leaning over to kiss his cheek.

The door swung open and they all turned to see Kurt's father, Finn, and Carole entering.

"I got ahold of Thad's mom," Kurt's father said. "There's an emergency phone-line through the Ministry. They're setting up a Long Distance Portkey for her so she'll be here soon."

"What about Flint?" Kurt said, his voice a little scratchy and dry. Kurt's father shook his head. "I couldn't find any number to call. They said his dad's off for vacation and they can't give out the information of Ministry employees. The only thing we can do is write a letter." He looked disapproving of the strict regulations of the British Ministry but didn't say anything further on the subject.

Kurt nodded slowly, looking miserable at the prospect of writing Flint about the situation. Blaine could only imagine Flint sitting at home enjoying his holiday, not knowing that Thad was lying unconscious in a Muggle hospital. He wondered what it would be like to be in the same situation, to have Kurt lying injured while he was oblivious half-way around the world. The thought made him sick to his stomach.

Carole moved to pull Kurt up into a hug, which he returned, sniffing faintly.

"He'll be okay, sweetie," she said.

"Thanks, Mom," Kurt said, smiling even as his voice broke.

Carole's eyes filled with tears at this and she squeezed him a little tighter for a moment before releasing him and hastily wiping her eyes.

"Finn and I were going to go out and get us all lunch," she said, her voice very slightly shaking as she glanced around at them. "I know it's hard thinking about food right now but you need to eat. Is there anything you'd like?"

They shook their heads, none of them feeling particularly hungry at the moment. She patted Kurt's arm with a sad look before turning to leave, giving Kurt's father a brief kiss and telling him to call if anything happened before leaving with Finn.

Kurt's father moved farther into the room and looked around at them.

"So Finn told me this was because of that Karofsky kid? Something about an explosion."

Kurt launched into a retelling of what had happened, his father frowning faintly as he listened.

"Right, well, I'm calling MLE," he said, pulling out his phone again when Kurt had finished. "That kid needs to be locked up before he kills someone."

Kurt glanced at Blaine, looking nervous as his father dialed the number for Magical Law Enforcement. Jeff and Nick were nodding with looks of vindictive approval.

"They're sending someone over," Kurt's father said when he closed his phone a few minutes later. "You boys will have to give statements okay?"

Blaine nodded along with the others, though he saw Kurt swallow anxiously.

The door to the waiting room burst open and Thad's mother strode in, looking flustered and still wearing a set of dark mauve robes, a tattered newspaper in her hand.

"Where is he?" she said, glancing around, recognition flitting across her face at the sight of Blaine, Kurt, Jeff and Nick.

"They haven't told us anything yet," Kurt's father said. "We're waiting for the doctors to finish looking him over."

"Who are you?" she said bluntly, blinking at Kurt's father as she threw the used Portkey in the rubbish bin.

"Burt Hummel," he replied, holding out his hand for her to shake. "We talked earlier in the year about Thad coming to stay with us."

She half-glanced at Kurt. "What happened?" she said, her tone prim and clipped.

Kurt's father briefly relayed what Kurt and Finn had told him, Jeff and Nick watching Thad's mother closely. Blaine was well aware that they did not approve of her.

When Kurt's father had fallen silent, a young woman in what Kurt had called scrubs entered the room, holding a clipboard.

"Jenkins?" she said, looking around at them.

"That's my son," Mrs. Jenkins said, moving towards her.

"And your name?" the nurse said, clicking her pen and taking in her robes with raised eyebrows.

"Annabelle Jenkins," she replied. "I want to see my son."

"In a moment, ma'am," the nurse said, "I need to ask you some questions."

"I want to see my son," Mrs. Jenkins repeated, a little more firmly.

"I just need you to sign some paperwork, ma'am," the nurse said, holding out her clipboard with a rather bored look.

"Blast you and your damn paperwork!" Mrs. Jenkins shouted, knocking the clipboard out of the young woman's hand. "Take me to my son, you incompetent excuse for a Healer!"

The nurse stared at her, looking affronted. Jeff and Nick's jaws dropped and they exchanged faint grins. Blaine suddenly realized where Thad got his short temper towards foolishness from.

"Right this way, ma'am," the nurse said eventually, picking up her clipboard and giving Mrs. Jenkins a dirty look before leading her from the room.

Blaine saw Kurt's shoulders slump as she left and knew he'd been hoping to see Thad as well, or at least get *some* news. Blaine squeezed his hand reassuringly. After a few more minutes' silence, a pair of men in dark green suits bearing a crest that had "MLE" superimposed over a wand with a thin chain wound around it strode into the room.

They spoke briefly with Kurt's father before explaining that they would need to take their statements. They spent the next hour questioning them in turn about the incident, Kurt, Jeff, and Nick glancing at the door every minute or so.

The MLE agents spoke with Kurt's father again when they were finished before leaving to hunt down Thad's mother, nodding to the old man in a long white coat with a name tag that read 'Dr. Tyler Richards MD' that entered as they left. Kurt leapt up at the sight of the man, looking expectant.

"Is he okay?" Kurt said anxiously.

"I assume you're talking about Mr. Jenkins?" Dr. Richards said, taking in their nods. "He'll be...well, he was pretty banged up."

Kurt exchanged a fearful look with Jeff and Nick.

"His arm is in a cast and we stitched his leg up," Dr. Richards continued, "But he must have hit harder than we thought. His back and neck sustained some bruising but he's, uh, he's in a coma right now."

Kurt clapped a hand to his mouth. Blaine frowned, Jeff and Nick looking nonplussed.

"What's a coma?" Jeff said curiously.

Richards frowned faintly at him. "It's like a sleep your body puts itself into when it's damaged, usually because of a head injury. Now, there could be any number of things keeping him in the coma. He seems, from a medical standpoint, completely healthy. There may have been some bruising but he's not in any life-threatening danger. There's really no definitive way of knowing when he'll wake up though."

Jeff and Nick looked horrified.

"Can we see him?" Kurt said in a cracked voice, tears welling in his eyes.

Richards nodded. "Just remember, boys," he said as he led them into the sterile smelling, white hallway, presently decorated with cutouts of

Christmas trees and snowmen, "He's not going to look...well, he's going to look different."

He opened one of the doors lining the hall and led them into a room split by a long divider.

Jeff groaned audibly as they caught sight of Thad lying in the bed closest to them. His head lolled to the side on his pillow, which propped him up a little off the mattress, and there were IV's stuck in his left arm, tiny tubes running to little bags of fluid hanging upside down on a small, wheeled rack. He was dressed in a stark white hospital gown, the blankets pulled up to his chest with his arms—the right of which was wrapped in a plaster cast—lying on top of them. Wires snaked out from under his collar leading to a heart monitor, which beeped steadily with his pulse.

"Thad," Nick choked, moving towards the bed with Jeff.

Thad's mother was standing beside him, staring down at his pale face and gripping his small hand. She wasn't crying, she simply looked at him in disbelief, her jaw tight.

Blaine moved with Kurt to Thad's side, taking Kurt's hand as he started to cry silently again, Nick and Jeff wearing matching masks of anguish as they gazed at Thad.

"Is there anything we can do?" Kurt said, "To...to get him to wake up?" "It may help to talk to him. Sometimes hearing a familiar voice can trigger it," Dr. Richards said a little sadly. "Really, all we can do is wait and keep a close watch on him." He sighed. "I'll leave you alone, just remember visiting hours end soon. Mrs. Jenkins, I still need you to sign some paperwork."

Thad's mother nodded stiffly, reaching out to brush Thad's hair off his forehead before following Richards out of the room almost mechanically.

"Is there anything a Healer could do?" Kurt said, turning to his father the moment the door closed. "To get him to wake up?"

Mr. Hummel shook his head sadly. "Sorry, kiddo," he said. "We could fix his arm and leg but there are just some things magic can't do. You remember that boy Artie from McKinley? The one in the wheelchair? They couldn't heal his spine, either."

Kurt nodded and glanced at Blaine and he knew they were both thinking of the time Kurt had been temporarily blind the previous year from a head injury.

Carole and Finn returned with lunch not long after and they ate in the hospital cafeteria in silence, returning to Thad's room for a few minutes until they were forced to leave at the end of visiting hours.

They barely spoke on the ride home and when they trooped back into the house, Kurt immediately went upstairs to send a letter to Flint, returning twenty minutes later with fresh tear tracks down his face. Carole, Finn, and Kurt's father left to pick up the Christmas tree, leaving Blaine, Kurt, Nick and Jeff to sit in the living room together, staring at nothing as Christmas carols drifted from the radio. "He looked so small lying there," Jeff said softly after a long time, 'I'll Be Home for Christmas' filling the air around them. Nick sniffed, leaning against his best friend. "Why would anyone want to hurt him?" he said, his face glazed with tears. Blaine tightened his grip around Kurt, who was perched on his lap in the recliner, as he started crying again, burying his face in Blaine's neck and shaking gently. When Kurt's family returned with the tree later, they all helped decorate it, though none of them could really enjoy it as Acorn would around their ankles and looked around expectantly, meowing as he searched for his owner that wasn't there.

---

Kurt barely slept over the next few days. He kept waking up and seeing Thad's empty space on the recliner—where Acorn had been spending almost all of his time when he wasn't fruitlessly searching the house for Thad, meowing loudly—and bursting into tears. Blaine seemed to be suffering as well as he was almost always already awake when Kurt woke and would spend twenty minutes stroking his hair and holding him, whispering gently until he fell back into a fitful sleep. They visited Thad every day, taking turns going to his room as the hospital usually only allowed a few visitors in at once, and playing with the pack of Muggle playing cards they found in the waiting room. Mercedes, Tina, and Sam stopped by with Finn after school on Monday, bringing with them a bouquet of colorful flowers in a vase to set by Thad's bed. When they left, Kurt returned to his seat beside Thad, Blaine sitting across from him. "Thad?" Kurt said, reaching up to push away the dark hair falling across his forehead. "Thad, it's Kurt. I don't know if you can hear me or not but...it's going to be Christmas in two days. It doesn't really feel like it though since you're not here to yell at Jeff and Nick while they try and make up new traditions and put firecrackers in each other's sleeping bags and—" He stopped as his voice broke, Blaine reaching across Thad's legs to hold his hand comfortingly. Kurt took a deep breath and gripped Thad's fingers where they were peeking from his cast. "Flint's coming, Thad," he said softly. "I'm not supposed to tell you because he wanted it to be a surprise but...he's



coming to see you. I don't know if he knows that you're hurt yet or not but, he sold his broomstick to buy a Portkey so he could come spend Christmas with you."

Kurt watched Thad's immobile face, his slightly parted lips, searching for some sign that Thad could hear him. But there was none. No flicker of understanding, no faint blush that was so often present on his best friend's cheeks. He didn't even look like Thad anymore....

He blinked and his eyes stung as tears slipped down his cheeks and fell onto where his fingers were wrapped around Thad's still ones.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, sniffing and wiping his eyes hastily. "Please wake up, Thad, please."

But Thad remained as motionless and pale as he'd been since Saturday.

The next day, Christmas Eve, Kurt, Blaine, Jeff, Nick, and Finn were gathered around Thad's bed—the hospital had again allowed them all to crowd into his room, in which he was the only occupant—to leave his gifts there. They'd agreed not to open their own until he woke up. As they were getting ready to leave, Thad's mother—who'd been staying at a nearby motel—still sitting at his side, a man in a uniform bearing the name of local florist approached the room with a vase full of delicate white narcissus blooms.

"Is there a Kurt Hummel here?" he said, glancing around at them.

"The front desk said he signed in for this room."

"That's me," Kurt said, frowning as he approached the man.

"These are for you," the man said, holding out the flowers.

"I—what?" Kurt said, accepting them in confusion. "From who?"

The man shrugged. "Check the card," he said. He tipped his hat and smiled faintly. "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas," Kurt muttered in reply, setting down the vase beside the one Mercedes and Tina had brought, which was much smaller, and pulling off the card, reading the script inside.

*Kurt,*

*My Mum works with Thad's Mum and told me what happened. I'm really sorry and I hope Thad gets better soon. I thought these might help brighten his room a little. I had someone show me how to use a payphone so I could ring in the order. I hope you get them alright. The flower shoppe told me they're the flower for December birthdays and I remember you said Thad's birthday was a few weeks ago.*

*I know I shouldn't but I do miss you, Kurt. I really do. I miss your smile and...I know it's not right for me to, it's not my place...I'm sorry. Hope Thad gets better soon and that you and Blaine are having a good time otherwise in America.*

*Merry Christmas,*

*Leighton*

Kurt felt his throat tightened at Leighton's words. *I shouldn't but I miss you.* He swallowed back tears as he caught Blaine watching him.

"Who are they from?" he said curiously.

"Leighton," Kurt said, his voice constricted as his throat became painfully tight. "For Thad."

"Cross?" Jeff and Nick said in unison, exchanging a surprised look.

Kurt nodded, pocketing the note and turning away from Blaine to wipe his eyes. It hurt him more than he wanted to admit knowing that Leighton was aching so badly and that he actually felt sorry for feeling anything at all because he knew Kurt was in love with Blaine.

*I miss your smile.*

He took a steadying breath and turned back to Blaine, smiling faintly, reassuringly, and holding out his hand for Blaine to take. Blaine returned his smile, though it was slightly strained and Kurt knew he didn't like the idea of Leighton sending flowers, even if they were meant for Thad.

Kurt drove them back to the house in silence, suddenly lost in thoughts of Leighton. He felt like something was twisting and knotting painfully in his chest as he thought of the possibility of Leighton sitting at home on Christmas Eve hurting because of him. The guilt mingled with his fear for Thad and he almost felt sick to his stomach.

"You okay, love?" Blaine said as they climbed out of the car in the clear night, Christmas lights twinkling from trees and gables of the houses around them.

"Yeah," Kurt lied, keeping his voice steady. "Just...tired I guess."

Blaine nodded and moved to wrap his arms around his waist as Jeff, Nick, and Finn walked into the house.

"He'll be okay," Blaine said, kissing his jaw gently.

"Do you...do you think Flint knows yet?" Kurt said.

"I don't know," Blaine said, resting his head on Kurt's shoulder and holding him close in the still silence. "Maybe."

Kurt sniffed, staring up into the wide expanse of inky black sky streaked with clouds of stars and a silvery crescent moon. He wondered if Leighton was looking up at the same sky and hurting somewhere because of him. He pushed the thought away. Surely it couldn't be that bad. Leighton didn't even love him.

Lifting his head from Blaine's shoulder, he squeezed him a little to get his attention. Blaine pulled back to smile softly at him and Kurt angled his head to kiss him, searching for the love he always felt when their lips met. He needed to warmth, needed *some* good feeling to break apart the pain he'd been feeling, the hurt and the worry and the guilt from Leighton.

Blaine lifted his hand between them and brushed his gloved fingertips over Kurt's cheekbone, catching the tear that had fallen free when he closed his eyes. Kurt shivered as Blaine stroked over the shell of his ear and across the sensitive spot where his jaw stopped. The touch was so careful, so tender, that it brought even more emotion into his over-crowded brain. He let out a dry sob into Blaine's mouth.

Blaine pulled back immediately, looking concerned. "What's wrong, love?" he said, slipping the hand that wasn't cupping Kurt's face down to take his hand. The warm pressure between his fingers and over his palm calmed him slightly.

"I'm sorry," Kurt croaked. His throat was starting to hurt from all the crying he'd been doing. "I just...we were supposed to come here and have fun and spend three weeks laughing at Jeff and Nick pulling pranks while Thad yelled at them and—and I just want us to be able to be happy *for once* without dealing with this."

"Shh," Blaine soothed, cradling the back of his head in his hand and holding him close. "I know, shh, I hate it, too, Kurt."

Kurt sniffed, shivering in the cold as the wind gusted around them, sending clouds of sparkling, crystalline snowflakes down from the branches of the big, bare maple tree that stood in the front yard.

"Let's go inside," Blaine said. "I'll make some tea, okay?"

Kurt nodded even as he thought of Thad and all the times they'd sat together drinking tea and gossiping and a fresh wave of tears hit him hard.

When they walked into the house, Finn was stretched across the couch watching 'It's a Wonderful Life' on TV, eyelids drooping as he yawned. Jeff and Nick were sitting cross-legged on the floor with what looked like half of Carole's craft closet spread around them.

"What are you doing?" Kurt said, sitting on the recliner as Blaine moved to make tea.

"Making a present for Thad when he wakes up," Jeff said, not looking up from cutting out a Christmas tree from green construction paper.

"But...you can use your wands, you know?" Kurt said, frowning.

"We know," Nick said, opening a bottle of silver glitter and frowning into it as he muttered, "the things Muggles come up with."

"We don't want to use magic," Jeff said, shifting Acorn off the large sheet of posterboard lying in front of him.

Kurt smiled as he clicked his fingers to call Acorn to him, the cat leaping lightly into his lap and giving him the same questioning look he'd been giving them all since Saturday. Seeing Jeff and Nick acting so quiet and reserved over the past few days had been further confirmation that there was something not right in the world.

Watching them now, giggling and cracking jokes as they threw glitter at one another and doodles on each other's arms with markers as Blaine returned with their tea and snuggled next to him on the recliner, made the painful knot in his chest untwist slightly. He wasn't sure when he drifted off, curled up next to Blaine under a blanket with Acorn on his lap, but it was the first time he hadn't cried himself to sleep since Saturday night.

---

"Wake up, Kurtsie!"

"It's Christmas!"

Kurt snapped awake and tried to jump back from the plate of pancakes being shoved under his nose by a sniggering Jeff, Nick beaming next to him and holding out a mug of tea.

"We made breakfast!" Jeff said, sounding thoroughly pleased with himself.

"No firecrackers, U-No-Poo, or Giggling Powder, we promise," Nick said, grinning.

Kurt glanced up at where Finn was digging into his own pancakes on the couch before warily accepting the plate and mug from the two Beaters.

"What are you two so happy today?" he asked suspiciously.

"Because it's Christmas!" Jeff said, leaping around happily and falling flat on his face when his foot caught the rug.

Nick sniggered and leapt back from his best friend as he reached for his ankles. "Everyone's happy on Christmas," he said, turning back to Kurt.

"And we're seeing Thad today," Jeff said as he scrambled to his feet.

"And Santa visited!" Nick cried, gesturing to the pile of presents under the tree that Kurt's father or Carole must have set up in the night.

"And someone else visited, too!" Jeff said, looking fit to burst with excitement.

Kurt cocked an eyebrow as he sipped his tea. "Who?" he said.

"Flint!" they practically screamed.

Kurt nearly dropped his plate. "What?" he said, choking on his mouthful of hot tea. "He's here?"

They nodded furiously, looking vaguely mad with their manic grins.

"And he'll wake up Thad," Nick said happily.

"Thad won't want to sleep anymore when he hears Flint," Jeff said, grinning from ear to ear.

Kurt opened his mouth, his heart breaking a little at their child-like optimism, but closed it quickly. He didn't want to be the one to spoil their good mood.

"So...where is he?" he said, glancing around for both Flint and Blaine, who had disappeared as well.

"Here," a cracked voice said.

Kurt looked up to see Flint walking out of the kitchen with Blaine, who was clutching two mugs of tea and looking concerned. Kurt's gut clenched at the sight of Flint. His eyes were swollen and red, his hair disheveled and his expression twisted into one of absolute despair.

Jeff and Nick fell silent the moment he entered.

"Hey," Kurt said cautiously.

Flint opened his mouth to reply but nothing came out. He swallowed, sniffing as he wiped his eyes. "When can we see him?" he said shakily, fixing his bright brown eyes on each of the in turn.

Kurt glanced at the clock on the wall and saw that it was almost eight. "Visiting hours start at nine thirty," he said. "When...when did you get my letter?"

"Last night," Flint said, silently accepting the tea Blaine offered him and sitting on the couch. "I brought Pav with me."

"Thanks," Kurt said lamely as he watched Acorn, who'd been rubbing against Flint's ankles, jump into Flint's lap and push insistently at his hand.

"Blaine told me what happened," Flint said, automatically stroking Acorn's back, the Maine Coon purring happily as he did. He turned to Kurt. "What's happening with Karofsky?"

"My Dad said the MLE took him into custody Monday," Kurt said, watching Flint closely. "They not going to try him as an adult since he's still in school even though he is of age but he's going to get at least six months in the Cleveland Juvenile Detention Center for Wizards for 'misuse of magical objects with intent to harm'. Well...that's what my Dad said at least."

Flint nodded slowly, his expression unreadable. He wasn't crying, though Kurt assumed he'd probably been crying himself dry since the night before. The dark bags under his eyes told him he hadn't slept. Jeff and Nick moved to perch on the arm of the couch next to him.

"Don't worry," Jeff said, smiling sadly.

"Thad will be awake soon," Nick said, patting Flint's back.

Kurt exchanged a concerned look with Blaine and even Finn's face fell as Flint set down his tea and gripped his face in his hands with a strangled sob.

It was rare for Flint to fall apart like this, but Kurt had seen it the previous year after they'd broken up, when he'd spent weeks drowning himself in alcohol. He didn't like to think what he would do when he saw Thad.

Kurt's father and Carole—he thought he'd always call her that in his head—emerged from the hall, already dressed.

"Merry Christmas," Carole said, smiling around at them.

They all mumbled replies and her smile faded as she saw Flint.

"Are you kids going to the hospital soon?" Kurt's father said, pouring himself a cup of coffee.

Kurt nodded.

"Finn, are you going, too?" Carole called from the kitchen.

"I can't," Finn called in reply. "I'm going to Rachel's, remember?"

"Oh, that's right," Carole said, returning to the living room with a glass of orange juice in hand. "Tell her and her dads I said hello."

"And I want everyone back here for dinner," Kurt's father said as he stepped out of the kitchen. "At least you two, Kurt and Finn. I know you guys want to be with Thad but we still need family time for Christmas, okay?"

Kurt and Finn nodded mutely.

"Why don't you guys get changed," Kurt said, glancing at Jeff and Nick as Finn stood with his cleaned plate, patting Flint awkwardly on the shoulder before heading towards the kitchen. "We can leave around nine."

Jeff and Nick gave Flint one last sad look before standing and moving towards their trunks. Kurt gestured for Blaine to follow him and they climbed the stairs to his room in silence.

"I feel awful," Kurt said as he pulled off his pajamas, "being able to kiss you and hold you when Thad's lying in that bed and Flint will have to see him like that on Christmas when he might...he might not—"

"Stop," Blaine said sternly. "Don't let yourself think that." He slipped on a sweater, zipping up his jeans as he pulled Kurt close and kissed him. "Don't feel guilty, either. You didn't cause any of this."

"I know," Kurt said, wiping away the tears welling in his eyes. "I just...of all the people who don't deserve to be in pain, Thad is at the top of the list."

Blaine kissed his forehead gently. "I know, love," he said softly. "But he'll be alright. I'm sure of it."

Kurt sniffed and rested his head on Blaine's shoulder, taking a moment to soak in his comfort. "I hope you're right."

"Me, too," Blaine said with a sigh.

---

It was as though someone had ripped his heart out through his chest and thrown it in his face. That he'd been sitting at home, counting down the days until he was going to see Thad and thinking about all the fun Thad would be having with Kurt and Blaine and Jeff and Nick while Thad was in reality lying in a Muggle hospital, as good as dead to

the world around him, made his blood run cold and his gut ache to the point where he'd actually gotten physically ill.

He'd spent the hours before the Portkey left that morning lying awake, thinking of Thad and trying to picture his soft smile, the way his dark eyes always peered up at him with that look like he was searching for something, but images of Thad lying immobile, bleeding and broken, kept forming in his mind.

He hadn't eaten since he'd gotten the letter from Kurt because every time he tried, he got sick and at one point ended up dry-heaving for ten minutes, sobbing so hard he didn't think he'd ever stop.

The whole ride to the hospital, he simply stared out through the car window at the mockingly cheerful Christmas displays and children laughing as they played in the snow. He needed to see Thad, needed to hold his hand and push back the dark hair from his face, but he didn't know if his heart could take holding him without being held back.

His whole body was shaking when he climbed out into the parking lot outside the old brick building, a fresh bout of tears springing to his eyes as he thought of the fact that Thad was in there, unconscious and damaged on *Christmas*.

Jeff and Nick fell into step on either side of him and gripped his elbows comfortingly, flashing him small, reassuring smiles, though, from what he'd heard from Blaine, they'd been spending most of their time crying as well. They were each clutching a large tube of rolled posterboard which they claimed were for Thad when he woke up.

He was barely even paying attention when they walked through the front doors into the almost empty lobby and signed in before moving towards the other end of the room. There was a middle-aged man walking a burly boy around Flint's age in their direction, a man in a dark green suit accompanying them and clutching the boy's arm tightly.

"—see what you did, David?" the older man said angrily. "I hope you're happy."

He didn't even realize that the rest of them had stopped until he was already on the other side of the lobby.

"What are *you* doing here?" Jeff shouted.

Flint turned to see Kurt, Blaine, Jeff and Nick glaring at the boy he'd just passed, who looked faintly nervous.

"Back to cause more damage?" Nick snapped.

"Haven't you done enough already, Karofsky?" Kurt said, blue eyes hard as steel.

Realization hit Flint like a shot of adrenaline to the chest as he stared at the boy.

"You!" he roared. He was storming across the lobby, his feet and legs working automatically as rage like nothing he'd ever felt before blurred his vision and clouded his brain. Before the two men beside Karofsky could react, he'd grabbed him and slammed him up against the wall, his wand pressed hard into his windpipe.

Karofsky's eyes were wide, confused and fearful.

"You fucking scumbag," Flint growled, prodding Karofsky's throat with his wand and struggling hard to keep magic from exploding out of him.

"Do you have any *idea* who you hurt? Do you know what you did? He's worth a million times what you are and I swear if it wasn't for the fact that I want to be here when he wakes up, I would kill you right now!" Someone was screaming, someone else was ordering him to stop; he heard several voices call out his name, but he didn't care.

He slammed his fist into Karofsky's gut, forcing him to stay straight when he tried to double over in agony. Tears of pain welled in Karofsky's eyes as he coughed and groaned. Flint pressed down harder with the tip of his wand, his hand shaking as Karofsky started struggling for breath, an angry, red, welt forming on his skin around where Flint's wand touched him. He started sobbing and trying to scream breathlessly but Flint just pressed harder....

"*Protego!*"

Flint was thrown back from Karofsky by the invisible shield thrown between them by the man in the dark green suit.

"Are you insane?" he said as he moved to grab Karofsky's arm, glaring at Flint and returning his wand to his pocket.

Flint merely glowered at Karofsky, panting slightly as his wand shook in his hand.

The man in the green suit cast a Memory Charm on the receptionist, flashing another glare in Flint's direction before dragging a gasping and sobbing Karofsky out of the hospital, the man Flint assumed was his father trailing behind him with a both frightened and perhaps slightly apologetic look on his face as he glanced back at Flint.

Flint quickly shoved his wand in his pocket as the receptionist's glazed look from the Memory Charm wore off. Kurt, Blaine, Jeff and Nick were all staring at him with open mouths and raised eyebrows.

He cleared his throat feeling very faintly embarrassed as his heart rate slowed and his adrenaline drained away. "W-where's Thad?" he said, avoiding their eyes. He didn't like losing his temper like that but...Karofsky, of all people... Well, Flint thought he deserved any and every ounce of pain he got.

Kurt was the first to pull out of his shock. "Um, this way," he said weakly, gesturing for Flint down the nearest hallway. They passed a small waiting room and a pair of men in long white coats before Kurt



stopped at one of the closed doors, which had a cartoon reindeer pasted on it.

"Flint," Kurt said, looking at him steadily. "You need to know that he...he's hooked up to some machines so they can know he's healthy. Just...don't freak out, okay?"

Flint frowned, not really sure what he meant. He'd never been in a Muggle hospital before.

Kurt watched him for another moment before turning the handle and pushing the door open to allow him inside.

Flint knew it would be hard to see Thad unconscious, knew he'd probably not stop crying when he saw it.

But he hadn't expected this.

Wires and tubes trailed from Thad's arms and out from under the collar of the hospital gown he was wearing. His face was almost deathly pale, his lips looking unnaturally dark in comparison. His right arm was covered in thick bandages from just above his elbow to his hand, wrapping around his thumb.

"Flint?" Kurt said nervously, laying a hand on his arm when he hadn't moved from his spot in the doorway after a full thirty seconds.

He shook his head, shrugging his hand away gently and moving dream-like towards Thad's bed. He couldn't tear his eyes away from him, even as he felt like every last inch of him was screaming for him to do it, to stop torturing himself with the sight of Thad, sweet, innocent, adorable Thad, lying there as limp as a doll.

Thad's mother was sitting on the other side of the bed, holding Thad's left hand, but Flint ignored her. He reached out with trembling fingers to touch Thad's cheek, clutching his other hand to his mouth to muffle a sob when Thad didn't lean into the touch as he always did.

"Can I...can I please have a minute alone with him?" he croaked, not looking at the others for their agreement, though he heard their mumbled replies, barely feeling their comforting pats on the shoulder.

Thad's mother rose and Flint saw her open her mouth to say something, but then she closed it with a snap and walked out of the room with the rest of them, closing the door behind her.

Flint moved to the other side of the bed, taking the seat Mrs. Jenkins had vacated and scooting closer to Thad. He gripped his small, cold hand in both of his own, tears streaming down his face as he looked at Thad's closed eyes. Really, he could have been sleeping if not for the fact that his skin was *so pale*. He looked thinner than when they'd parted over a week ago, his already small frame diminished slightly under the thick blanket draped over him.

He sat there for awhile, just looking at Thad and crying, rubbing his hand and wishing more than anything that Thad would return the

pressure. When he'd gained enough control over himself, he took a shaky breath.

"Thad?" he said. He held his breath, somehow sure Thad would open his eyes just from hearing his voice. But he didn't.

It took another minute for him to calm himself down to the point he could talk again.

"I wanted to surprise you, pet," he said softly. "I wanted to sneak into Kurt's house early in the morning and stop Jeff and Nick from drawing on your arms and wake you up and see your eyes light up like they always do when you're surprised and happy about something."

He sniffed, hastily wiping his eyes. "I'm sorry," he croaked. "I'm so, so sorry I wasn't there to stop him, pet. I would have. I would have caught you." He lowered his head, shaking as he struggled to continue.

"I love you so much, Thad," he said, tears dripping onto his lap. "I know I've said it a thousand times but I don't think I really realized how much until I thought I might lose you. I've never really thought about the future, about what I want to do after Hogwarts but I know that I want you to be there with me."

"I want to fall asleep with my arms around you and—and wake up before you just so I can watch you sleep and see the way your eyes sort of flutter open and you get this little smile on your face when you see me...like when spent the night in the tower once and you said at first you were upset that you were awake because you were dreaming about me but then you were glad you did because you got to be with me for real and...please, *please* wake up, Thad, because I want that every day. I want it more than anything." He broke, unable to continue at the thought that the picture he'd painted might never happen.

"Promise?"

Flint froze. His hands shook as he slowly turned his head towards the sound that he wasn't sure he'd ever hear again.

Thad was smiling softly at him, exactly as he'd just described, one corner of his mouth quirked very slightly up and his dark eyes half-open as he watched Flint.

"T-Thad?" Flint choked, his throat constricting painfully.

"Do you promise?" Thad said, his voice small from lack of use.

"Everything you said? Do...do you really want that?"

Flint nodded, tears blurring his vision again, though this time from overwhelming relief. "I do," he said, squeezing Thad's hand and nearly breaking down again when he squeezed very gently back. "I love you."

"I love you, too," Thad said. He glanced around the room curiously.

"I'm in a Muggle hospital, aren't I?"

Flint laughed. He couldn't help it. Every familiar gesture and facial expression he saw Thad do was like something pulled from his dreams. "Yes," he said, nodding and moving closer to him.

Thad nodded slowly before turning to him. "Flint?"

"Yes, pet?" Flint said, smiling as his heart swelled with love for the boy watching him through those dark eyes.

"Did you really sell your Falcon to come see me?" Thad said softly.

Flint nodded. He frowned. "How did you know?" he said.

Thad wrinkled up his nose as he considered the question. "I...I think I had a dream or...maybe it's a memory...or an almost-memory...Kurt was saying something about you coming to see me for Christmas and that you sold your broom to afford the Portkey and...I kept trying to tell him to tell you I was alright but nothing was working. It was like I was watching everything happen from...somewhere else. Every time they talked to me, I tried to talk back but I couldn't.

"And then...then I heard you tell me you loved me and it was like I was waking up from a really long nap and you were saying all those nice things and I didn't want you to stop but...then you started crying again...." He trailed off, looking mildly apologetic for not telling Flint immediately that he was awake.

Flint didn't think he'd ever stop smiling at what Thad had said. "Don't be sorry, pet," he said, standing up so he could bend over Thad and kiss him.

Thad almost protested, mumbling something about his breath, but shut up the moment Flint pressed his lips against his. Flint kept one hand on Thad's and moved the other up to graze across his cheek, his chest exploding with happiness with Thad groaned softly and nuzzled against the touch.

The door opened behind him but he ignored it.

"Flint, are you—*THAD!*"

Flint reluctantly pulled back at Kurt's shout, turning in time to see Kurt leaning back out into the hall.

"HE'S AWAKE! THAD'S AWAKE!" he cried before turning and running to Thad's side and carefully hugging him around the shoulders and grinning wider than Flint had ever seen.

Footsteps pounded in the hall and Jeff and Nick burst into the room first with twin shouts of delight, followed by Blaine and Thad's mother. Thad laughed as Jeff and Nick hugged him furiously.

"Wildcat, we missed you!"

"Don't leave again, okay?"

"We don't have any tears left."

"And we really don't like looking like big saps around Kurt. It's embarrassing"

Flint smiled as they pulled away to allow Blaine to hug Thad briefly before his mother approached the bed.

"Hi, Mum," Thad said, smiling as she hugged him for a full ten seconds. "All that stuff you said...about me being like Dad...thanks." He reached up to squeeze his mother's hand as she blinked in surprise. "I love you, Mum."

"I love you, too, darling," she said, her voice cracking as tears welled in her eyes. She stepped back from Thad and turned to Flint, gazing at him for a moment before throwing her arms around him and hugging him tightly. "Thank you, Flint," she whispered. "For bringing him back."

Flint returned her watery smile before turning to watch Thad giggle as Jeff and Nick grinned and unrolled the posters they'd made for him the night before.

Jeff's was decorated with a little forest of construction paper Christmas trees, what Flint assumed was supposed to be a wildcat peeking out from behind one of them. All of this surrounded big block letters that read 'Welcome back, Wildcat!'.

Nick's was covered in green, red, and silver glitter—Flint guessed they'd gotten a little carried away as they so often did—that formed the words 'We missed you, bunny!'.

Thad watched them bouncing around excitedly, retrieving his gifts and practically doing backflips as they ordered him to open them as Kurt called his father and told him that Thad was awake. Flint smiled softly as Thad opened his other gifts, which included a dark red peacoat from Kurt and a set of eagle feather quills from his mother, before approaching him with his own present.

Thad smiled gently as he accepted the little package from him, struggling a little to unwrap it as he had with the others because of his cast. His eyes widened as he lifted the necklace Flint had bought him from the box and he took in the little silver runic symbol and the tiny sapphires inlaid in it. He turned to Flint, his lip quivering faintly as his eyes glittered.

Flint smiled and took the beaded necklace from him to tie behind his neck.

"How's it look?" Thad said, blushing faintly as he looked down at where the pendant rested on his chest.

"Perfect," Flint said, leaning down to kiss him gently, not caring that Thad's mother and their friends were standing right there. "Just like you."

## Chapter Thirteen

"Flint, I can walk."

"I know," Flint said, glancing down at Thad, who was wearing the coat Kurt had given him over a pair of pajamas he'd gotten from Wes and David that read 'Ravenclaw House- Hogwarts Class of 2012' across the front.

Within twenty minutes of Thad waking up, Kurt's father and Carole had shown up and, along with Thad's mother, were able to convince the Muggle doctors to let them take Thad home, insisting he would be looked after by his 'regular doctor' for his arm and leg. By this, of course, they meant that the moment Thad was carefully tucked in the back seat of Kurt's car that Thad's mother healed his arm and leg in about three seconds.

Thad sighed in relief when his cast was Banished. "It was so itchy all week and I could never scratch it," he said as he flexed his hand and wrist with a faint grimace.

They rode back to Kurt's house, Thad's mother—who had been invited to stay for Christmas dinner—riding with Kurt's father and step-mother while Flint was crammed into Kurt's car with the other five boys. Not that he minded, as he'd simply pulled Thad onto his lap and held him close, whispering into his ear and watching him smile and blush from all the attention.

Jeff and Nick were intermittently saying 'I told you so' and singing random snippets of a song they were making up as they went about a wildcat, grinning as Thad giggled.

Flint barely registered the others' presence in the car. Thad was really the only one he could see right now. He was almost upset that the others were there because he had to stop himself from kissing Thad silly every time he looked at him through those dark eyes shining with love.

When they climbed out of the car twenty minutes later, Flint lifted Thad carefully into his arms despite Thad's protests that his legs were perfectly fine.

Everything suddenly seemed a thousands times more incredible. The beauty of the soft snow and twinkling holiday lights, the gentle touch of fat snowflakes fluttering over them as he carried Thad inside, forcing himself to watch where he was going instead of simply staring at Thad.

Acorn practically threw a fit when they walked into the house, meowing and trying to climb Flint's leg until he set Thad gently on the couch so that the cat could jump onto his chest and rub against his

face, purring loudly. Thad giggled and tried to push him away, scrunching up his nose and scratching behind the cat's tufted ears. All throughout opening gifts—during which Jeff and Nick successfully covered the living room floor in a sea of wrapping paper—Flint wasn't even really paying attention, his eyes continually darting to Thad. He didn't even register any of his gifts until he opened the one from Thad and Blaine groaned in jealousy.

It was a Quaffle from the previous summer's League Final in July, when the Tornados had won by a landslide, which was signed by all seven team members of that season. Flint remembered listening to the broadcast over the wireless at home with his father, Thad curled up next to him, reading, occasionally smiling indulgently when they cheered about something.

Flint stared at the Quaffle through the glass case, unable to string together anything coherent and instead deciding to simply lean over from where he was sitting against the couch to give Thad a kiss that incited catcalls from Jeff and Nick, a smirk from Kurt, and a flustered splutter from Thad.

Honestly, Flint didn't care anymore. The thought of never hearing Thad laugh again, of his dark eyes never giving him that searching look, or his soft lips moving against his own had awakened something inside him. Kurt's step-brother returned after a few hours, frowning faintly and wearing a green, knit sweater with 'I love Rachel' in red letters. Jeff and Nick took one look at him before bursting into a fit of giggles that lasted a full twenty minutes while Finn scowled and went upstairs to get changed.

Kurt's father Conjured up extra chairs and expanded the table so they could all sit together for the dinner Carole—with help from Thad's mother, who made quick work of the meal with her wand—had prepared for them.

Thad struggled a little with his knife and fork as he was still weak from the days of inactivity. When he sighed after dropping his fork for the fifth time and stared a little sadly at his food, Flint pushed his own plate away and turned to him.

"Here, let me, pet," he said, smiling as he held a bite up to Thad's mouth. Thad blushed faintly but accepted it, smiling as he chewed. "It's nice having solid food again," he said thoughtfully after he swallowed. "It's funny...I didn't really realize what I'd been missing all until I started getting those things back again."

"Yeah?" Flint said, glancing up from cutting Thad's turkey.

"Mhmm," Thad said, opening his mouth and chewing slowly as he frowned in consideration. "It smelled so...*clean* in that room. I'm so used to Jeff and Nick setting off fireworks in the common room or

throwing their dirty clothes on me to wake me up that it was...weird, I guess. Not that I miss having their socks in my face, but..." he trailed off, lifting his glass of juice with a shaking hand to take a sip. "And I missed the fresh air. I don't like the cold but...it's nice. And the way the snow kind of sparkles." He smiled and shrugged. After a moment, he bit his lip a little nervously and looked down at his lap.

"What's wrong?" Flint said, pausing to look at him.

Thad glanced up, his dark eyes searching him for a moment before he spoke. "I missed you the most, though," he whispered. "I felt so cold in that bed and all I could think of is how warm you always are and that if you were there I wouldn't mind it so much, being asleep for so long, because you'd keep me warm."

Flint took his hand under the table and squeezed it very gently.

"Did you miss me?" Thad said very quietly. "I mean...before you found out about what was wrong?"

"Of course I did," Flint said, scooting a little closer so that the others couldn't overhear. Though he didn't think he had to worry as Jeff and Nick had been flicking mashed potatoes at each other and some of it had just landed on Kurt, who was now shouting at them while they giggled, Blaine concealing a grin and Finn watching a little anxiously.

"I was going crazy without you, Thad. When you sent me that letter last week about how sad you were and how much you missed me...I couldn't stand the thought of you crying without me being there to hold you, even though you said you were having fun with everyone...I tried to think that you were, having fun I mean. I hate it when you're upset, pet. I hate seeing you cry.

"When I got that letter from Kurt yesterday, I...I didn't know to do. My parents were out with some friends so I was home by myself I think I just stared at it for an hour. I didn't even finish it. I got to the part about you being in the hospital and I couldn't read any more. It was like my brain stopped working.

"I don't even remember it, but this morning my throat was really sore and I thought it was just from getting sick and crying but...my dad said when they got home last night was I just sitting there...screaming." He rubbed the back of his neck, remembering the brief visit from his concerned Muggle neighbors, who'd heard him despite the fact that his bedroom was in the basement.

Thad looked concerned at this and reached up to brush his fingers gently over Flint's neck. "Are you alright?" he said softly.

"I'm fine," Flint said firmly. "I'm not worried about anything but you getting better, alright? Don't you dare fret about me."

Thad nodded reluctantly and allowed Flint to continue feeding him. He didn't manage to eat much as his body was adjusting to eating actual

food again, but Flint was fully prepared to keep a close eye on him until he gained back the weight he'd lost over the past week. After they'd finished eating, Thad's mother had to leave as she needed to be back at work the next morning. She was reluctant to leave Thad there but seemed to be comforted by the fact that Flint was with him. She'd certainly warmed up to him since he'd been the one to wake Thad in the hospital and pulled him into another brief hug before she took her return Portkey back to Wales.

"I need a shower," Thad announced the moment she was gone. "I feel really...icky."

"Are you sure you can manage?" Flint said. Thad had been moving shakily since they'd left the hospital, as wobbly on his feet as a newborn unicorn foal.

"I don't know," Thad said. He blushed furiously. "But it's not like you can shower with me."

Flint bit back a grin. "Maybe not," he said. He frowned in thought.

"Wait here, okay?" he said, settling Thad onto the couch, Acorn immediately climbing onto his lap and curling into a ball. "I'll be right back."

Thad looked mildly upset but nodded, petting Acorn absentmindedly and rolling his eyes as Jeff and Nick plopped down on either side of him and started singing again.

Flint went upstairs to the bathroom Blaine had shown him to earlier when he'd first arrived. Seeing Acorn searching for Thad earlier had brought on a fresh wave of tears and he'd needed almost half an hour to calm himself down.

He flipped on the tap in the tub, waiting for the water to warm before stopping the drain. Glancing around, it was obvious that the bathroom was Kurt's. It was almost overly clean, with bottles of expensive hair and skin products filling the small basket by the sink. There were indications of the other boys sharing it though. Jeff's sweatshirt was hanging across the towel rack and Blaine's reading glasses were sitting on the counter next to all of their toothbrushes. A few of Finn's things were scattered around the rather large room as well, but he was sure that Kurt forced him to keep most of his things contained in the basket beside the vanity labeled 'Finn' to try and keep the clutter to a minimum.

There was a bottle of sweet-smelling bubble bath beside the claw-footed tub and he poured a little of it into the rising water, watching thick white bubbles blossom across the surface. He turned off the water when the bubbles had almost reached to the curved lip of the tub and went back downstairs to find Thad flipping through the updated



Runes dictionary Blaine had given him. He closed the book and smiled up at Flint when he approached.

"Will you come with me?" Flint said, holding out his hand to help him up.

Thad tilted his head in curiosity but took his hand, standing a little shakily and falling against him.

"Sorry," he muttered. "Still getting my feet back."

"It's fine," Flint said, kissing the top of his head and wrapping his arm around his waist. He glanced at Kurt, who was sitting on the floor leaning back between Blaine's legs and browsing a copy of the January issue of an apothecarist's supply catalog as Blaine read his new Arithmancy book. Jeff and Nick were preoccupied with attempting to make hot chocolate without magic, Finn trying to explain how to work the microwave but giving up as they two Beaters started having a marshmallow fight.

Hoping none of them would realize they were missing, Flint half-carried Thad upstairs to the bathroom.

"Flint what—oh," Thad said, falling silent as he saw the full tub, steam rising gently from it into the air. He blushed faintly.

"I can leave, if you want," Flint said, taking in his wide eyes and almost sensing his heartbeat shooting up in his chest.

"No," Thad squeaked. He coughed. "No...no, you can stay. Just...can you give me a minute?"

Flint nodded and kissed him on the cheek before leaving, closing the door behind him. He heard Thad turn on the sink and brush his teeth, muttering something about being disgusting that made Flint suppress a grin.

"Okay," Thad said a few minutes later, sounding nervous. "You can...you can come in."

Flint glanced down the hall to make sure no one was coming to look for them before slipping back into the bathroom and locking the door. He turned back to Thad and his heart broke a little when he saw him standing there in his just his pajama bottoms. His weight loss was much more noticeable seeing his bare torso, his ribs visible through his skin each time he inhaled. He wasn't unhealthily thin but seeing him so affected by what had happened brought tears to Flint's eyes.

"Thad," he said, his voice cracking as he moved towards him and placed his hands gently on his waist, pulling him close and meeting his lips in a slow kiss, tasting cinnamon from his toothpaste and the underlying sweetness that he always tasted when he kissed him.

"I'm sorry," he whispered as he pulled back, brushing his hand over Thad's cheek. "I can't say it enough, pet. I should have been there."

"It's alright," Thad said, snuggling against him. "You're here now. That's all I care about." He looked up and saw the tears in Flint's eyes, reaching up to wipe them away with his thumb with a small smile.

"Don't cry. I'm better now."

Flint sniffed, blinking hard.

Thad rocked up on his toes, gripping Flint's shoulders to stay steady, and kissed the spot at the crook of his jaw that never failed to relax him. He slid his hands down Flint's chest and fiddled with the hem of his shirt, pushing it up a little as he continued to kiss gently at Flint's jawline.

Smiling, Flint allowed him to hitch his shirt up before taking over and pulling it over his head. Thad pressed against him immediately, sighing at the touch.

"You're so warm," he murmured against him, closing his eyes. He inhaled slowly. "And you always smell good."

Flint smiled, rubbing his back very gently. "Do you need me to help you in the tub?"

He could almost feel Thad blushing where his cheek was pressed against his chest. "Y-yes," he said a little breathlessly.

"It's alright," Flint said as he stepped back. "I'm not going to try anything."

Thad bit his lip, shaking a little as he wriggled out of his pajamas and boxers, keeping his gaze locked with Flint's as he did. He swallowed nervously, wrapping his arms around his bare torso and looking self-conscious.

Flint smiled reassuringly as he helped Thad lower himself into the tub. Thad let out a long sigh of content as the hot water hit him, leaning back and sinking down so that only his head was visible above the clouds of bubbles.

"This feels really good," he mumbled. He turned to Flint and lifted himself a little from the water into a comfortable position. "Thank you. I know I'm probably gross right now."

"You're not," Flint said, pulling up the chair from the vanity and setting it so he was sitting at the back of the tub. "You are, without a doubt, the sexiest and most adorable thing I've ever seen. It wouldn't matter if you were rolling around in the mud all day, I'd still think that."

Thad smiled, blushing.

"Here, pet, let me..." Flint reached over the back of the side and kneading Thad's shoulders gently.

Thad groaned, closing his eyes and rolling his shoulders into Flint's touch. "Flint that...mmm, that feels *really* good."

Flint smiled and continued to work at the wet flesh, kissing Thad's temple as he did. "I'm so glad you're awake," he said. "I don't know

what I'd do if I had to see you like that for days or, Merlin forbid, *months* or years."

Thad smiled, turning to him to plant a soft peck on his lips. He bit his lip as Flint pulled his hands away, blushing and slinking back down into the water again until he disappeared below the surface. He emerged a few seconds later, his hair sopping wet with bubbles clinging to it. Flint laughed as Thad wiped his eyes, grinning a little mischievously. "You know," Thad said, flicking bubbles absently and not looking at him. "There's plenty of room in here."

Flint frowned. "Okay," he said, not really sure what he meant by his comment.

Thad glanced at him very briefly, his face bright red. "I mean," he said, returning to scooping up bubbles absentmindedly.

"There's...enough room for two people."

Flint blinked, still confused. Then it dawned on him what Thad was suggesting and thought he might pass out at the very thought, his pulse rocketing to an unhealthy speed.

"Y-yeah?" he said, trying to keep his throat from closing off.

Thad nodded, still not looking at him. After a moment's silence, he turned, his dark eyes shining and the tiniest smirk on his face. "I really missed you," he said softly.

Flint kept trying to tell himself to calm down but his body refused to listen as he broke out into a nervous sweat. "I...are you sure, pet?" he said. "I mean...you're still sick."

"I'm sure," Thad said reaching out with a soapy, wet hand to run his fingers down Flint's chest. "I missed you."

"O-okay," Flint said, nodding nervously. "Just...one second."

"Okay," Thad said, lowering himself back under the water again as Flint stood.

Flint took the time Thad was immersed to take a few steadying breaths. He unbuttoned his jeans with trembling fingers and stripped them and his boxers off, glancing at the door and praying that no one would come looking for them.

Thad resurfaced with a light gasp, shaking water out of his eyes and freezing when he saw Flint. He smiled and moved towards the front of the tub, looking nervous and excited.

Flint gulped and climbed into the tub, settling back where Thad had been sitting before and fighting back a groan when Thad slid towards him through the water and sat between his legs, leaning back and resting his head on his shoulder. His heart was beating so fast he thought it would give out at any minute. They'd barely even been completely naked together before and when they were, they were so

focused on getting straight to the point that they'd never done anything this intimate before.

Thad seemed much more relaxed than he was with entire situation and barely even flinched when he scooted back and brushed against Flint's rapidly growing erection. In fact, he let out a small giggle.

"Pet, what's gotten into you?" Flint choked, his own hands shaking where they were gripping the sides of the tub to keep them from traveling...elsewhere.

Thad tilted his head back to look at him. "I told you," he said, nuzzling against the side of his neck. "I missed you. I kept thinking 'what if I never see Flint again? What if I sleep forever and I never get to kiss him or have him hold me when I fall asleep or—'." He stopped suddenly and his eyes widened as he turned to face forward away from him.

"Pet?" Flint said, frowning at his sudden anxiety.

"Nevermind," Thad said, trying to move away from him.

"Hey," Flint said, slipping his hands under the water to hold him there. "What's wrong?"

Thad swallowed and licked his lips nervously. "I...I was just thinking that...I'm ready," he said in a small voice.

"Ready?" Flint said, frowning and watching him closely. "For what?"

Thad turned to him slowly and gave him a familiar searching look. "I-I love you," he whispered.

"I love you, too," Flint said, smiling and kissing him gently.

Thad twisted between his legs so that he was lying on his side. He watched Flint steadily for a moment before angling his head and kissing him. It was careful and sweet and so very *Thad* but there was an underlying passion to it that left him gasping for air and tightening his grip around Thad's middle to pull him closer.

Everything was warm, wet skin and Thad's gentle fingertips grazing over his muscles and down his stomach under the water. He felt like he was overheating. The combination of the hot water with the way Thad always managed to bring the temperature up twenty degrees just by looking at him a certain way was almost too much for his body to handle.

Thad's fingers glided along the crook of his lap and the inside of his thighs before he gripped him gently in one hand, digging the nails of his other hand into his thigh.

Flint groaned softly into Thad's mouth, moving one hand from Thad's waist to run it through his wet hair and brush along his damp cheek.

"Flint," Thad gasped. "I want...I want...you."

"What do you want me to do, pet?" Flint mumbled, pressing open-mouthed kisses along Thad's jaw and across his ear.

Thad whimpered and squeezed him underwater, making his breath stutter in his throat. "I want you to...Flint, I want...sex."

Flint froze, pretty certain he'd heard him wrong. He pulled back and stared at him. "W-what?" he said, blinking.

Thad swallowed, looking anxious again. "I...I don't know how else to s-say it," he said. "But...I'm ready. After what happened. I don't want to wait anymore."

Flint was quite sure his heart stopped beating for a few seconds after this. He was *positive* his brain stopped functioning because he couldn't do anything beyond stare at Thad, his mouth hanging slightly open and his eyes wide.

"Y-you don't want to?" Thad said in a small voice, looking horrified.

"No!" Flint said hastily, wincing as it came out as a shout. "I mean, I...yeah, I-I want to. If...if you're *sure* you're ready. I'm not going to push you into it, Thad."

"I know," Thad said, smiling as he drew runes on Flint's chest with his finger. "I want to." He lifted his eyes and Flint almost shrank away from intensity of his gaze. "I *really* want to."

"O-okay," Flint, feeling himself blush. He was completely clueless as to what to do at this point. Honestly, the idea still scared him a little.

Thad looked just as nervous, though admittedly he seemed more sure of himself than Flint. "If you don't want to do this, we don't have to," he said, looking a little downcast by Flint's lack of enthusiasm.

"No, I-I want to," Flint said, nodding. "I just...Thad, I have no idea what I'm supposed to do."

Thad smiled faintly and leaned up to kiss him reassuringly. "That's alright," he said as he pulled away and moved his mouth towards Flint's ear. "Neither do I. But...I'm a fast learner."

Flint closed his eyes and bit back another groan as Thad sucked gently on his earlobe and moved his hand around him underwater. He loved it when he did things like this, taking control and yet still remaining his nervous, careful self.

Thad removed his hand from around him, continuing to suck marks along his neck as he placed his fingers around Flint's wrist and moved his hand back to rest on his lower back.

Flint tried not to act as nervous as he was as moved his other hand to rub small circles on the small of Thad's back before sliding both hands down to squeeze very gently on the soft flesh.

Thad groaned against him and squirmed impatiently, his lips moving a little more sloppily on his neck. Holding his breath, Flint slipped one hand across down and brushed his fingers tentatively over his entrance.

Thad bit down hard on his neck, his chest rising and falling with each shallow breath. "Flint," he whined. "Please...I-I'm ready. I've practiced."

Flint froze.

"W-what?" he croaked.

Thad nodded. "I wanted to do this when we got back from holidays," he murmured between his increasingly messy kisses on Flint's neck. "I wanted to make sure I'd be okay for you. I thought of you while I did it though, so that's okay, right?"

Flint had no idea how to respond to this. Finding out Thad had actually touched himself to get ready for their first time, and thought of Flint while he'd done it, was probably the hottest thing he'd ever heard in his entire life.

"You're not mad, are you?" Thad said, pulling away from his neck to look at him anxiously.

"Mad?" Flint choked. "No, Thad, that's...oh my god, that's so sexy."

"Really?" Thad said, looking surprised.

Flint nodded, suddenly feeling a lot less nervous. "C'mere," he muttered, squeezing Thad's ass and kissing him hard. Thad responded immediately, digging his nails into Flint's thigh and groaning.

Flint brushed over Thad's entrance again, rubbing gently before sliding his index finger in very slowly. Thad moaned into his mouth, his tongue moving sloppily around his mouth and his hands exploring his chest and arms needily.

Flint tried not to think about how bizarre what he was doing was, focusing instead on kissing Thad as he slipped a second finger inside him, spreading them carefully. Thad writhed against him, whimpering a little at the pain but nodding to encourage him to continue. Flint hesitantly pressed a third finger in, moving them gently and completely in shock of how incredibly *tight* it was. He didn't know how Thad wasn't screaming in pain right now.

But Thad was panting and mewling and nibbling on Flint's bottom lip, his hips twitching underwater as he started spouting off random swears, in both English and Runes, Flint only catching snatches of what he was saying. The noises he was making were unbelievable.

"Flint," he gasped. "Please...just, ahhh, naudin mas, now, linthil."

Flint nodded shakily and pulled his hand away, Thad whining a little at the loss of contact.

"Pet, are you—"

"Flint, I said yes!" Thad almost shouted as he turned around in the tub to face away from him, looking annoyed. "Please stop acting like I'm a child and just have sex with me already!"

Flint stared at him, almost scared to speak after this outburst. "Okay, pet," he said, stroking Thad's back comfortingly.

"I'm sorry," Thad muttered, ducking his head. "I just...I'm ready. I don't want to wait any more. I know I want to do this. I know I want *you* to be the one I do this with. Please."

"Alright," Flint said softly, glancing at the door before trailing gentle kisses across Thad's shoulders. He gripped Thad's hips carefully and lifted him up underwater, taking a deep breath before lowering him down very slowly so that the head of his erection pressed into him. Flint bit back a shout at the sensation. It was incredible, nothing like the other things they'd done together—though he enjoyed those, too, of course—and he'd barely even started.

Thad whined a little but reached back to grab Flint's thighs and pull himself down until he was flush against his lap, letting out a long, keening note as he did.

Flint thought he might black-out from the pleasure.

"Thad," he choked. "Oh my god, pet...you're...that's...I can't even think right now. You're amazing. Dammit. I love you."

Thad's chin was against his chest and he was panting as he tried to adjust to the sudden change.

"Are you alright?" Flint said, wrapping his arms around Thad's waist and sucking gently on his shoulder blade.

"Yeah," Thad said in a small voice. "It's just...really big."

Flint groaned and squeezed him a little tighter. It was amazing how he managed to be so encouraging without even trying.

"I love you," Flint mumbled against him. "Pet...god I love you more than you know."

"I love you, too," Thad said, reaching up to wipe away the tears forming in his eyes. "I'm okay," he said upon seeing Flint's concerned look. "Just hurts a bit."

Flint pulled him back so he was resting against his chest, reaching one hand up to turn his head and capture his lips in a deep kiss.

"Flint," Thad whined after almost a full minute, pushing back against him a little.

Flint nodded and placed his hands on Thad's hips, caressing them gently before lifting him off his lap and pulling him back slowly. Thad swore into his mouth, wriggling against him as Flint repeated the motion, fighting back any noise with increasing difficulty as he reminded himself that their friends—not to mention Kurt's parents—were still downstairs.

Thad mewled and gasped, dropping his head back against Flint's shoulder and closing his eyes, his fingernails digging almost painfully into Flint's thighs.

Flint jerked his hips up as he pulled Thad down against him and Thad let out a shout of pleasure, tossing his head back and squirming. "Shh," Flint said, rubbing his hips soothingly and kissing his neck. "Pet, they can hear us still." He swore internally for not remembering to cast *Muffliato* before climbing into the tub.

"Sorry," Thad whined, biting his lip and whimpering as Flint pushed into him again, hitting the same spot. "Oh god, Flint."

"It's fine, just...here," Flint said, lifting his hand up to cover Thad's mouth and wrapping his other hand around Thad underwater, using solely his hips to create friction.

Thad bit down on his palm, groaning and panting against it and writhing underwater as he got close.

"You're so sexy," Flint breathed in his ear. "Pet, you're so sexy it hurts sometimes. I don't know why you'd ever think you aren't. I love you and I love that you thought about this, about us, and touched yourself. You keep surprising me and, ugh, it's so hot thinking about it."

Thad was actually crying at this point from the pleasure, tears sliding down his face from his closed eyes and over Flint's damp fingers as he struggled to stay silent.

"Pet, don't cry," Flint whispered, kissing his jaw gently. "My little wildcat, I love you, I love what you do to me. You fell unbelievable, you know that?"

Thad opened his eyes and turned a little to meet his gaze, his pupils wide and blown with lust as Flint rolled his hips up against him and pumped his hand steadily.

"Are you close, pet?" Flint muttered, feeling the heat coiling in his own gut, something tightening at the base of his spine as his hands started to shake.

Thad nodded, whimpering against his hand.

"Go on, Thad," Flint said, smiling and pulling his hand away so he could pull him into a searing kiss, the combination of sensations—the heat and feel of the water, Thad's wet lips moving smoothly against him, the unbelievable pressure around him—was driving him insane. It was too much, surely his body couldn't handle this all at once.

Thad suddenly stilled and moaned loudly. "Flint," he whimpered as he trembled against him. "Oh god, oh god, oh god...Flint, I l-love you."

Flint couldn't answer. Thad had clenched down around him as his orgasm hit and pleasure rocked through him like nothing he'd ever felt before. White lights exploded across his vision as he came, one hand tightening around Thad's shoulder, the other gripping the edge of the tub so hard his knuckles were white.

"Thad," he breathed. "Ugh, that's...you're amazing."



Thad collapsed against him, panting heavily and almost laughing.

"Best...bath...ever," he said, leaning his head against Flint's, his face flushed from the heat.

Flint chuckled, blinking hard and trying to stay conscious as his heart rate started to settle back down. He gently lifted Thad off him, kissing his neck as he whined at the feeling.

"You alright, pet?" he mumbled, a rush of drowsiness sweeping through him as the hot water soothed his loose body.

Thad gave him a sated smile and nodded. "Yeah," he said, blushing faintly. "Sorry I yelled at you."

"I like it," Flint said nuzzling his neck. "You're sexy when you get angry."

Thad giggled and settled back in his lap, closing his eyes as they both felt ready to drift off.

There was a sudden knock at the door and they both sat up straight, eyes wide.

"When you're finished being a wildcat, I need my jumper," Jeff said, sounding faintly annoyed.

"And congratulations on finally putting us all out of our misery and doing it already," Nick said, sniggering.

"Kurt said you'd better bleach the tub when you're finished, though," Jeff said.

They both burst into laughter and walked away down the hall.

Thad groaned in embarrassment and sank down into the water so that only his head was above the now nearly gone layer of bubbles.

"Sorry, pet," Flint said, squeezing Thad around the middle.

"It's alright," Thad said with a sigh. "They'd have found out soon enough, the way they're always snooping. They have no sense of personal space."

Flint grinned, something he suddenly found himself unable to stop doing.

Thad bit his lip and wrinkled up his nose adorably. "We just had sex," he said conversationally.

"Yes, yes we did," Flint said, laughing.

Thad grinned and giggled, burying his face in Flint's neck and squirming a little. "I can't believe it," he said. "I...that was fun."

"Yes," Flint said, resting his head on Thad's. "Yes it was."

He didn't want to leave the tub, could have simply sat there with Thad for the rest of the day. But it was Christmas and apparently everyone knew what they were doing so, after a few minutes, he forced himself up and retrieved a towel for himself, drying off briefly and pulling on his clothes before helping Thad out onto the bathmat.

Thad winced a little as he moved, wrapping the towel around his shoulders and shivering in the sudden chill of the air. Flint was suddenly reminded of the previous summer when Thad had emerged from the lake at the post-Final party, grinning faintly and sopping wet. That had been the first time Thad had even let Flint touch him. He smiled at how far their relationship had come.

"W-w-what's so f-funny?" Thad said, his teeth chattering as he pulled on his boxers, stumbling slightly.

Flint caught his arm and steadied him before pulling him close.

"Nothing. I love you," he said, hoping he conveyed just how true his words were. "I love you so much, Thad. I hope you know that. I meant what I said in the hospital. I want to be with you...always. Thad, if I could marry you, I would."

Thad looked up at him in shock, dark eyes wide and lips parted.

"Really?" Thad said breathlessly, tears welling up in his eyes.

"Yes," Flint said, his throat tightening with emotion. "Yes, Thad, I love you so much. It honestly hurts me sometimes when I see you, you're so perfect, I can't even take it. Seeing you in that hospital bed...it was like someone was ripping me in half. I'm not...I don't feel like *me* without you, Thad. If you were gone, I wouldn't be whole anymore. You're...you're a part of me. And I would never be right again if I lost you. *Never*. And I don't care if it sounds stupid or cliché or sappy—"

"It doesn't," Thad said, cutting him off. "I love you, too. Just as much. I still get pixies in my tummy when I see you."

Flint kissed his forehead, laughing softly. "You're so sweet," he murmured. "Honestly, how are you the most adorable, sexy, smart, perfect thing in the world and what did I do to deserve you?"

Thad giggled and snuggled against his chest. "Just lucky, I guess," he said. "Like me. With you."

Flint laughed again and helped him get dressed, deciding he might as well stay in his pajamas as they weren't going anywhere for the rest of the day. He paused for a moment to look at him, pushing his dark, damp hair back and pulling him into another kiss that left them both breathless and Thad faintly flushed.

"I'll never get tired of kissing you," Flint said as he unstopped the tub and moved with Thad towards the door.

"Good," Thad said, grabbing Jeff's sweatshirt before snuggling under Flint's arm and walking out of the bathroom with him, grimacing very faintly as he did.

"Sorry," Flint said, squeezing him around the shoulders.

"That's alright," Thad said, smiling up at him as they went downstairs. "I don't mind. It'll just make me think of you. Like when you leave marks on my neck. I like it. I just reminds me that I'm all yours."

Flint bit back a grin as they entered the living room.

"Give me that," Jeff said, snatching his sweatshirt from Thad. "I don't want your wildcat germs on it."

"You both sicken me," Nick said with a sniff as Jeff pulled on his sweatshirt.

"Honestly, we shower there," Jeff said as he emerged, tousle-haired. Thad blushed furiously, though he had the smallest of smirks dancing on his lips as he moved with Flint to sit on the couch. Kurt gave Flint a knowing smile before returning to his catalog, Blaine absently kissing his hair softly and giving him a one-armed squeeze around the waist.

"We made hot chocolate," Nick said as he and Jeff pulled on hats, scarves, and gloves.

"It's brilliant, of course," Jeff said, moving towards the back door.

"Finnegan, are you coming?"

Finn emerged from the kitchen wearing gloves and a heavy coat, grinning faintly. "That's not my name, you know," he said, glancing at Jeff.

"We know," Nick said, shrugging.

"But we have a nickname for Kurtsie, so we thought you deserved one, too," Jeff said, grinning.

"Because Kurtsie and Finnegan are on the same level," Kurt muttered, rolling his eyes.

"Hush, Kurtsie," Jeff said, sticking his tongue out at him.

"Go back to reading; we're having a snowball fight with Finnegan,"

Nick said, pulling open the back door and going out into the snow with Jeff.

"Oh, hey, Flint," Finn said, pausing at the doorway. "We're all playing football tomorrow at the park. Well, me, my friends, Jeff, Nick, and Blaine. Want to join?"

"Sure," Flint said, shrugging.

"Cool," Finn said, grinning before slipping outside, where he was promptly pelted with snowballs from a laughing Jeff and Nick. He closed the door behind him and struggled to hide from the rapid barrage hitting the door.

Thad yawned and snuggled against him, giggling as he watched Acorn swatting at the dangling Christmas ornaments.

Flint slipped his arms around him and pulled him close, fighting back a yawn with difficulty and leaning back against the arm of the couch.

"Hey, Flint?" Thad muttered sleepily as he pressed back against him.

"Yes, pet?" Flint mumbled, rubbing his thumb along Thad's hipbone.

"Merry Christmas," Thad said with a yawn.  
Flint smiled. "Merry Christmas, pet. I love you."  
"I love you, too," Thad murmured, his body turning a little limp in his arms as he drifted off.  
Flint kissed his hair and closed his eyes, privately thinking that this was the best Christmas he'd even had in his entire life.

---

Kurt pulled his scarf a little more snugly around his neck, smiling faintly as he watched Flint and Thad walk together ahead of the rest of them, their arms around each as they spoke softly.

"They're going to be completely inseparable now, aren't they?" he said, turning to Blaine.

"Insufferable is more like it," Jeff muttered from where he was walking behind Kurt with Nick and Finn.

"Unbearable," Nick offered.

"Intolerable."

"Excruciating."

"Agonizing."

"Alright, I get it," Kurt said, laughing faintly as they continued on their route to the park. Jeff and Nick could complain all they wanted about Flint and Thad having sex, but he knew secretly they were still just happy about Thad being awake.

Blaine grinned and squeezed his hand as they turned into the park after Flint and Thad. "So, are you going to cheer me on?" he said, glancing over at him.

"Maybe," Kurt said, smirking. "If you're any good."

"Oh, I see how it is," Blaine said shaking his head. "Only like me when I'm winning, do you?"

"Something like that," Kurt said, smiling as he watched Flint stop at the edge of the field and lay out the blanket he'd brought for Thad on a bare spot of ground under a big pine tree.

Thad pulled him down by his collar for a long kiss before allowing him to join the boys already waiting. Jeff, Nick, and Finn joined them, introducing Flint to the others briefly.

"Don't hurt yourself, okay?" Kurt said as he turned to Blaine.

"You're talking to someone who takes Bludgers to the head every few weeks," Blaine said, smirking. "I'll be fine."

Kurt smiled and gave him a slow kiss, squeezing his ass before letting him join the others. Blaine winked over his shoulder at him as he jogged out onto the snowy field.

Kurt waved to Mercedes and Tina, who were making their way across the field towards him, as he settled down next to Thad and spread the blanket he'd brought with him over their laps.

"How are you feeling today?" Kurt said, a little anxiously, as he turned to Thad and opened the thermos of tea he'd brought.

"Good," Thad sighed, his eyes fixed on Flint, who'd just blown a kiss in Thad's direction as they split into teams.

"I'm glad," Kurt said, hugging him around the shoulders. "I missed you this week. I had to deal with Jeff and Nick and try to control them all by myself."

"Sorry," Thad mumbled as he accepted the thermos and took a sip of tea.

"Don't be sorry," Kurt said as Mercedes and Tina threw their blanket across the bed of pine needles and grass next to them. "I'm just happy you're back."

"Me too," Thad said, smiling and handing him the thermos back.

"And Flint seems happy, too," Kurt said, smirking.

Thad blushed but didn't disagree, shrugging his shoulders a little.

"And how are you boys today?" Mercedes said, smiling over at them as she and Tina settled down.

"Good," Kurt said. "Thad's doing particularly well."

"Yeah?" Tina said, smiling. "Well, I'm glad you're feeling better."

"He's feeling a lot more than that," Kurt muttered.

"Kurt!" Thad hissed, smacking his arm and turning scarlet.

Kurt grinned and fell silent to watch Finn yelp and drop the ball as Flint tackled him around the middle. Jeff, who'd apparently decided his strategy would be to make as much noise as possible, snatched the ball from the ground and sprinted towards the goal, screaming like a banshee as Nick fell about laughing.

"Goal!" Jeff shouted, throwing the ball into the air and leaping up, attempting to spin around and ending up flat on his back in the snow. Nick howled with laughter, the rest of them smiling, too, though Sam, Puck, and Mike looked vaguely confused by the two Beaters antics. Kurt bit back a laugh as Nick, still laughing, attempted to kick for the extra point, slipping on the grass and falling down, where he continued to laugh hysterically, Jeff doubled over next to him as he tried to hold the ball up.

"Why did we ever think this was a good idea?" Kurt muttered, raising his hand to return Blaine's wave.

Thad giggled, scooting a little closer to him and shivering slightly as he reached for the tea. "I'm just glad Flint's playing," he said, smiling a little mischievously. "He's not going to want to keep his coat on forever."

"Wildcat," Kurt muttered, smirking as Thad fell about giggling next to him.

Sure enough, within fifteen minutes, the boys had started peeling their coats and gloves off, their breath rising in heavy clouds in front of them as they played.

Thad tilted his head to the side, biting his lip as he watched Flint blitz Finn for the fifth time.

"You two are so in love, it's a little sickening," Kurt said offhandedly as Finn pulled himself up, grumbling and rubbing his back.

Thad smiled. "Yeah," he said with a sigh, resting his head on Kurt's shoulder. "Do you...I mean, do you think he'll always love me?"

"Of course," Kurt said, giving him a surprised look. "Will you always love him?"

Thad nodded, a faraway look in his eyes. "Forever," he said. "It don't feel so nervous about the future when I think about getting to spend it with him."

"That's good," Kurt said, and Mercedes and Tina laughed at Jeff and Nick, who were doing a little victory dance as Nick scored another touchdown. "Do you know what you're going to do after Hogwarts yet?"

Thad shrugged. "Probably work at Gringotts or something," he said.

"They always need Runes translators."

Kurt nodded slowly. "And Flint?"

Thad shifted a little as he took another sip of tea. "We were talking last night when you were all asleep," he said. "He said he wants to try out for the Tornadoes with Blaine."

"Really?" Kurt said, turning to him in surprise. "I...but what about his broom?"

Thad shrugged again. "Dunno," he said, sighing. "But he'll figure something out. He always does." He smiled, blushing as Flint winked at him as they all decided to end their game and go to the coffee shop for lunch. "If you'll excuse me," Thad said, lifting himself up, still a little shaky, and making his way out to Flint, throwing his arms around his neck and kissing him fiercely.

Kurt shook his head, laughing as Blaine sat down in Thad's vacated spot, panting lightly. "How was I, love?" he said, leaning over to kiss Kurt on the cheek.

"Spectacular," Kurt muttered, grinning.

"Hey, for a first-timer, I thought I did pretty well," Blaine murmured, nibbling on his ear.

"Are we still talking about football?" Kurt quipped, cocking an eyebrow and turning to him.

"Maybe," Blaine said, grinning. "Maybe not." He nuzzled against Kurt's neck and Kurt yelped.

"Blaine, your nose is freezing," he said, squirming.

"Sorry, love," Blaine said, blowing hot air on the spot before kissing it lightly. "Ready to go?"

Kurt sighed. "I suppose," he said, pushing up off the grass and folding up the blanket they'd been sitting on. "Though honestly, I'm not looking forward to eating lunch with a bunch of sweaty guys."

"Well," Blaine said, wrapping his arms around Kurt's waist and brushing his lips over his ear as the rest of them moved to leaving, chatting happily and not realizing they were not with them. "We could always do other things. It won't matter if I'm sweaty then. In fact, I could probably make sure you're just as bad."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Blaine, you're so charming," he muttered.

Blaine chuckled and rubbed his hips against him. Kurt couldn't help but groan when he felt Blaine's half-hard cock brush against his own.

"Is that a no?" Blaine breathed, slipping his hands down to squeeze his ass.

"Screw you," Kurt mumbled. He swore softly and pulled back to he could shout out to those leaving. "We're going to head back to the house," he said, tugging his coat down so they couldn't see his rather obvious problem. "We're...not hungry." He saw Thad's smirk as the rest of them called out goodbyes and waved.

"Come on," Blaine growled, grabbing his hand and pulling him along in the direction of the house.

"You know," Kurt said as he half-jogged alongside him. "You *are* pretty sexy when you get all hot and rough and sweaty like that."

"Are we still talking about football?" Blaine said, grinning.

"Maybe," Kurt replied.

Blaine chuckled again and picked up his pace a little. Within minutes, they were back at the house, shedding their outer layer before they'd even made it through the front door. Kurt let Acorn outside to chase birds, slamming the door shut behind him.

Blaine pushed Kurt up against the wall and started biting and sucking on his neck, groaning as Kurt bucked his hips up into him.

"Blaine," he gasped. "God, yes...I want you so bad right now."

Blaine slid his hands, which were still icy cold, up Kurt's shirt and over his stomach and sides. Kurt gasped at the sensation, goosebumps erupting on his arms as he shivered.

"Are you parents home?" Blaine mumbled as he unfastened his belt.

"Work," Kurt gasped.

"Good," Blaine grunted. "Because I'm going to fuck you against the wall and I don't want you to be quiet, got it?"

Kurt groaned at the tone of his voice, the hoarse growl that was dripping with lust and made him even harder. He nodded enthusiastically, dropping his head back against the wall as Blaine

thrust their hips together before tugging his jeans down just enough to pull himself free from his boxers. He pumped his hand around himself a few times, biting his lip and closing his eyes.

"Not fair," Kurt whined.

Blaine smirked and unfastened Kurt's jeans, pulling them down along with his briefs in one swift movement before turning him around so he was pressed flush against the wall. He kicked his legs apart to allow himself better access.

"Blaine, shouldn't we...lock the door, or something?" Kurt said, glancing at the front door, which was only about five feet from them.

"No," Blaine grunted as he pulled out his wand and muttered what was probably, as of late, the spell he used most often.

Kurt barely had time to prepare himself before Blaine was shoving two fingers into him, crooking and twisting them as Kurt started whimpering and mewling, his forehead pressed against the wall. "B-Blaine, *fuck*," he whined.

Blaine laughed and kissed the back of his neck, moving his fingers in and out at a steady pace. Kurt let out a small cry of pleasure when he hit his prostate, his hips twitching back towards him.

"Blaine, just...hurry it up, will you?" he groaned, still a little afraid someone would walk in on them.

He could almost hear Blaine's smirk as he slipped a third finger inside him, scissoring all three of them gently before pulling them free as he sucked a mark on the exposed flesh Kurt's shoulder where his sweater fell off the side.

Without warning, Blaine positioned himself and pushed inside Kurt in one smooth thrust.

"God, love," Blaine breathed, resting his head against Kurt's back as he quickly picked up a steady pace. "You're always so damn tight."

Kurt whimpered in reply, closing his eyes and digging his fingernails into the wall, sure he was going to leave marks at how hard he was doing it. Blaine's hands came to rest on top of Kurt's as he rocked against him, grunting faintly and groaning.

"Blaine," Kurt gasped. "Touch me."

Blaine wrapped one arm around him to pull him back from the wall, still thrusting into him as he slipped his other hand down to grip his cock firmly and pump in time with his movements.

Kurt groaned, gasping Blaine's name repeatedly as he started to feel himself getting close.

"Love, I, ugh, I never get over the sounds you make," Blaine growled.

"They're so fucking hot. Just like you."

Kurt panted beneath him, starting feel dizzy from all the pleasure.

"Blaine, I'm...I'm almost there," he breathed.



"Mmm, me too, love," Blaine whispered, biting on his earlobe as his movements became less timed.

Kurt moaned as Blaine hit his prostate and he was suddenly coming all over Blaine's hand and his own stomach. Blaine followed not long after, holding him in place with his arm around his hips and biting down hard on his shoulder.

"Fuck," Blaine breathed, falling against Kurt, his chest heaving as he tried to catch his breath.

They stood there for a long moment, breathing heavily in the silence.

"I hope I didn't just ruin this sweater," Kurt said conversationally as Blaine pulled himself free and went to get a towel, laughing faintly.

"Here, love," Blaine mumbled, kissing his neck as he wiped his leg gently with the wet towel before handing it to Kurt to try and clean his sweater. Luckily, it wasn't one he was overly attached to. "I'm going to go have a shower, okay? Unless you wanted to join me?"

Kurt grinned. "I think I'll make lunch, actually," he said. "I'm starving."

"Mmm, okay," Blaine said, pulling him into a slow kiss before retreating upstairs, his jeans still half undone.

Kurt hurried to get changed and cleaned up, giving up on his sweater and thinking he'd try and have it cleaned at school instead. He wondered vaguely if the house elves ever got sick of doing their laundry and found himself cracking up at the thought.

The others returned an hour or so later, by which time Kurt was curled up with Blaine on the recliner, watching TV with Acorn stretched out on Kurt's lap, purring happily.

Thad smirked a little at the sight of them but remained silent as he sat on the couch to watch with them, Flint moving upstairs to shower as Jeff, Nick, and Finn raided the fridge. Acorn leapt from Kurt's lap and into Thad's, settling in contentedly as his owner scratched him behind the ears.

"Didn't you just eat?" Kurt called, raising an eyebrow.

"Kurtsie, you should know by now that we're always hungry," Jeff said as he emerged from the kitchen clutching the bowl of leftover mashed potatoes.

"And Finnegan understands us," Nick said, gnawing on a roll.

Finn grinned happily as he sat down on the couch with a handful of Carole's sugar cookies.

"I swear, the three of you would eat Hogwarts completely empty,"

Kurt muttered, rolling his eyes and Thad and Blaine laughed.

They spent the next few days as they had their first at the house, lounging around and drinking hot chocolate, having snowball fights in the back yard and laughing at Jeff and Nick being ridiculous as always.

New Years Eve, Kurt woke to loud screams and equally loud laughter reaching the living room—where they'd all started sleeping since Flint had gotten there—from the second floor.

"What's going on?" he mumbled, sitting up and turning to Blaine, who was already up and reading.

"Jeff and Nick," he said simply. "They put firecrackers in Finn's bed to wake him up."

As if on cue, the two Beaters came bounding down the stairs, roaring with laughter as Finn ambled after them, looking shell-shocked but grinning faintly as his pajamas smoked.

"Honestly, Finn, you're the only one who actually *enjoys* getting pranked by them," Kurt muttered.

Finn shrugged and followed Jeff and Nick to the kitchen to get breakfast as Thad stirred where he'd been sleeping curled up in Flint's arms on the recliner.

"What happened?" he said, yawning and stretching as Flint kissed him on the top of the head.

"Jeff. Nick. Firecrackers," Kurt said.

"Oh," Thad said, nodding. They'd gotten to the point where didn't need to do much more than mention their friends names before they knew what was happening. "Who?"

"Finn," Blaine replied, turning the page in his book and pushing his glasses back up his nose.

Thad smiled. "I think they like him," he said, snuggling back into Flint's grip.

"If setting off explosives in someone's bed is a form of flattery then, yes, I'd say they do," Kurt said, stretching his arms above his head.

"The highest form of flattery," Thad quipped, grinning. "At least that's what they keep saying every time they do it to me."

Kurt laughed and pushed Acorn off his lap, kissing Blaine on the cheek before moving to the kitchen to get breakfast before Jeff, Nick, and Finn cleaned the fridge.

"Kettle's on the stove, love," Blaine called from the couch.

"Thanks," Kurt said, smiling.

"Kurtsie, are you still making biscuits later?" Jeff said as he scuffled with Nick over the last pop-tart.

"Yes," Kurt said, pouring himself a cup of tea from the kettle Blaine had already made up for him. "Why?"

"We want to help," Nick said, giving up on the pop-tart and digging in the cupboard for something else.

"Um, no," Kurt said, sipping his tea. "I wouldn't let you two near a hot oven with biohazard suits. You'd kill someone or yourselves."

"But, Kurtsie, we want to learn," Jeff whined.

"I said no," Kurt said. "Besides, all you really want is to eat the cookie dough."

"That's entirely off-point," Nick said with a sniff.

"It's entirely true," Thad said as he wandered into the kitchen to get himself a cup of tea, Finn moving past him to go back to the living room.

"You're both big, fat, wet blankets," Jeff said, folding his arms and pouting.

Kurt rolled his eyes at Thad, who grinned faintly and sipped his tea.

"We may have to lock them up while we're baking," Kurt muttered as the two Beaters left the kitchen, squabbling over a piece of toast. "I'm guessing you don't mind?"

Thad giggled at the thought, shaking his head.

They managed to lure Jeff and Nick into the pantry with a few of Carole's leftover Christmas cookies, locking them in and fighting back laughter as they realized what had happened.

"Oh, very clever," Jeff said, jiggling the handle.

"You're really stooping to this level, Kurtsie?" Nick said, bending down to talk through the crack in the door.

"If we turn gay while were in here, it's your fault," Jeff said angrily. "I really don't want to have sex with Nick."

"I really don't want to have to decided which one of us will be the girl in all of this," Nick said, wriggling his fingers under the door and swearing loudly when Acorn swatted at them, claws extended. "Bloody cat, I'll hang you by your tail in the forest!"

"You will not, now hush or we won't save any cookie dough for you," Thad said, shaking a finger at them, though he knew they couldn't see. They fell silent immediately, though Kurt knew it wouldn't last long.

"I wonder when they'll realize they have wands and can free themselves at any time," Kurt said thoughtfully as he sifted through the pile of ingredients on the counter.

"Probably later tonight," Thad said, giggling.

Kurt nodded. "Probably."

They work for a few hours, gossiping and baking and laughing as Jeff and Nick occasionally shouted at them from the pantry, complaining they'd soon have to start eating spices if they weren't fed immediately. Blaine, Flint, and Finn were discussing Quidditch in the living room, Kurt's father and Carole getting ready for a New Year's Eve party for Kurt's father's shop.

When they let Jeff and Nick out of the pantry, the two Beaters shielded their eyes from the light, hissing.

"I don't reckon I can make it on the outside anymore," Jeff said as he stepped out into the kitchen.

"Blimey, me neither," Nick said, shaking his head sadly. "We're hardened criminals now."

Kurt snorted. "Well, I can always lock you back in," he said. "But then, you won't get any cookie dough."

"I think we've reformed," Jeff said, Nick nodding furiously beside him.

Thad sighed and passed them the bowls they'd saved for them. They let out a whoop and bounded into the living room, plopping down on either side of Finn and spooning cookie dough into their mouths happily.

"You want some, Finnegan?" Jeff said, spotting Finn's jealous glance at his bowl.

Finn nodded, grinning.

"Here," Nick said, scooping some up from his bowl and smearing it over Finn's face, Jeff clutching his side as he giggled.

Finn simply wiped the cookie dough clean and ate it with a small grin.

"I'm glad they've found someone else to pull that stuff on," Thad said as he helped Kurt stack the cookies onto a tray, boxing the rest of them up in Tupperware containers.

"It's nice, isn't it?" Kurt said as he set the cookies on top of the fridge, hoping Jeff and Nick wouldn't find them there.

They spent the rest of the evening cooking up food for their little New Year's party. Kurt had originally wanted to invite Mercedes and the others but decided he'd much rather have a quiet—well, as quiet as it could be with Jeff and Nick around—party instead with just the seven of them.

Jeff and Nick had a huge box of Weasley's Wildfire Whizbangs that they set off in the backyard after Kurt's father and Carole left for the evening and the sky was a deep, warm indigo scattered with stars and clouds.

Finn laughed as the sparklers they set off started writing swearwords across the sky, Jeff and Nick shooting sparks from their wands as they ran around the yard, overly hyper from the combination of cookies, soda—which they'd drank while in the pantry, curious to try it—and simply excitement for New Years.

"They're going to seriously injure themselves," Kurt muttered to Blaine, who was standing behind him with his arms wrapped around him, his head resting against Kurt's shoulder.

Blaine chuckled as Jeff's foot caught on his jeans and he stumbled, Nick slamming into the back of them and both of them toppling into the snow with matching shouts of laughter. "What do you expect?" he

said, kissing the back of Kurt's neck lightly. "You've known then long enough to know this is actually relatively tame for them."

Kurt smiled, watching the two Beaters attempt to stand, though they continued to fall about laughing each time they tried. Finn set off another firework, which exploded overhead in a shower of dark blue stars that forcibly reminded Kurt of Leighton's eyes.

He shifted a little in Blaine's arms, frowning. He hadn't thought about Leighton since Thad had woken up, being much too preoccupied with other things to worry about it. But suddenly he found himself going back to wondering if he was alright. He hadn't written back to him, thinking it was probably best to avoid more drama.

Thinking he would talk to him when he got back, check that he was okay and not suffering because of him, he pushed the thought from his mind and went back to watching the fireworks, smiling as Blaine whispered, "I love you," in his ear.

---

Flint tightened his grip around Thad as the other boy yelped at the sound of the screaming Catherine wheel Jeff had just set off, which went whirling around their heads in a flash of red sparks.

"It's alright, pet," Flint soothed, shifting in the chaise they were sharing to pull him a little closer.

"They're loud," Thad said, wrinkling up his nose.

"We can go inside if you'd like," Flint said, nodding to the darkened house.

"No," Thad said, shaking his head. "I want to stay out here with you. I like it out here it's...well, not peaceful, not now...but it's nice."

Flint smiled, resting his chin on Thad's shoulder and watching Kurt scream and duck as the Catherine wheel zipped by him and Blaine.

"Hey, Flint?" Thad said, twisting in his arms to look at him.

"Yes, pet?" Flint said, meeting his dark eyes and smiling.

"I love you," Thad said.

"I love you, too," Flint said, kissing his forehead.

"No, I mean...I *really* love you," Thad said seriously. "I mean...I have for a long time but...after what you said, about, you know...marrying me if you could. Well...I never thought about what we'd do after Hogwarts either. I'd always hear Kurt talking about what he wanted with Blaine after school and I never thought about that stuff before. But...now I do. And I can't picture any of it without you being there." Flint tilted his head down to press their foreheads together. "Good," he said softly. "I feel the same way."

"You do?" Thad said. He let out a sigh of relief and smiled. "Good."

Jeff and Nick started counting down from ten for the New Year, but Flint couldn't wait, he pressed his lips to Thad's and tangled his fingers

in his dark hair, everything else—the noise, the chill air, the fact that there were five other people with a perfectly good view of them—fading into the background as he kissed him and it finally sank in.

*This is him. This is the person I'm going to spend the rest of my life with.*

Thad turned around to face him, placing his hands on Flint's thighs and sitting on his knees. Flint pulled Thad up closer so that he was wrapped around his waist. He stopped caring that the others were there a long time ago and completely ignored Jeff and Nick's wolf-whistles.

When the others seemed to realize they were stopping, they went back into the house, Jeff and Nick giggled.

"Have fun, wildcat."

"Watch it, lion, he's got claws."

Thad merely deepened the kiss, gliding his tongue along Flint's as the door closed and Flint opened one eye to see Kurt tug the drapes closed with a smirk.

Smiling, Flint grabbed Thad's ass and pulled him down against him, the heat rising from them completely banishing the chill of the night. They didn't even do anything sexual, really, just sat there kissing and cuddling for a long time until Thad drifted off and Flint carried him inside, laying down with him in the recliner and avoiding Jeff and Nick, who were trying to throw cookies into each other's mouths as Kurt and Blaine attempted to watch a movie together.

Acorn leapt into Flint's lap, stretching out on his back and looking expectant. Smiling, Flint scratched the cat's—though he was more like a small tiger at this point—belly as Thad muttered something and snuggled against him with a small smile playing on his lips.

---

"Finnegan, we'll miss you terribly," Jeff said sadly as they prepared to take their Portkey back to King's Cross Station Sunday morning.

"Yes, don't forget to remember us," Nick said, skulking a little as they dragged their trunks out into the yard.

Finn smiled. "Dude, I couldn't forget about you guys," he said, "you taught me Quidditch. Well, sort of."

Jeff and Nick beamed happily.

"But I guess I'll see you this summer, right?" Finn said, rubbing his bare arms and shivering. "When you guys graduate. I think we're coming."

"Finnegan!" they shouted excitedly, hugging him furiously.

Finn laughed, looking amused as they pulled away with matching grins.

"Here," Jeff said, passing him a package. "We bought you these."

"What are they?" Finn said, frowning.

"Well, okay, we didn't buy them *for* you," Nick said. "But they're our left-over Skiving Snackboxes."

"They'll get you out of class anytime," Jeff said, winking.

"Cool," Finn said, nodding and grinning. "Thanks...I think."

"Don't mention it," Nick said shrugging.

"Are you lot ready to go?" Blaine said, turning to them from where he was gathered with Thad, Flint, and Kurt's father.

Kurt, who'd been watching the Beaters exchange with Finn with a smile, pushed the two towards the others before turning to Finn. "I'll see you in a few months, alright?" he said as Finn pulled him into a hug.

"Alright," Finn said. "Be safe, little brother."

"I always am," Kurt said airily. "My life is ever so boring."

Finn laughed, stepping back inside and watching them from behind the sliding door with Carole, who waved and smiled.

Kurt dragged his trunk towards the others and placed his other hand on the Portkey, which was an old trowel this time, exchanging a small smile with Blaine.

"Ready to go back?" Blaine said as the Portkey started glowing blue.

"Yeah," Kurt said, nodding and smiling at Finn, who waved furiously at them. "Yeah, I think so. I'm glad we did this though. Even given...what happened." Karofsky, from what Kurt's father had said, had started his sentence in the Detention Center a few days before and would be there for at least six months for what he'd done to Thad.

"Me, too," Blaine said, leaning over to kiss him as he felt a hard yank behind his navel and they were suddenly being pulled towards London, spinning like a huge, awkward top until they landed hard on Platform Nine and Three Quarters. Kurt toppled into his trunk, swearing as his knee connected with the corner painfully.

"You alright, love?" Blaine said, sounding concerned as he straightened up with the rest of them, Thad blushing and looking flustered as Flint had caught him around the middle before he fell.

"Fine," Kurt grunted, wincing a little as he moved to hug his father goodbye.

"See you in June, kiddo," he said, hugging Kurt tightly.

"Bye," Kurt said, waving as his father disappeared in a flash of blue with the Portkey. He sighed, glancing around the crowded Platform at the students returning to Hogwarts for the next term.

"Ready to go?" Blaine said, still looking faintly worried about his knee as he jumped onto the train and hauled his trunk up with him.

"Mhmm," Kurt said, pulling his trunk towards the train and lifting it and Pavoratti's cage—again, he'd sent the owl ahead of him

separately—onto the carriage with difficulty. Blaine, not realizing he was struggling, had already wandered off in search of a compartment. "Here, let me help you, Kurt."

Kurt froze and looked up to see Leighton smiling at him as he pulled his trunk up the stairs for him.

"Hey," Leighton said as Kurt leapt up next to him.

"Hi," Kurt said, swallowing nervously as Leighton watched him, his dark blue eyes shining so intensely that it was almost blinding.

"Good holiday?" Leighton said, taking Kurt's trunk and pulling it for him down the aisle.

"It was alright," Kurt said. "I mean...given what happened."

Leighton nodded. "My Mum told me Thad was better," he said. "I'm glad. I can't believe someone would do that to him. He seems like such a nice bloke."

"He is," Kurt said, smiling. "He's my best friend."

"Oh, what, it's not me, then?" Leighton said, laughing.

Kurt laughed, incredibly relieved that he seemed back to his old, cheerful self. "Oh," he said, a little anxiously. "I thought I should tell you...I-I told Blaine about what about. About...how you kissed me."

The color drained from Leighton's face and his smile vanished.

"But he's not mad," Kurt said hastily. "He...he understands that you're, well...a little confused."

Leighton swallowed nervously.

"How are you doing with that, by the way?" Kurt said, grabbing Leighton's arm and stopping him. "Did you talk to Simone?"

Leighton avoided his gaze, staring instead at his feet. "I—a bit," he muttered.

"And?"

"She...well, she doesn't care about me liking another bloke," he said, scuffing the ground with his toe. "I think it's more she's concerned that I'm i—that I like another bloke who's taken." He looked up at Kurt with a broken expression. "I feel so bad for what I did Kurt," he whispered.

"You have...no idea. I don't want to break you and Blaine up. I know how happy you are and that...that's all I want. I want you to be happy."

Kurt sighed. "It doesn't make me happy seeing you *unhappy*, though," he said, his hand still resting on Leighton's arm.

Leighton shrugged, looking at the floor again. "I'm alright," he muttered. "Don't worry about me."

"Of course I worry about you," Kurt said. "Leighton, you're my *friend*, no matter what else you may feel towards me, that's not going to change. I mean...last year, Blaine was one of my closest friends and he sat back and watched me with Flint and kept quiet about his feelings



for me for a long time. I saw how much it hurt him, seeing me with someone else. Granted, Blaine was in love with me but...I can't imagine it's fun. *I'm* sorry, Leighton. I'm sorry you're hurting at all and I'm *especially* sorry you're hurting because of me. I don't want you to."

Leighton sniffed, eyes unusually bright as he looked back at Kurt, smiling faintly.

"Could I...would it be weird if I hugged you?" he said, his voice a little broken.

Kurt smiled. "Not at all," he said, holding his arms open and pulling Leighton into hug, catching a whiff of some obviously expensive cologne that he hadn't even realized he remembered from when they were together in the Slytherin common room. It was woodsy and had a faint hint of something he thought might be lavender beneath the overlying scent. He found himself breathing slowly as he took in the smell.

"Kurt."

Kurt and Leighton leapt apart at the sound of Blaine's voice, Leighton looking anxious and perhaps a little fearful as Blaine glowered at him.

"Blaine," Kurt said, a little flustered as he took his trunk from Leighton. "Sorry, I was just..." he trailed off uselessly, glancing between the two boys and almost feeling the tension building.

"Blaine," Leighton said, clearing his throat. "I-I'm sorry about what I did. I really am. It wasn't my place."

"That's right it wasn't," Blaine said in a clipped tone, moving to take Kurt's trunk from him. "See it doesn't happen again. Come on, Kurt." He took Kurt's hand and pulled him along the aisle.

"Sorry," Kurt mouthed over his shoulder.

Leighton shrugged and waved, looking morose again. Kurt thought he saw him pull someone out of his pocket, something that flashed in the bright sunlight, but before he could be sure, Blaine was leading him into a compartment where Jeff, Nick and Nick's girlfriend, Hanna, were already sitting.

"Thad and Flint with Dan?" Kurt said as he sat opposite Jeff and Blaine stowed his trunk with a little more force than necessary.

"Yeah," Jeff said as he pulled out his chess set.

Kurt shrank a little as Blaine next to him.

"What was that all about?" he hissed in Kurt's ear as the train whistled and started crawling away from the platform.

"I was just talking to him, Blaine," Kurt said, sighing. "He's my friend. He's confused and hurting. I was comforting him. End of story. Can you please stop getting so uptight about him? I don't feel like that about him, alright?"

Blaine watched him closely, a little anxiously, for a moment before nodding. "Alright, I believe you," he said.

"Good," Kurt grunted, turning to stare out the window at the platform sliding away.

"But he still likes *you* that way?" Blaine said.

"Yes, Blaine, he does," Kurt said, facing him and frowning. "And in case you've forgotten, you were in the same situation last year while I was dating Flint."

"But *I* never kissed you," Blaine said, folding his arms across his chest and slumping back in his seat.

"You almost did," Kurt said in a low voice. "I'm sure you don't forget about when we were on the Quidditch pitch together. If not for Jeff and Nick, you probably would have kissed me."

"But would you have kissed me back?" Blaine said.

Kurt paused at the question. He sighed. "I don't know, Blaine," he said, growing increasingly tired of having this conversation about Leighton. "But it shouldn't matter, should it? I'm with *you*, I love *you*, not Leighton."

Blaine grunted, pulling out his Arithmancy book and barely saying another word to him for the next few hours. When the lunch trolley came in the middle of the day, Kurt got up to buy their usual snacks, smiling faintly at Leighton, who'd missed the trolley when it had passed and approached with one of his friend, laughing about something and grinning at Kurt, looking much better than he had earlier.

"You coming to the match in two weeks?" Leighton said as he passed Kurt a box of cauldron and Chocolate Frogs, remembering what he'd bought on the train ride in Septemeber.

"Of course," Kurt said, half-glancing at Blaine and frowning. "Blaine's Captain after all."

Leighton looked nervously at Blaine for a moment before turning back to him with a small grin. "I guess I'll have to deal with you cheering against me then, huh?"

Kurt nodded. "I'm sure you'll have plenty of people cheering out on, though," he said. "Given how good of a flier you are."

Leighton paid for his snacks, smiling. "You flatter me, Kurt," he said.

"Well, it is true," Kurt said. "You're very good at Quidditch, I'm simply stating a fact."

Leighton shrugged as his friend tugged at his sleeve. "I suppose," he said. He sighed. "I'll see you 'round, Kurt."

"See you later," Kurt said, raising his hand in farewell before ducking back into the compartment. He handed Blaine his Chocolate Frogs,

watching him closely. "Blaine...will you please talk to me? You're being moody again and I hate it."

Blaine stared at his book for a moment before sighing. "I'm sorry, love," he said, closing his book and turning to Kurt. "I...I'm just scared of losing you."

"You're not losing me," Kurt said, taking his hand and smiling. "I swear. So please stop, Blaine, please. I love *you*. Get that through that head of yours, alright?"

Blaine chuckled and leaned towards him, kissing him on the cheek. "I love you, too," he whispered in Kurt's ear. "I'm sorry."

"You're forgiven," Kurt said, leaning against him and unwrapping one of his cauldron cakes. "Now, I don't know about you, but I have plans for rechristening your bed when we get back to the tower tonight."

Blaine smirked. "Is that so?" he muttered.

"Mhmm," Kurt said. "If you're up to it."

"I think I can manage that," Blaine said, unwrapping a Chocolate Frog and ignoring Jeff and Nick's muttered statement of, "Rabbits," as Hanna giggled next to them.

## Chapter Fourteen

The entrance hall echoed with the sound of talk and laughter of students returning from the holidays. Cole rocked up on his tiptoes and looked around, searching for the head of dark, curly hair that he hadn't seen in three weeks. He'd thought about trying to hunt him down on the train earlier, but had decided against it, instead simply waiting inside the entrance hall to catch a glimpse of Blaine.

His stomach wriggled happily when he caught sight of Blaine walking through the oak front doors, though the feeling changed to something like that of a lead weight being dropped inside of him when he saw Hummel walking alongside Blaine, clutching his hand and smiling about something.

Cole shook a little with anger. Hummel did *not* deserve Blaine. He simply didn't. He had...dreams, disgusting, inappropriate dreams, about boys other than Blaine. Straight—well, supposedly straight—boys at that. He glowered across the hall, watching Blaine, Hummel, and their friends moving up the marble staircase, chatting happily. Marsh picked her way through the crowd towards him, half-grinning. "Well, hello, partner," she said, stopping beside Cole and leaning against the wall next to him. "Good holiday?"

Cole grunted in reply, eyes still fixed to Hummel. He wondered if maybe there were acceptable reasons for using Unforgiveable Curses. Or even just for Transfiguring someone into the little snake they were. Sighing as Blaine and his friends disappeared around the corner, he turned to Marsh, who'd been examining her fingernails as she waited. "Alright," he said. "What did you want?"

"Just checking that you haven't chickened out about you-know-what," Marsh said, not looking at him as she frowned at her peeling green fingernail polish.

"Of course I haven't," Cole said, glancing briefly at the spot where Blaine had disappeared.

"Good," Marsh said, grinning. "Because I've got the perfect plan. It's going to completely humiliate Hummel *and* Leighton."

"Yeah?" Cole said, perking up. "What is it?"

"You just leave that to me, my little partner in crime," Marsh said, smirking. "Just make sure you're ready to have some extra juicy commentary next Saturday when Slytherin and Ravenclaw play, got it?"

Cole squirmed with excitement. "Yeah, got it," he said a little breathlessly at the thought that Blaine might finally be free from that...*hussy* in just a few weeks.

"Alright, well, I've got to unpack," Marsh said, grabbing the handle of her trunk. "See you in Potions."

"Bye," Cole said distractedly, reaching into his bag and lightly fingering the little bottle of memories lying there with a small smile. Soon.

---

Returning to the Hogwarts routine was harder than Kurt had anticipated, mostly for the fact that N.E.W.T.s were now a lot closer than they'd been three weeks ago. His first Double Transfiguration period on Monday consisted of Professor Aldebrand spending twenty minutes going over a long list of topics they'd be covering over the next few months plus a packet of review papers that used enough parchment to have cost the lives of several trees.

Blaine was, of course, suffering the most, with returning to his Head Boy and Captain duties along with the insane workload, he was also starting to stress about his Tornadoes application, which his mother had mailed him their first day back.

After an exhausting first week—during which Blaine had either Quidditch practice or patrol every night—Kurt was fully prepared to spend the weekend sleeping. However, his pile of homework had grown alarmingly in just a few short days and he found himself holed up in the library Saturday afternoon with Blaine, Thad, Jeff, Nick, and Flint, attempting to make a dent in the long list of assignments.

Blaine was working on finishing up his application for the Tornadoes, Thad copying out Flint's for him as the Chaser's handwriting still somehow managed to be barely legible.

"Pet, you are honestly the most wonderful person ever," Flint said, smiling as Thad squinted at his parchment to try and read what he'd written.

Thad smiled faintly as he wrote. "I know," he said, turning pink and biting his lower lip.

"Any idea what you're going to be doing for a broom yet?" Kurt said, glancing up from his Muggle Studies essay on the internal combustion engine.

Flint sighed a little sadly. "No idea," he said. "But I'll figure it out."

"You always do," Thad said. He stopped writing. "There. Finished," he said, tapping the parchment with the tip of his quill.

Flint slipped an arm around his shoulders and gave him a squeeze, kissing his hair gently. "You," he said as Thad fanned the parchment to dry the ink, "are perfect."

Thad smirked and leaned towards Flint to whisper something in his ear. Flint blushed and gave him a faintly surprised look.

"We've got to, er, go," Thad said, slipping his books into his bag, which he swung over his shoulder, Flint doing the same next to him.

"Right," Flint said. He opened his mouth to make up an explanation but closed it at the look Thad was giving him. "Bye," he said hastily before trailing after Thad like a puppy.

"Honestly," Nick muttered when they'd left.

"Kurtsie, they're giving you and Blaine a run for your title of rabbits," Jeff said, wrinkling his nose as he looked up from his Care of Magical Creatures homework.

"I'm sure I'd survive without the nickname," Kurt mumbled.

The Beaters sniggered.

The Ravenclaw Seeker, the sixth year, Ethan O'Brien, approached their table with his broom over his shoulder.

"Hey," he said, grinning faintly and absently running a hand through his short red hair. "Just checking that practice is still on."

Blaine glanced at the clock. "Yeah," he said. "Give us five minutes, I need to finish this. Tell Tonya, Kal, and Hanna to start with some passes."

"Alright," Ethan said, nodding and turning to leave.

"Hey, Ethan," Kurt said, calling him back. Ethan turned, looking expectant.

"That cousin of yours, Cole," Kurt said, setting down his quill. "Any idea why he's so insane?"

Ethan laughed. "We're not really close," he said, shrugging. "His Mum and my Mum are sisters and they had a falling out when I was little so they don't talk much. Why, what's he done?"

"Just his strange obsession with Blaine," Kurt said, frowning.

"Yeah?" Ethan said, glancing at Blaine and looking surprised. "Sorry, I can't help."

Blaine looked vaguely disapproving as he glanced at Kurt. "It's no big deal," he said, turning back to Ethan.

"Alright, well...see you at practice," Ethan said, looking awkward as he turned to leave.

Blaine rounded on Kurt. "He didn't need to know," he mumbled as Jeff and Nick started packing up their things.

Kurt blinked in surprise. "I'm sorry," he said. "I...I just wanted to help."

Blaine looked annoyed as he folded up his completed application and placed it in his bag with his books. "See you after practice," he grunted, not looking at Kurt as he followed Jeff and Nick out of the library.

"I love you," Kurt called after him, a little dejectedly. Trying to figure out exactly what he'd done wrong, he sighed and pulled his phone and earphones out, thinking he could at least listen to some music while he worked.

Putting in his headphones, he flipped through to his homework playlist and sighed as Lady Gaga came through the speakers. He'd made sure to fill up his phone with new music over the holiday to give him something to listen to when Blaine was busy or Thad was with Flint, which had been even more than usual over the past week. He'd been starting to feel lonely again.

Tapping his foot a little in time with "Judas," he returned to his essay, still a little confused about Blaine's annoyance.

He caught a whiff of something woodsy and someone was suddenly at his ear, pulling out his earbud and whispering, "What are you listening to?"

Kurt yelped and nearly fell off his chair, clutching his chest and glaring at a smirking Leighton, who was settling down across the table from him looking smug.

"You," Kurt said, glaring at him as his pulse returned to a normal speed, "are an ass."

Leighton laughed, leaning back in his chair so it rocked on two legs.

"You never answered my question," he said.

"Lady Gaga," Kurt muttered, frowning at the blot of ink he'd smeared on his parchment when he'd jumped in his seat.

"Is that like a Seer or something?" Leighton asked curiously.

Kurt gave him a dead-panned stare. Sighing, he held up his left earbud and gestured for Leighton to sit next to him.

Grinning, Leighton moved to the seat and scooted a little closer to him to put the earpiece in. Kurt restarted the song, still wearing the right earbud and watching Leighton out of the corner of his eye as he worked on his essay.

Leighton looked mildly confused. Kurt bit back a laugh at the expression he was wearing.

"Not your style?" he said after a minute.

Leighton shrugged, looking thoughtful, mouthing the chorus absently and pulling a hilarious face that made Kurt clap a hand to his mouth to keep from laughing. Smirking, Leighton began dancing in his seat, pretending to sing along with the music coming from the earphones.

"Stop it," Kurt said, rolling his eyes.

"Nope," Leighton said, smirking. "You look like you need cheering up."

Leaping up, he grabbed Kurt's phone and pulled the headphones out so that the music was blasting straight from the speaker into the silent library.

"Leighton!" Kurt hissed as other people started turning in their direction, looking annoyed.

Leighton ignored him and sang into Kurt's phone, missing half the lyrics, nodding his head and jumping around the table looking completely ridiculous.

Kurt tried to pull him back down into his seat as people started glaring at him. "You moron, Leighton, we're going to get thrown out!"

Leighton merely jumped onto the table, dancing and nearly falling down as he slipped on one of Kurt's pages of notes.

"Get down!" Kurt hissed, grabbing his foot as he was about to kick. He slipped and tumbled off the table onto Kurt, knocking him out of his chair onto the floor and laughing hysterically as he rolled over, Kurt smacking him as he struggled to get up and retrieve his phone, which had slid a few feet away.

Leighton was laughing so hard Kurt was sure he was going to crack a rib, but he simply leapt up and beat Kurt to his phone, snatching it up and sprinting off through the quiet shelves.

Sure Madam Pince would be swooping down on them at any moment, Kurt pushed himself up and hurried after him, following the sound of Leighton giggling and the still blaring music.

"Leighton!" he breathed, peeking down the rows as he passed.

"Leighton, I swear, I'll turn you into a fruit bat if you don't get back here right—"

Leighton popped out of next aisle, wriggling Kurt's phone and smirking. Kurt gave him a warning look and he sighed.

"Fine," he muttered, sticking out his bottom lip as he flipped the music off and handed Kurt his phone back. "You're no fun at all."

"I'm plenty fun," Kurt said with a sniff as he walked back towards his things, trying to ignore the people glaring at them. "I just try to contain myself to *outside* the library."

"Oh, is that all?" Leighton said, perking up. "Well, come on then." He grabbed Kurt's hand and pulled him towards the exit.

"Leighton. Leighton, stop," Kurt said, pulling his hand back.

Leighton turned, looking mildly confused. "What's wrong?" he said, still half-grinning.

Kurt hesitated for a moment, taking in the laughter behind his eyes and hating himself for what he was doing. "Leighton, I like you," he said slowly, "you're a great guy." Leighton's smile softened a little.

"But I...I mean, I feel like us, acting like this, joking around, is...well, I don't want to lead you on. I don't want you to think that...that—"

"That I've got any shot with you?" Leighton finished for him bluntly.

Kurt opened his mouth to speak, suddenly tearing up at the hurt behind Leighton's eyes.

"I swear, Kurt," Leighton said, taking a step closer to him. "I'm not going to try anything. If I have to sit back and watch you be with



Blaine, I'm alright with that, because you're happy. I told you...that's...that's really all I care about. I want us to be friends, Kurt, I like making you laugh. Even if sometimes I do have to break out my incredible dancing abilities to do it."

Kurt laughed, shaking his head.

Leighton grinned as well, moving a little closer. "There it is," he said, watching Kurt fondly. He lifted his hand towards Kurt's face, opening his mouth to say something. He stopped, closing his mouth and gripping his hand in a fist as he pulled it back, as though deciding he wasn't allowed to touch Kurt.

"I've gotta go," he said. He gave Kurt a final searching look, quirking a half-smile that didn't reach his eyes. "I'm sorry." He turned and walked away through the shelves, leaving the faint scent of pine and lavender behind. Kurt saw him slip something out of his pocket, gripping it tightly as he left, head bowed.

Kurt stared through the empty aisles for a moment before sighing and rubbing his eyes in a tired way as he returned to his desk at the back of the library. So now Blaine was apparently mad at him and Leighton looked like he was on the verge of another breakdown. Tears welled in his eyes again as he dropped to his seat and clutched his head in his hands, tired of being the unintentional cause of others' pain.

---

Flint smiled softly, glancing up at Thad from where he was trailing kisses down his stomach. Thad's eyes were closed, a look of content on his face as he let out the occasional, soft sound of enjoyment. Blowing briefly on his hands to be sure they were warm, Flint ran his fingers down Thad's bare chest and sides, sucking gently at the sensitive spot just inside his hipbone.

Thad groaned, biting his lip as he arched his hips up off the mattress and dug his fingers into the sheets.

Flint kissed the red mark he'd left, smiling. "You can Charm these away later, pet," he said, glancing up at Thad.

"I could," Thad said, smiling faintly as he looked down at him. "But maybe I want it there. That way everyone knows I'm yours."

Flint grinned. "Well, I'm not complaining," he said. "I want everyone to know that no one else can touch you."

Thad tilted his head to the side. "Who else would want to touch me?" he said, frowning.

Flint thought of Derricks, the sixth year who had kissed Thad. "I-I'm sure someone does," he said. "I mean...look at you." He eyed Thad's tanned and faintly toned body. Thad loved to swim over the summer and the effect still hadn't quite worn off. "You're...Thad, you're...sexy."

Thad bit his lip, staring at the canopy of Flint's four-poster bed. "I...no I'm not," he mumbled.

"Yes, you are," Flint said, "I'm so afraid you're going to realize I'm not all that great and find someone better."

"Don't say that," Thad said in a small voice. "You're...I love you."

Flint smiled. "I love you, too," he muttered. He kept a close eye on Thad, who closed his eyes again, as Flint moved his head down, nuzzling the crease of his thigh and the growing bulge in the front of his jeans.

Thad froze, eyes snapping open.

"Pet, why won't you let me take care of you?" Flint murmured, nudging him again. "You do it for me."

Thad made a nervous noise in the back of his throat. "I just...I don't want to," he said, blushing and avoiding his eye.

"But why?" Flint said, sighing and folding his arms over Thad's stomach before resting his chin on them. "You won't tell me why, pet."

Thad mumbled something, turning an even deeper shade of scarlet.

"Pet," Flint said, sighing.

"Because I'm afraid I'll taste bad," Thad blurted out so he could hear, not looking at him.

Flint stared at him for a moment before crawling up the bed and catching him in a deep kiss, lapping at his mouth with a noise of longing.

"You taste *amazing*," Flint murmured. "I'm sure all of you does."

Thad shivered as Flint slipped one hand down the front of his jeans, rubbing at the base of his cock, continuing to kiss him carefully.

"Mmm, so can I?" Flint whispered, grazing his lips down Thad's jaw and nipping his earlobe before kissing it gently.

"O-okay," Thad said nervously.

"Will you say it?" Flint breathed, blowing a thin stream of air over the shell of his ear. "Say you want it." He stopped and sat up, grinning.

"Pet, I want you to talk dirty."

Thad blinked, a look of innocent surprise on his face. "What?" he said.

"Yeah," Flint said, liking the idea more by the second. "I love it when you talk in Runes and say exactly what you want but I want you to say it in the filthiest way you can think of."

Thad's mouth fell open and his eyes widened. "But...but I don't know what to say," he said, blushing and staring down at his hands.

Flint bit back a grin. "Just...try it," he said. "Just say what you're thinking only...um, dirtier."

Thad bit his lip, brow furrowed in concentration. "Okay," he said after a moment. He smoothed his features before adopting look of sultry

innocence that sent shivers down Flint's spine. "I want you to ravish me...with your mouth."

Flint chuckled before he could stop himself, Thad was just too cute, attempting to turn it into a cough, though Thad's expression was already mortified and hurt.

"I'm sorry," Flint said, quickly calming himself. "Pet, I'm sorry, I...I didn't mean to laugh."

Thad folded his arms and stuck out his bottom lip in an angry pout.

"Pet, I'm sorry," Flint repeated, reaching out for his arm.

Thad pulled away from him, hurt and embarrassed tears shimmering in his eyes. He slid off the bed and pulled his shirt on.

"Thad, don't, please, I didn't mean it like that. I just think you're so adorable," Flint said, starting to panic as Thad put on his shoes, refusing to look at him as he pocketed his wand.

"Don't leave," Flint said, fear suddenly gripping him. "Pet—"

"Don't call me that," Thad snapped. "I'm not your damn pet."

"P—Thad, don't go," Flint said, reaching out for him again.

"Don't tell me what to do!" Thad said, smacking his hand away. "I'm not a child. Stop treating me like one."

"I didn't—"

"Just...don't, Flint," Thad said, shaking his head.

"Thad, I—"

"Don't touch me!" Thad yelled as Flint tried to take his hand again.

Flint's hands started shaking; he suddenly felt sick to his stomach.

"Thad," he choked, "you're—you're not breaking up with me, are you?"

Thad turned to him at last at the door, looking betrayed and vulnerable. He gave Flint a long, searching look, sniffed, and left the dorm, pulling the door shut behind him with a snap.

Flint stared at the door in disbelief, tears stinging his eyes and fear clenching so painfully in his chest his legs nearly gave out from under him.

---

He'd always loved winter. The way the air seemed cleaner and crisper, how the snow caught the pale sunlight that peeked through the clouds. A walk in the cold always helped to clear his head. But lately...nothing had been clearing his head.

No matter how hard he tried, Leighton simply couldn't push the thought of Kurt Hummel out of his mind. He'd never seen another person, much less another *boy*, like Kurt before. He was kind and smart and was perhaps the only person who didn't simply laugh at Leighton's jokes. Kurt always had something sarcastic to say that made Leighton laugh just as much.

And he was...well, he was...he supposed beautiful would work, but at the same time, it didn't fit at all. He still felt strange thinking of another boy like that, but on top of that, the word simply didn't do Kurt justice.

His skin was pale, but nothing like his own, which just made him look sickly and got overly freckled in the sun. It almost...glowed. And his eyes were like... He pulled out the Claddagh Ring he'd gotten for Kurt for Christmas. He smiled as the little heart of aquamarine caught the feeble sunlight. Not only was it Kurt's birthstone, but it also matched his eyes perfectly when they were blue.

He wasn't really sure *why* he carried it around. Perhaps to remind himself that this, Kurt, was what he couldn't have. Kurt was off-limits. Kurt was with Blaine and Leighton would never compare. He didn't really want to. Not when he saw how happy Kurt was with Blaine. But he would be Kurt's friend. At least he could do that. That wasn't hurting anyone. Yes, he'd been incredibly stupid—not to mention incredibly drunk—and kissed Kurt and obviously Blaine was angry at him for that, but he'd forced himself not to do anything more than platonic since then. It was difficult, sometimes, not to stare at the way Kurt's eyes lit up when he laughed.

Slipping the ring back in his pocket, he sighed and looked up, realizing that his feet had instinctively carried him to the Quidditch pitch. He always flew when a walk wouldn't clear his head, but he thought the Ravensclaws had practice today so he turned to walk back up to the Castle when he saw someone standing, half crouched, at the base of the stands, peering out across the pitch.

Leighton frowned and walked towards the red-haired someone, thinking it might be a Slytherin trying to spy, something he'd never put up with before.

"Hey, you can't be—oh, nevermind," he said as the other boy turned and he realized it was the Gryffindor fifth year Prefect, Cole O'Brien.

"What do *you* want?" O'Brien snapped, turning faintly pink.

"Nothing," Leighton said. "Just making sure you—nevermind, it's nothing."

O'Brien glared at him. "Why don't you just go back to being all over Hummel, Cross?"

"I...what?" Leighton said, blinking as he digested his words.

"You heard me," O'Brien said, straightening up, though it did little good, he was over a half a foot shorter than Leighton. "It's pathetic the way you two drool all over each other."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Leighton said, quirking an eyebrow. "Kurt and I are friends."

O'Brien snorted. "Right," he muttered. He said something under his breath that Leighton couldn't hear, though he thought he heard the word *hussy* and was pretty sure O'Brien was not talking about him. "Listen, *elf*," Leighton said, feeling annoyed. "I don't know what I did to piss you off, but you'd better not talk about Kurt like that or I swear, I'll punch the freckles right off your face."

O'Brien simply gave him a superior look. "I'd watch my mouth if you want to play in Saturday's match," he said. "I can give you detention, you know."

"Trust me, I know," Leighton muttered, thinking of the times his friends had already lost points of been given detentions for calling O'Brien "elf".

"Well, skip on back to the Castle then, Cross," O'Brien said with a smug smile.

Leighton bit back an angry retort and turned away, glancing back to see O'Brien peering across the pitch again. Why on earth he was watching the Ravenclaw team play Quidditch, he had no idea, but the encounter had at least helped to clear his head.

O'Brien was obviously delusional. Leighton and Kurt were certainly *not* "drooling all over each other". Leighton's *friends* didn't even know that he liked Kurt beyond their friendship and he didn't think Kurt's friends knew either. But O'Brien had always been a weasely little twit from what Pen had told him. Then again...hadn't Kurt said the two had been hanging out together? He'd laughed it off at the time because it was so strange thinking off the two together. Pen had always hated him.

He decided not to worry himself over it. There were more important things to focus on than the delusions of a fifth year and his slightly insane ex girlfriend.

---

No longer able to concentrate on his homework, Kurt returned to the common room to wait for Blaine to finish practice, hoping he'd be in a post-practice high when he got back.

Settling down on the couch, he scratched a purring Acorn behind the ears and opened his copy of *The Apothecarist's Index* that Blaine had gotten him for Christmas, though he wasn't really reading it.

The door to the common room swung open and Thad walked in, looking hurt and angry, tears streaming down his face.

"Thad, what's wrong?" Kurt said, closing his book and sitting up in concern.

Thad threw himself onto the couch next to him, arms folded across his chest as he glared into the fire.

"Thad?" Kurt said. "What's wrong? Did something happen with Flint?"

Thad burst into tears at this, clutching his face in his hands and sobbing brokenly.

Kurt moved quickly to place an arm around his shoulders, suddenly fearful. Thad crying just at the mention of Flint's name could not be good.

"Shh," Kurt soothed, rubbing his back. "What happened?"

Thad leaned against him, crying into his shoulder. "He asked m-me to—to talk...well, to say...*things* and I tried a-and he *laughed* at me," Thad sobbed, his voice muffled in Kurt's sweater.

"He—what?" Kurt said, staring at him. He couldn't believe Flint would actually make fun of Thad. He knew how much he loved him.

"Thad...are you sure you didn't maybe...I mean, I don't think Flint would want to hurt you on purpose like that."

"But he d-did," Thad said. "I was j-just trying to do what he t-told me to do."

"Shh, Thad, it's alright," Kurt said, holding him close. He paused, afraid to ask the next question. "So...did you, I mean...did you break up with him?"

"I don't k-know," Thad sobbed. "I...Kurt, I don't want to but it really hurt what he did."

Kurt pulled out his wand and Conjured a handkerchief so Thad could wipe his eyes.

"Do you want me to talk to him?" Kurt said softly as Thad wept into the kerchief, nodding without looking up.

"Alright," Kurt said, hugging him around the shoulders as he stood. "I'll be back."

Thad made a noise of acknowledgment as he hiccupped into the kerchief, Acorn rubbing against his arm and meowing softly.

Kurt glanced back at him before stepping out onto the spiral staircase that led down from the tower. The door at the bottom of the stairs opened and he almost ran into Flint, who was panting and looking terrified.

"Is Thad up there?" Flint said in a strained voice, eyes full of tears.

"Yeah," Kurt said, quirked an eyebrow. "Care to enlighten me as to what happened? From what I got through the crying, you laughed at him when he tried to talk dirty."

Flint blushed faintly but let out a sound somewhere between a whimper and a cry of frustration. "I didn't—I wasn't—he'd just so adorable; he said something that didn't really come off the way he wanted it to and I thought it was cute."

"Kurt, is he...did he say he wanted to break up with me?" Flint looked like he might be sick at the thought.

"He's really upset, Flint," Kurt said. "Maybe *you* should just talk to him. He feels hurt."

"Oh god," Flint groaned miserably, raking a hand through his hair. "I'm such an *idiot*."

Kurt let him into the common room; Thad looked up the moment they'd entered, turning his red eyes towards them. He glared when he saw Flint, turning away and staring at the fire.

"Thad," Flint choked as he moved towards him. "Thad, I'm sorry, I didn't...I love you. I'd never *try* to make you feel bad."

Thad ignored him, sniffing and crossing his legs and arms.

Flint sat down next to Thad, giving him a few feet of space and ignoring Acorn, who was pawing at his hand hopefully. "Thad, I love you," Flint said, "I didn't mean to hurt you, p—Thad. I'm *sosorry*.

Please, don't break up with me. Thad, I'd have nothing without you. Tell me what I need to do to fix this, *please*."

Thad stared at the fire for another moment before turning to him. His jaw tightened and he stood up, walking across the room and up the dormitory stairs without a backwards glance.

Flint gave Kurt a stricken look.

"Go talk to him," Kurt said as the dormitory door slammed. "He'll come around. Just...be very apologetic. And complementary. Here—" he twirled his wand and produced a bouquet of roses, "—give him these."

"No," Flint said, shaking his head and standing up. "I-I don't want to give him those.... I didn't make them." He pulled out his own wand and Kurt—who knew how bad Flint's Charms abilities were—started to protest. Flint screwed up his face in concentration.

"*Orchidius*," he said firmly. A single white rose bloomed from the tip of his wand. He caught it and gave Kurt a nervous look before striding upstairs.

---

Flint knocked on the dormitory door softly, clutching the rose in his hand.

"Thad?"

"Go 'way," he heard from inside, Thad's voice muffled and thick with tears.

Flint pushed the door open slowly and edged inside.

"Thad? Please talk to me," he said, closing the door and trying to keep his voice steady.

Thad was lying facedown on his bed, his face buried in the pillow as he shook gently. Flint wanted to cry just seeing him like that; knowing it was his own fault made it a thousand times worse.

"Thad, I'm sorry," he said, sitting down on the edge of Thad's bed.

Thad scooted away from him.

Flint took a shaky breath, tears spilling down onto his hands. "Thad, please...I'm so sorry I laughed, there's nothing wrong with you or anything you said. I just...I thought it was cute."

"Well, I wasn't trying to be cute!" Thad shouted, lifting his head from the tear-stained pillow to look at him. "I don't want to be a damn...bunny or whatever for the rest of my life! I can't even try and say on sexy thing without you l-laughing at me." He broke down again, dropping his face onto the pillow.

"Thad, you say sexy things all the time," Flint said. "You *are* sexy, Thad."

Thad let out a shout of laughter into his pillow.

"I'm serious," Flint said. "How many times do I have to say it? I'm an idiot, I know.... I'm sorry, pet.... I love you. Remember what I said? I'm never going to stop loving you. I don't mean to make stupid mistakes, I really don't. I swear, you're the most...amazing, incredible, sexy person I've ever met. I'm sorry I made you feel like you weren't for even a second."

Thad was still for a long time. For one wild moment, Flint thought he'd fallen asleep. Then he lifted his head slowly to look at him, his expression unreadable.

Flint smiled hopefully and held out the rose he was holding. Thad stared at it.

"I'm sorry I couldn't make more," Flint said apologetically. "I'm just so bad at Charms...."

Thad took the rose lightly between his thumb and forefinger and smelled it, closing his eyes as he inhaled. He looked back at Flint and gave him the smallest of smiles.

Flint sighed in relief and returned Thad's smile. "I never meant to make you feel...Thad, you are the most intelligent, perfect person I've ever met. If anything I said or did made you feel, I dunno, inferior, or anything in any way, I can't apologize enough.

"I just think everything you say and do is so sweet and...I love taking care of you. If that bothers you, I—"

"No, no, I like it," Thad said hastily. "It's just...everyone's always saying I'm so innocent and naïve or whatever and...I don't want to *a/ways* be...helpless, I guess."

"Merlin, Thad," Flint said as Thad sat up next to him. "I never thought you were helpless. I've seen what you can do. I know very well that you can take care of yourself. I remember what you did to Reinhold."

Thad giggled, looking mildly pleased with himself. "It's a little exciting, isn't it?" he said, glancing at Flint. "Our first row."

"Nerve-wracking is more like it," Flint muttered.



Thad gave him an apologetic smile. He turned the rose over in his fingers. "So...is this the part where we have make-up sex?" Flint chuckled and kissed him on the temple. "Whatever you'd like, pet. If I can still call you that, that is?" Thad nodded, looking sheepish. "Sorry..." "No, don't apologize to me," Flint said, shaking his head. "I'm the idiot here, remember?" "So," Thad said, trailing the soft rose petals down Flint's forearm with a coy smile. "About that make-up sex...." Flint grinned as Thad bit his lip and tossed the flower away before climbing onto his lap, straddling his hips and kissing him hard. "I'm glad you didn't stay angry for long," Flint said as Thad moved down to nip and suck at his earlobe. "I don't know what I would have done without you." "I don't think I could stay mad for long," Thad said, smiling against him. "I'd have missed kissing you too much." Flint smiled and pulled him a little further down on his lap. Thad whined with their hips rubbed together, his breathing turning hot and hard in Flint's ear. "Tell me what you want, pet." Thad gulped nervously "I w-want...I want you to suck my cock," he said in a low, anxious whisper. "A-and then, I want you to fuck me." Flint grinned and bit a mark on Thad's neck, earning a soft whimper from the other boy. "I think that can be arranged," he said. Thad giggled as Flint turned him around and dropped onto the floor in one swift movement. He looked scared and excited as Flint unfastened his jeans and pulled him to the edge of the mattress. He bit his lip as Flint pulled his legs apart gently, gasping lightly as Flint mouthed him through his briefs. "Are you sure you're not just doing this for me?" Flint said, watching him closely as he tugged his briefs down enough to free his half-hard erection. Thad nodded. "I'm sure," he said in a small voice. "I love you," Flint said, kissing his knee softly. Thad opened his mouth to reply but all that came out was a loud shout of pleasure as Flint wrapped his mouth around Thad's erection, trying to think of what he enjoyed most when Thad was doing it for him. "Oh," Thad said, looking a little surprised at the sensation. "I—oh..." Flint smiled. He kept his eyes trained on Thad's expression, noting when he moaned or gasped the loudest, gripped the edge of the bed the hardest, and threw back his head with a blissful expression. Thad was making the most amazing sounds, short, breathy whimpers that started out barely audible but were now echoing around the dormitory as Thad started to tremble.

"Oh god," Thad groaned his hands finding Flint's shoulders and gripping tightly. "Flint, you...ah, that's so good." He looked down, his tongue darting out to wet his lips as he watched Flint with a curious expression. Smiling, he reached down to run his fingers through Flint's hair, rubbing lightly at the soft spot behind his ear.

Flint leaned a little into the touch, groaning in the back of his throat. Thad let out a low whine at the vibration, tightening his hold in Flint's hair and gently bucking his hips as he did.

Flint sucked hard, hands resting on Thad's knees, and Thad let out a long, loud cry as he came hard into Flint's mouth. Swallowing around him and trying to ignore the bizarre sensation, Flint winced a little as Thad dug his fingernails into his scalp.

Thad dropped his head to his chest, panting as his arms fell limply to his sides.

Flint pulled back and tugged Thad's boxers back up before pushing himself off the floor. "How was that?" he whispered in Thad's ear, his voice a little hoarse. "Alright?"

"Mhmm," Thad squeaked, nodding.

"Mmm, good," Flint said, pushing him back onto the bed and trailing kisses down his neck. "And you taste fine, by the way."

Thad laughed nervously. "Oh no," he breathed, tensing suddenly.

"Kurt...he probably heard me!"

Flint bit back a chuckle. "I'm *sure* he heard you," he mumbled. "But who cares anymore? They all know anyway." He pushed Thad's slightly sweaty hair back off his forehead. "I love you."

Thad relaxed under the touch. "You too," he said, yawning. "'M'tired."

Flint smiled and pulled the covers down, lifting Thad gently and lowering him back onto the sheets before pulling off his jeans and covering him.

Thad whined when he pulled away, pouting and holding out his arms.

"One minute, pet," Flint said, slipping his shoes and jeans off before climbing under the blankets with him. He draped one arm around Thad's middle and pulled him back against his chest.

"I do like it," Thad said as he snuggled against him. "When you take care of me, I mean. I just...I like to be needed, too."

"Of course you're needed," Flint said. "You know full well I'd go insane without you. Not to mention I'd fail all my lessons."

Thad made a small noise of agreement. "True, true," he murmured.

Flint smiled and kissed the top of his head.

Thad yawned. "Sorry I'm sleepy," he mumbled. "I feel bad that we can't...well...you know."

"Don't worry about it, pet," Flint said, pulling him closer under the blanket. "I was afraid I was going to lose you. I think I can wait. As long as you're happy."

"Mhmm," Thad said, yawning again. "I like being the little spaenuz...I mean spoon. Love you."

"Love you," Flint said inhaling the scent of cinnamon and sandalwood that always lingered around Thad as the other boy drifted off to sleep, murmuring something in Runes and wriggling against Flint happily.

---

Kurt glanced up as the door to the common room opened and Jeff and Nick led the rest of the House team in, all of them shivering and brushing snow from their robes.

"I just want to sleep," Jeff murmured,

"Can I sleep *in* the fireplace?" Nick said, blowing on his pale fingers. They started up the dormitory stairs, grumbling and casting Blaine, who was at the back of the group, mutinous glares.

"I wouldn't go up there if I was you," Kurt said as he returned to his book.

"Why?" Jeff grunted, stopping with Nick as the others continued past them towards their own dorms.

"Thad and Flint have had a fight," Kurt said.

"What?" Nick said, exchanging a shocked look with Jeff.

"Yeah," Kurt said, fighting a grin. "But judging by the sounds coming from the dorm earlier, they seem to be past it."

The Beaters looked confused for a moment. Their faces then proceeded to go through several emotions, from comprehension to disgust to annoyance to resignation, in perfect unison.

"Fine," Jeff sighed, stomping back downstairs, Nick at his side.

"Thad's lucky we like him," Nick muttered angrily.

"Lucky he's got the threat of turning us into squids is more like it," Jeff grumbled.

They slumped down on the rug in front of the fireplace, rubbing their hands together and mumbling about wildcats.

"Hey," Kurt said apprehensively as Blaine sat next to him, looking tired but pleased. "Practice go alright?"

Blaine nodded, struggling to untie his heavy boots with numb fingers.

"Let me," Kurt said, smiling and kneeling to undo the wet laces.

"Thanks," Blaine said, closing his eyes and leaning back in his seat.

"Ready for Saturday?" Kurt said as he slipped Blaine's boots off.

"Mhmm," Blaine said, pulling off his gloves and tossing them aside before doing the same with his leather armguards.

Kurt pulled out his wand and dried Blaine's things, setting them in a neat pile next to the couch before sitting next to him again.

"I'm sorry that I brought up Cole to Ethan," he said, though he still wasn't sure *why* Blaine was so annoyed. Yes, he'd found Cole's crush cute and funny when the year had first started but it had gotten to a point that it was almost creepy the way Kurt sometimes caught him either looking at Blaine or glaring in his direction.

"You're forgiven," Blaine said, yawning. "No one needs to know about it. I can handle it just fine. He's been leaving me alone for the most part lately, anyway."

"That's what worries me," Kurt muttered. True, the Gryffindor had backed off in the number of times he'd been approaching Blaine, but the way he'd talked at the Quidditch match in November didn't sit well with him. "Blaine, I think—"

"Just...can't you drop it, Kurt?" Blaine said, sounding suddenly annoyed. "Unlike you, I don't encourage people who have crushes on me." He stood up, shaking his head. "I'm going to use the Prefect's bathroom."

Kurt made to stand with him.

"Alone," Blaine said firmly.

Kurt sank back into his seat, feeling confused and hurt as he watched Blaine leave. Was Blaine really acting like this because he was still friends with Leighton? Kurt had made it perfectly clear to both Blaine *and* Leighton that there was no choice between the two. He loved Blaine. Only Blaine. Leighton had accepted it, why couldn't Blaine? He was starting to wonder if Blaine didn't trust him, a thought that brought a painful lump to the back of his throat as he struggled to return to his book, though he found his vision blurred with tears.

---

Kurt had not forgotten that his and Blaine's one year anniversary was the following Friday. On the contrary, he'd been excited about it. Blaine, however, seemed to be more focused on the upcoming match and combination of responsibilities and schoolwork.

Things simply hadn't felt...right between them since they'd gotten back to school. If he really admitted it to himself, things had been off since September for one reason or another. But he still made sure to be patient with Blaine when he got snippy or short after practice or patrols throughout the week. He'd given up trying to talk to him about it like Blaine had told him to do, it wasn't worth the hassle, the exasperated sighs and uncomfortable silences that stretched between them afterwards.

Plus, he didn't actually think it was a good idea to distract Blaine from Quidditch. He was well aware how important the matches were now that he'd put in his application for the Tornados. Blaine also seemed more determined than usual to beat Slytherin—or, in Kurt's mind,

Leighton. Kurt had seen Ethan walking around looking completely exhausted more than once over the week before the match. Leighton, on the other hand, was nothing short of a ball of energy the whole week. Kurt hadn't had much of a chance to talk to him as he was often practicing when Kurt was not with Blaine, but on the rare occasion that Kurt could have a conversation without Blaine glaring at Leighton, the Slytherin was grinning from ear to ear.

"Why are you so damn...bubbly?" Kurt said, half-laughing as he walked—well, Leighton was nearly skipping—to Transfiguration that Wednesday.

"There hasn't been Quidditch since November," Leighton said in exasperation. "Kurt, that's two whole *months*."

"Hmm, and yet you survive the summers just fine," Kurt said, rolling his eyes.

"Barely," Leighton said with a sigh. "Only because I force Simone and Arianna to play. They hate it, think it's barbaric with the Bludgers and everything. But I learned French so they owe me."

Kurt laughed.

"Plus, I *am* coming of age next week," Leighton said. "I'd say that's a good reason to be excited, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, it that next week?" Kurt said with mock surprise. "Leighton, you should have mentioned something."

Leighton, who'd been almost overenthusiastic about turning seventeen, smirked and shrugged. "What, I can't be happy about it?" he said.

"Yes, well, there are limits," Kurt said as they stopped outside of the Transfiguration classroom.

"You need to loosen up," Leighton said reprovingly. "Stop being so uptight all the time and I think you'll have a lot more fun. Just look at me. I don't let things get to me and I'm brill. Or should I say awesomeness?" He smirked.

"I'll keep that in mind," Kurt muttered, rolling his eyes. "Why don't you just go to Charms before you start jabbering on about being of age again."

Leighton merely shrugged and walked away singing "Starstruck"—he'd insisted that Kurt allow him to listen to every song on his phone "to learn about strange Muggle music"—and dancing, as usual, in the most ridiculous manner possible, earning him concerned looks from a group of passing fourth years.

"There are other artists besides Gaga," Kurt called after him. Leighton simply laughed as he rounded the corner. "Never thought I'd say that before," Kurt muttered as he turned to see Jeff and Nick standing a few feet away, looking amused.

"He's not bad," Jeff said as he led the way into the classroom.  
"For a Slytherin," Nick added.  
"Blaine doesn't seem all that chuffed with him though," Jeff said thoughtfully, setting his books down and taking his usual seat.  
"I've noticed that," Nick said, frowning. "I reckon it's Quidditch." Jeff nodded, shrugging.  
Kurt quickly moved to his own seat, hoping they wouldn't ask his opinion.  
Flint joined him moments before the bell rang, straightening his tie and ignoring Kurt's smirk.  
"Thad's been keeping you busy, hasn't he?" Kurt murmured.  
"Honestly, I just saw you two in Potions fifteen minutes ago."  
Flint blushed faintly.  
"You know," Kurt said as they unpacked their books. "You don't have to keep kicking everyone out of your tower. Blaine and I only do it because we really don't care but if you need a place to...go, I know of one."  
Flint looked curious, pausing as he pulled out his quill and ink. "Yeah?"  
Kurt nodded. He thought he'd been keep the Room of Requirement secret long enough. Plus, he'd seen Dan and the other Seventh Year Gryffindor boys spending a lot more time than usual in the library.  
"I'll write it down for you, okay?" Kurt said as Aldebrand stood at the front of the room. "Just keep it secret, okay? I don't want it becoming the hookup for horny Hogwarts students."  
Flint laughed. "Alright," he said. "Thanks. You still sitting with us Saturday?"  
"Yeah," Kurt whispered. "Wes and David are sitting with Holly and the other Ravenclaw girls. At least, I think they are." He leaned forward to tap the shoulder of the girl with wavy brown hair in front of him, one of the three Ravenclaw Seventh Year girls. "Hey, Dinah."  
"Yeah?" she said, frowning.  
"Wes and David are sitting with you guys on Saturday, right?"  
Dinah nodded.  
"Mr. Hummel, Ms. Fletcher, something you'd like to share?" Aldebrand said sharply.  
Dinah jumped and turned to face forward, turning pink.  
"No, Professor," Kurt said hastily. "Sorry."  
He looked over to see Jeff shaking his head reprovably, Nick mouthing "honestly" beside him. Kurt held his wand up threateningly under the table.

---

As Blaine was busy with practice on Friday, they'd decided to celebrate after the match on Saturday. Kurt hoped more than anything that

Ravenclaw won, as he wasn't looking forward to trying to cheer up Blaine after the past two weeks, which had consisted primarily of piled of homework interspersed with a tired, cranky Blaine readjusting to the school routine.

So on Saturday, Kurt was sure to wake up extra early and crawled into Blaine's bed, pulling to hanging closed around them and casting *Muffliato*.

He watched Blaine sleep for a moment, smiling at how peaceful he looked when he wasn't worrying himself over everything. Blaine sighed in his sleep and Kurt kissed his ear softly.

"Wake up, sleepy," he murmured, moving to brush his lips over the spot behind Blaine's jaw. "You need to get up, Captain Anderson."

Blaine jumped, sitting straight up and swinging his arm around. His elbow caught Kurt across the face and pain bloomed across his cheek. Kurt swore and clutched his face as his eyes watered.

Blaine spluttered and blinked in confusion. "Wha—who—Kurt?" he said, tuning and seeing Kurt close to tears. "Oh, love, I'm sorry!"

"M'fine," Kurt gasped, tenderly touching the spot on his cheekbone where Blaine had hit him. "It's nothing, really."

"Hush, let me see it," Blaine said, pulling his hand away and examining the red mark. "Pretty shoddy way to start the day. I'm sorry, love, I'll fix it in a tick." He fished out around for his wand through the curtains.

"This may sting a bit."

Kurt winced as Blaine tapped the spot with his wand. He felt the swelling go down as Blaine brushing his thumb over the spot.

"Better?" Blaine said, smiling.

Kurt nodded, hastily brushing away his unshed tears.

"Sorry," Blaine said, kissing his cheek softly. He glanced at his watch.

"Blimey, I'd better get ready. Thanks for getting me up, love."

Kurt opened his mouth to protest, but have up and sighed in resignation when Blaine disappeared through the hanging. He heard him waking Nick and Jeff up, the Beaters grumbling angrily into their pillows.

"S'not time yet," Jeff groaned sleepily.

"Well, I want you lot ready early so I can go over maneuvers," Blaine said. Kurt pulled the hangings open in time to see Blaine his Nick around the head with a pillow.

"I'm up!" Nick said, glaring and rolling over the moment Blaine ruined away. "Bloody impatient..." he trailed off, grumbling something Kurt was sure would earn him detention from any other Prefect.

"He's g-g-gone mental," Jeff said with a huge yawn, rolling off his bed onto the floor. "Kurtsie, you need to control your man."

Kurt forced a laugh, though he felt he was just as frustrated with Blaine as they were. He sat on Blaine's bed as the other three got ready, Thad, Wes, and David still fast asleep.

"I'll see you after the match, love," Blaine said, giving him a swift kiss. "Happy anniversary."

"Happy anniversary," Kurt said lamely as the door closed behind Blaine, Jeff, and Nick. He glanced out through the window at the pale sky, where snow was falling steadily on the still air.

Sighing, he got up, showered and dressed. The others were still asleep when he returned from the bathroom. He Conjured up a pot of tea and two cups and sat down on Thad's bed, nudging him gently.

Thad woke with a lot more grace than Blaine, blinking blearily and yawning as he rubbing sleep from his eyes. He perked up when he saw the steaming mugs Kurt was holding and sld up against the headboard into a sitting position.

"Where are the others?" he said as he accepted his tea.

"Already went to breakfast," Kurt said, settling in beside him. "I think it's Blaine's mission to have Jeff and Nick cause a full-scale mutiny before the season's over."

Thad giggled and sipped his tea.

"I've missed this," Kurt said, smiling. "You've been staying with Flint so often we never get to do this anymore."

"Sorry," Thad said, looking sheepish. "I'm a rubbish friend."

"Stop it," Kurt said warningly. "If the choice was between drinking tea with boring old me and sex, I'd choose sex, too."

"Kurt!" Thad hissed, wide eyes darting to the sleeping forms of Wes and David as he blushed furiously.

"What?" Kurt said, smirking. "It's true."

"Well still," Thad muttered.

"Oh, so you're actually admitting it, then?" Kurt said, cocking an eyebrow.

Thad shrugged, suppression a grin as he swirled his tea. "Maybe."

Kurt laughed, shaking his head. "Flint's turned you into *quite* the wildcat, hasn't he?"

Thad bit his lip, turning pink as he stared into his mug. "Who said he's the one who started it?"

Kurt nearly choked on his tea.

---

He followed Thad down to breakfast twenty minutes later, not surprised when he saw that Blaine and the rest of the team were already gone.

"Hey, Kurt!"



Kurt turned towards the voice to see Leighton hailing him from down the Slytherin table, grinning broadly. Kurt waved in reply, smiling as he sat next to Thad.

Leighton said something to his friends and teammates, who looked at Kurt suspiciously, before moving to sit next to Kurt. Thad smiled at him before turning back to making eyes at Flint across the Hall.

"Er, why are they all glaring at me?" Kurt said, glancing back at the Slytherin team.

"Oh, them?" Leighton said, waving them away. "Ignore them. They just reckon you're using me to spy for Blaine."

"That's ridiculous," Kurt said.

"Isn't it, though?" Leighton said, pouring himself a glass of juice. "But Blaine probably thinks I'm doing the same thing." He picked up a piece of toast, shrugging.

"Not in the least," Kurt said. "He's more afraid I'm going to leave him for you."

Leighton gaped at him, his toast hanging limply from his fingers.

"Now *that's* ridiculous," he said. "Blimey, I'm not thick enough to try anything, doesn't he know that?"

"Oh, he knows," Kurt said a little irritably. "He just won't listen."

Leighton set down his toast. "Listen, Kurt, if us being friends is causing problems, I—"

"Leighton, sit down," Kurt said, stopping Leighton from getting up with a hand on his arm. "You're my friend. Blaine's my boyfriend. He needs to understand that *I* understand and *you* understand the difference. You've done nothing wrong."

Leighton still looked nervous as he returned to his seat, chewing on his toast thoughtfully. The rest of the Slytherin team approached not long after, giving Kurt reproofing looks as they did.

"Come on, Leigh," one of the Chasers said, passing Leighton his broom. "We've got to head down."

"Brill," Leighton said, perking up. He turned to Kurt. "I'd ask you to wish my luck but...well..."

"Nonsense," Kurt said, laughing. "Good luck, all of you." He smiled at the stony-faced Slytherin players.

"See you later," Leighton said, patting his shoulder. Something like sadness flickered behind his eyes as he looked at Kurt, their gazes meeting for a split second before he turned to leave the Hall with the rest of his team, his broom at his side.

As Kurt turned back to his plate, he saw Leighton's ex smirking at him from the end of the Slytherin table; Kurt glared in reply. Still, he felt a little uneasy when he saw her leaving with Cole not long after, both of them glancing in his direction.

Feeling annoyed and a little worried, he stared down at his breakfast, finding himself no longer hungry.

"I'm going to head down," he said, turning to Thad. "I'll see you guys there, okay?"

Thad, who'd been smiling dreamily at Flint, looked a little taken aback.

"Oh, alright," he said. "Yeah, see you in a bit."

Kurt pulled on his gloves and scarf and made his way out into the chilly grounds alone. His breath rose in front of him, snowflakes fluttering down around him to add to the soft layer of white covering the ground. He saw Acorn darting around the snow happily at the edge of the forest, leaping to try and catch birds flying from low-hanging branches.

There were other students walking towards the stadium, talking excitedly and clutching flags and handmade banners. The sight made him suddenly lonely.

He rounded the corner of the back of the Slytherin changing rooms and found himself looking at Leighton, who was leaning against the wall in his emerald and silver Quidditch robes, staring across the grounds and looking lost.

"Leighton?" Kurt said, walking towards him apprehensively. Leighton turned at the sound of his voice.

"Kurt," he said, blinking rapidly. "Hi."

"Everything alright?" Kurt said, stopping in front of him.

Leighton seemed to struggle with something for a moment. "I—no," he said, shaking his head.

"What's wrong?" Kurt said, watching him closely.

Leighton took a deep breath. "Kurt, I...I like you a lot," he said, looking like what he was saying was incredibly painful. "But...if us being friends is straining your relationship with Blaine...like I said, I want you to be happy. I don't want you and Blaine fighting because of me. I...I don't think we can be friends anymore."

Kurt stared at him. "Leighton, I—"

"I know you're going to say that it's not a big deal," Leighton said, cutting over him. "That you're not leaving Blaine and he'll understand in time but...I've seen the way he glares at me. Kurt, he *hates* me."

"He doesn't—"

"He does," Leighton said, giving him a steady look. "And I don't blame him. I kissed you and I don't even know what I am yet. And now you say he's afraid I'm going to try and...and break you up or something? I'm not...but I still like you, Kurt, which means a piece of me wants to be with you, which means that piece hopes you'll break up with Blaine. But the rest of me knows that won't happen. Not for me. I've been okay with being just friends because I really like spending time with

you. But it us being friends is upsetting Blaine, it means you're already or going to be hurting because of it. And I can't live with myself knowing that." There were tears in his blue eyes by the time he was finished, his gaze fixed steadily to Kurt.

"You don't have to do this," Kurt said, a little surprised to find his own eyes stinging.

"I do," Leighton said. "I'm sorry, Kurt. Maybe...maybe when I'm over you we can be friends." He smiled sadly as tears slid down his face. Kurt stepped forward and pulled him into a tight hug, catching the scent of hi cologne as he did.

Leighton hesitated for a moment before hugging him back.

"I'm sorry you think you have to do this," Kurt said as he pulled back. Leighton smiled as he wiped a tear from Kurt's cheek with the back of his fingers with a touch so light and gentle that fresh tears sprang to Kurt's eyes. He leaned forward and kissed Kurt softly on the cheek.

"Goodbye, Kurt," he said, giving him a final, small smile before turning and walking into the changing rooms.

Kurt swallowed hard and wiped his eyes hastily on his sleeve. He stood there for a moment in the still silence, feeling a painful knot in his chest tightening around him. He wanted to tell Leighton that they *could* be friends, that Blaine would get over his jealousy and stop acting the way he was.

But a part of him knew that was a lie. Blaine was a jealous person. He always had been. He'd mellowed out when he'd told Kurt about his feelings the pervious year but that didn't change the fact that he'd still been at odds with Flint for a long time after they'd gotten together. Anger flared inside him as he walked past the changing rooms towards the stairs to the stands. Blaine had not right to dictate who his friends were. Kurt certainly didn't give a damn who Blaine hung around with. The only reason he was the way he was to Cole was because Blaine had *asked* him to talk to him. Plus, Blaine didn't even like Cole.

He calmed himself down as he climbed into the stands and made his way to where Flint and Thad were sitting with a Dan and a few other Gryffindors, most of them wearing Ravenclaw scarves or hats.

"Hey," Flint said, smiling as Kurt sat next to Thad.

"Hey," Kurt said, forcing a smile in reply.

"What's wrong?" Thad said, frowning.

"Nothing," Kurt said, widening his smile. "I'm fine."

Thad looked suspicious for a moment but forgot about it the moment Flint kissed him on the cheek and wrapped his arm around his waist.

"Oh, I brought tea," he said, holding up a thermos and smiling.

"Thanks," Kurt said, accepting the drink and taking a sip, shivering as a chill wind swept through the stands.

Thad pressed a little closer to Flint's side, pulling his scarf over his mouth and nose and holding the blanket draped around his shoulders more tightly around him. Kurt smiled as Flint held Thad closer.

"Honestly," Dan muttered, leaning forward in his seat towards Kurt.

"They might as well start posing for bloomin' holiday cards at this rate."

Kurt laughed. "Hmm, puppies in a basket or Thad and Flint just being themselves," he said thoughtfully. "Yeah, you're right, they'd probably sell more."

Dan grinned and leaned back in his seat again.

Thad leaned down to fish something out of his bag and Kurt caught Flint's eye. "So, have you used the little tip I gave you yet?" he said quietly enough so Thad wouldn't hear.

Flint turned pink. "Er, no," he said, glancing at Thad. "I was planning on going tomorrow."

"Well, enjoy it," Kurt said, smirking as Thad straightened up, holding a thick, woolen blanket, which he stretched across his and Flint's lap with a slightly mischievous look.

Thad wriggled against Flint's side, smiling at him as he pulled the blanket up so it was tented over their laps. Flint looked faintly confused for a moment but his eyes widened and gulped nervously, giving Thad a disbelieving look.

Kurt shook his head and faced forward, not really interested in watching Thad giving Flint a hand-job in the middle of the Quidditch stands. "Oh, Thad, what have you become?" he muttered.

Madam Hooch strode out onto the snowy pitch, clutching the ball crate and her broom under her arm. The Ravenclaw and Slytherin teams walked out from opposite sides, their robes dusting along the snow as they went.

Kurt felt a stab of guilt when he saw Leighton at the back of the group, his head hung, looking completely dejected. Blaine shook hands with the Slytherin Captain and Kurt saw him cast Leighton a glare that made anger bubble up inside him again. He wanted to take Blaine and smack some sense into him.

Madam Hooch released the Snitch and Bludgers as the players mounted their brooms, and blew her whistle, tossing the Quaffle straight up.

"And they're off," Cole's voice rang throughout the stadium, the certain smugness he always carried evident. "That's Ravenclaw Chaser Tonya Grayson with the Quaffle. I hear she's been having a thing with the other Chaser, Kal whatever his name is. I wonder if it's true."

Tonya dropped the Quaffle, looking shocked, and a Slytherin Chaser caught it quickly. Kal shouted something in the direction of the

commentator's box, shoving his middle finger in the air as Cole laughed a little into the mic.

"Oh, well, I guess it is," Cole said, his smirk clear.

"What an ass," Gwen, the Gryffindor Seeker said from where she was sitting next to Dan. "I'm not proud to have that little twerp in the same House as me."

Madam Hooch called a penalty on Kal for all the cursing he was doing, though Blaine blocked it easily enough as Hanna tried to comfort a sobbing Tonya, Nick and Jeff hitting their bats threatening against their palms and glaring at Cole.

"I don't know what his damn problem is," Dan said. "Something crawled up his butt and died, it seems."

Thad, who'd apparently finished feeling Flint up under the blanket, giggled, Flint still looking dazed next to him.

Kurt watched Kal and Hanna, who seemed to be on a warpath after what Cole had said, score a swift five goals against the still inexperienced Slytherin Keeper. The wind had picked up since the start of the match and a few of the players were starting to struggle to keep control of their brooms.

"It's so c-c-cold," Thad said, shivering and huddling under the blankets. "How do they even stand flying in this?"

"Lots of practice," Flint said, smiling. "And constant focus on the fact that Quidditch is the most important thing at school."

Dan rolled his eyes. "Sure it is," he said. "You know, Cross doesn't look all too focused, if you ask me."

Kurt looked up to see Leighton barely dodge a Bludger from Nick, his fourth near-hit of the match so far.

"He's going to get knocked off his broom if he's not careful," Gwen said sounding concerned.

Leighton suddenly did a strange swoop and the crowd groaned as a Bludger from Jeff collided with his ankle, an ominous snap ringing throughout the cold air. Leighton let out a shout of pain, spinning and rolling haphazardly.

"What the hell was he doing?" Gwen said, standing up to try and see over the heads of those standing in front of them.

Madam Hooch flew towards Leighton and helped him towards the ground as both teams took a time-out.

Kurt watched apprehensively as the Slytherin Team gathered around when Leighton was lying in the snow. "I'll be right back," he said, coming to a decision and jumping up.

The others called out in question but he ignored them, hurrying to make his way down the stands and towards the group on the side of

the pitch. He pushed through the emerald-clad players, who were, for some reason, laughing and cheering.

"Brilliant," one of them said as Kurt broke through to Leighton.

"That's why he's our Seeker," the Captain said, looking proud.

Kurt frowned.

Cole's voice rang throughout the stadium. "It looks like the Slytherin Seeker Cross has allowed himself a broken ankle to catch the Snitch. Well, that's stupid, if you ask me, but whatever."

Kurt stared at Leighton, who looked on the verge of passing out from the pain but was grinning faintly and holding up the little, winged Snitch. The Slytherin supporters slowly erupted in cheers and applause, still taken aback by the turn of events. Madam Hooch was examining his ankle, clucking her tongue reprovingly.

"Leighton, you're an idiot," Kurt said, half-laughing in relief.

"Oh, hey, Kurt," Leighton said, sounding surprised. "I thought—"

"Shut up before I break your other ankle," Kurt said, shaking his head.

"Are you alright?"

"Fine," Leighton said, smiling. "But...Blaine."

Kurt turned at his words to see Blaine and the rest of the Ravenclaw team dismounting their brooms, looking dejected and defeated. Blaine was staring at Kurt with an angry expression.

Before Kurt could move, he saw Leighton's ex, Penelope, making her way from the stands onto the center of the pitch.

"What's Pen doing?" Leighton said, sitting up a little straighter as Madam Hooch went to work fixing his ankle.

Penelope stopped in the middle of the field and lifted her wand to her throat.

"*Sonorus*," she said, a faint smirk on her face. "Well, that was a lovely match, wasn't it?" she said. The stands fell silent as everyone turned their attention to her. "But I've got a different sort of show I think you'll all appreciate just as much." She pulled a tiny bottle out of her coat pocket and held it up. "I'd like to thank Kurt Hummel and Leighton Cross, the stars of this little display. Those with weak constitutions may want to shield their eyes."

Kurt exchanged a confused look with Leighton as Penelope uncorked the bottle and dipped her wand into it, pulling out the tiniest strand of silvery thought. She pointed her wand into the sky and shouted, "*Exertus!*"

It was like she'd turned on a giant movie projector, the images displaying clearly on the clouds overhead. Kurt couldn't make out exactly what was going on, but he could hear gentle gasps and light moans that seemed to come from the very air around them.

"*Please*," he heard a voice say, followed by a rough, needy groan.

The images became a little clearer and he could make out the form of two bodies wrapped around each other in the dark.

"Oh my god," one of the Slytherin players said, looking shocked.

"*Kurt. I—What do I do?*" a second voice said, echoing from the memory. Leighton gasped and Kurt knew he must have suddenly understood what Penelope was showing them.

"*Touch me,*" the first voice, which Kurt now recognized as his own, said, "*Please.*"

He couldn't think. Everything had turned fuzzy and there were eyes on him, stunned and confused gazes. He could almost feel Leighton's eyes burning into him. He wanted to run away but his legs wouldn't carry him.

"*Oh, god, yes.*" There was the wet sound of heated kisses, though the memory itself was still too dark to make much out other than the occasional shift of limbs.

"*Is this right?*"

"*Y-yes. Yes, that's, ugh, that's so good.*"

Tears stung his eyes as he started to shake. There were people jeering from the stands now. Someone shouted "what a slut!" and someone else laughed in reply. They thought it was real. They didn't realize it was a dream. No one but Kurt and Leighton, and perhaps a few people who knew about Occlumency and Legilimency, would know that it hadn't actually happened.

There were murmurs from the players around him and he heard Madam Hooch standing and hurrying out to Penelope, who was laughing, to try and stop the memory from playing out any further.

"*What do you want me to do?*"

There was a collective, disgusted groan from the crowd. Though it was difficult to distinguish the images, there was no mistaking what was happening in the memory. Kurt's face stung in the cold, tears freezing in his eyes as his brain screamed for his legs to run.

"*Leighton!*"

The projection faded from the clouds and Madam Hooch snatched Penelope's wand away, shouting something Kurt's brain wouldn't take in.

Cole was laughing into the microphone until Professor Cooney managed to get it away from him. There was the faint buzz of talk rising slowly in a crescendo as a few people hurled insults at Kurt from the stands.

"Whore!"

"Christ, Hummel, you'll get it anywhere, won't you?"

"Anderson, your boyfriend's a slag!"

Kurt tried to catch his breath. He felt sick. He was going to puke or pass out or cry or *something*, he wasn't sure which sounded better yet. The feeling of being trapped suddenly pressed down on him and he pushed back away from the Slytherin team, catching a glimpse of Leighton's confused and surprised expression.

He turned to where Blaine and the rest of the Ravenclaw team were staring at him with shocked looks. Blaine looked completely stunned, hurt evident in his eyes as he looked across the pitch at Kurt.

"Blaine," he croaked, taking a shaky step towards him.

Blaine shook his head, throwing down his broom and storming from the pitch.

"Blaine, don't!" Kurt sobbed, tears coming hot and fast to his face.

"Blaine, it's not real! Blaine!"

He ran after him, ignoring the jeers and laughter directed towards him as the feeling that his entire world was suddenly collapsing in on itself filled him with a rush of dread and fear.



## Chapter Fifteen

"Leigh, what the hell, dude?"

"You're *gay*?"

"So Pen was just an act?"

Leighton ignored his teammates' questions and pushed himself to his feet, fighting through the pain of his broken ankle and stumbling towards where Madam Hooch was shouting at a smirking Penelope. He was never an angry person. He always hated confrontation; but seeing his ex *laughing* after causing Kurt the humiliation that had sent him running after Blaine in tears had cracked something inside of him.

"You bitch!" he yelled as he reached them.

"Oh hey, Leighton," Pen said, smirking. "Nice job with Hummel. I had no idea you liked that sort of thing."

"Shut up!" Leighton shouted, ignoring Madam Hooch, who was saying something about his ankle. "You're a jealous, spoiled brat and I never should have dated you in the first place! You've just done something you *know* he'll never forget and neither will the rest of the school. How could you?"

"Wasn't that hard, really," Pen said shrugging.

Leighton stumbled a little as his broken ankle shook beneath him but he forced himself to stay upright. "What did he do, huh?" he said, tears burning his eyes at the thought of the look on Kurt's face. "What did he do to deserve you humiliating him?"

"Oh stop acting all high and mighty, Leighton," Pen said, rolling her eyes. "Go find Hummel and make his dirty little dreams come true like you know you want to, I doubt he'd mind, the little slut."

"Shut your mouth, you stupid bitch!" Leighton roared, trying to run at her. His ankle gave way and he fell into the snow, pain arching up his leg and sending a wave of nausea over him.

"He needs the hospital wing," someone said, sounding worried as Pen laughed and Leighton rolled onto his side moments before vomiting onto the pitch.

"You're going to see the Headmistress, Ms. Marsh," Madam Hooch said, her voice sounding fuzzy in Leighton's ears.

"I think he's going to pass out," someone shouted.

A shadow passed over him and a concerned face swam into view.

"No," he groaned. "No...I can't. I have to...find Kurt...."

Darkness swallowed him up and he blacked out to the still ringing sound of jeers and disbelieving sounds from the stands.

---

It was like all his nightmares were suddenly blooming into existence. He was barely even watching where he was going, his vision blurred with anger and tears as he stomped across the quiet grounds.

"Blaine, stop!"

He ignored Kurt's shouts, didn't want to hear anything he had to say right now.

"Blaine you have to listen to me! Please!"

Blaine pushed the oak front doors open, his footsteps echoing around the entrance hall.

Kurt finally caught up to him, panting and gasping as tears rolled down his face. Normally the sight of Kurt crying would break his heart but now it just fueled his anger.

"Blaine it wasn't real!" Kurt said, struggling to keep up with him as Blaine climbed the marble staircase. "It was just a dream!"

"Is that supposed to make me feel better?" Blaine shouted, refusing to look at him.

"Blaine, it was *ages* ago," Kurt said, slipping a little in the snow falling from Blaine's robes. Blaine ignored him.

"Again, not helping," Blaine said, speeding up and trying to shake him off.

"Blaine, please don't be angry," Kurt sobbed. "I...it was back when we weren't...when you weren't really being *intimate* with me and...I mean, I can't control my dreams, can I?"

"Apparently not," Blaine snapped.

"Blaine, please," Kurt said, his voice breaking. "Don't do this. This is what they want! I knew Cole was up to something. He's just trying to make you hate me."

"He's doing a damn good job of it, then," Blaine said.

"Blaine," Kurt pleaded. "Just talk to me."

Blaine didn't answer as he climbed the spiral staircase up to the tower and grunted out an answer to the eagle-knocker's question.

"Blaine?" Kurt said, sounding worried.

"Just tell me one thing, Kurt," Blaine said, rounding on him at the top of the dormitory stairs. "When he kissed you, did you kiss him back?"

"I—what?" Kurt said, looking taken aback.

"Did you kiss him back?" Blaine repeated, smashing open the dormitory door so hard it rattled on his hinges.

"W-what...why are you asking that?" Kurt said, looking confused.

"Because I'd damn well like to know!" Blaine shouted.

Kurt's expression shifted a little. "Are you saying you think I *would*?" he said softly.

"I don't know!" Blaine said, throwing up his arms. "That's why I'm asking."

Kurt had stopped crying now and looked disbelieving. "So...you don't trust me?" he said.

Blaine let out a noise of frustration. "Just answer the question, Kurt!"

"I shouldn't have to!" Kurt said, his voice rising as well. "After everything we've been through, after the number of times that I've told you over and over again that I love *you*, you should know the answer!"

"I'm still not hearing a no," Blaine said.

"No, then!" Kurt said. "I didn't! But that's not the point anymore, Blaine. The point is that you don't trust me. You think I *would* kiss him back."

"Well, after what I just saw, can you blame me?" Blaine yelled. "And how is this any different from last year when you thought I cheated with Jeremiah?"

"Well, for one thing, you *know* that was a dream," Kurt said. "You're so perfect at Occlumency I'm sure you spotted that without much difficulty. But how was I supposed to know those pictures were fake?"

"I dunno, ask me?" Blaine said.

"I'm sorry, Blaine," Kurt said, throwing up his hands. "I've already apologized for being stupid and overdramatic about it!"

"What about now?" Blaine shouted, his throat starting to hurt from all the yelling. "I haven't heard one yet for you being overdramatic like you *always* are."

"*I'm* being overdramatic?" Kurt said in disbelief. "It was a dream! A damn *dream*, Blaine. A dream that the whole s-school has seen now and I'm going to have to d-deal with them thinking I did those things when I didn't and all you care about is if I kissed Leighton back!" Tears slid down his cheeks again as he spoke, his voice cracking.

"Well I'm sorry if I'm upset that my boyfriend let himself be some supposedly straight guy's experiment!" Blaine said. "A straight guy that you've been having sex dreams about, apparently. Dreams that you won't tell me about, which, in my opinion, says something."

"First off, I'm not his damn experiment," Kurt said, his eyes sparking with anger. "He's confused and he feels horrible about kissing me but he knows he has feelings for me; he's not just...testing the waters to see if he's gay, that's a terrible thing to say. You don't even know him, Blaine, and how *dare* you accuse me of...allowing it to happen. I couldn't exactly stop it and I've made it very clear that there's nothing beyond friendship between us."

"Second, it was one dream, Blaine!" He was crying in earnest again, looking hurt and irritated. "And I didn't tell you about it because it wasn't important! I knew you'd freak out about it when it *didn't matter*!"

It was months and months ago when you couldn't spare ten minutes to be with me."

"So what, would you have been turning to Cross for real if I hadn't put out for you?" Blaine said. "You certainly lead him on enough."

"I don't lead him on!" Kurt shouted. "I've told him that there's no chance of me and him getting together because I love you. Dammit, Blaine, why won't you just listen to me! Leighton understands, why won't you?"

"So you can be all flirty with the guy who had a thing for you but then when it comes to Cole, I'm supposed to just treat him like dirt?" Blaine said.

"You don't even like Cole!" Kurt said, sounding exasperated. "I'm sorry, Blaine, okay? I'm sorry that a friend of mine has developed feelings for me. I'm sorry that the person who has a crush on you is a creepy stalker, but you *asked me* to talk to him, to tell him to back off! I don't remember you protesting much when I told him to leave you alone! Leighton's not following me around or acting like a total perv like Cole is with you. The two are completely different! And for your information, Leighton feels horrible that he was coming between us."

"Is that so?" Blaine said, rolling his eyes.

"Yes!" Kurt said. "You know what he did before the match? He said he didn't want to be friends anymore because he didn't want you getting upset about our friendship. Because he *cares* about me Blaine. He cares more about me being happy than about him being happy."

"Well good for him," Blaine grunted. "I'd just hoped that *you'd* care more about me being happy than about him being happy."

"I do!" Kurt said; his tears had stopped again and he just looked annoyed and furious. "I've put up with you being snippy and I've reassured you countless times that you're the only person I love and you continue to be moody and doubt me and it's really starting to get to me."

"In case you've forgotten, Blaine, last year when I was with Flint and you said you loved me, I had to figure out what I wanted. I didn't have to do that this time, Blaine, because I *know* I love you! And why is it that you were fine with me being understanding and staying friends when it was you but not with Leighton when I don't even *like* Leighton like that? You're being a hypocrite, don't you think?"

"So, what, now I'm the angry, stupid boyfriend and you'll just skip on over to Cross' arms and be happy with him, then?" Blaine said. "You were certainly rushing to his side the moment he was injured."

"Because it was my fault he was upset!" Kurt shouted. "You're being ridiculous! Not to mention cruel."

"Go then!" Blaine roared, throwing himself down onto his bed, his back to Kurt. He clutched his face in his hands, trying to stave off the throbbing headache that was building in his skull.

"Fine!" Kurt snapped.

Blaine heard him throw open his trunk and turned to see him shoving clothes and books haphazardly into his bag.

"What are you doing?" Blaine grunted.

"I'm leaving," Kurt said, not looking up. "I'm not sleeping in the same room as you."

"Whatever," Blaine said, turning away from him again. "I don't even care anymore."

Something hit Blaine in the back before falling onto the bed and he looked back to see a book lying on the mattress.

"Happy damn anniversary, Blaine," Kurt said, giving him one last pained look before leaving the dorm, slamming the door behind him.

Blaine frowned and pulled the book around to look at the cover. It was a scrapbook with a picture of the two of them smiling at each other under the beech tree they'd always considered their tree. Kurt had taken a piece of parchment and done a rubbing of the words Blaine had carved in the bark the year before.

The reality of what had just happened hit him hard and his throat tightened painfully as tears splashed down from his face onto the scrapbook, smearing the charcoal that surrounded his words.

---

Kurt had no idea where he was going, didn't know where he *could* go. The Room of Requirement was out. Blaine could get in there and he wasn't about to give him any chances to try and explain away the horrible things he'd said. He made Kurt feel about a thousand times worse than he already did, hurt and anger smashing into the shame and humiliation coursing through him.

A few people passed him in the corridor, talking about the match and what they'd seen and heard. Kurt pushed by before they had a chance to do more than realize who he was. He hitched his bag higher on his shoulder, dashing away the tears stinging his eyes and wishing he could just curl up into a ball somewhere safe until everything was over. But Blaine had always been the one to hold him and make everything better and now the thought of Blaine made him sick to his stomach.

He stopped at the end of a corridor and looked around, trying to gain his bearings and turning down a set of stairs leading to the Charms corridor. The thought of Leighton brought more humiliated tears to his eyes. What would Leighton think of him? What would he have to deal with because of Kurt?

Suddenly, he knew where he had to go. He turned down the next corridor and sped up, ignoring the people jeering at him as he went. He ran down the marble staircase and down the dungeon corridor, avoiding the confused and disapproving looks he was getting. "Salazar!" he shouted when he reached the blank stretch of wall that led to the Slytherin common room. Nothing happened. He let out a frustrated sob. "Salazar! *Salazar!*" He slammed his hand against the wall, sobbing and letting out a shout of pain. The wall slid open and he found himself face to face with a confused looking second year Slytherin girl. He moved past her into the room, which fell silent the moment people realized he was there. He ignored the stares, searching desperately for Leighton in the crowd. "Kurt?"

He spun around and saw Leighton sitting up from where he was lying on one of the green leather couches, looking pale and anxious. "Leighton," Kurt said, sighing in relief. "Can I talk to you...alone?" Leighton nodded, gently pushing away the people who were gathered around him looking concerned. "No, I'm fine, really, Madam Hooch fixed it fine," he said, giving his teammates a forced smile. He approached Kurt, giving him a steady look. "Come on," he said, laying a hand lightly on his shoulder and leading him towards a door at the back of the common room. It opened to a spiral staircase, which they climbed in silence to a green-carpeted hallway lined with paintings of ships and tossing oceans. Doors were set along the wall, one of which Leighton opened and let him into, following after him before closing the door softly.

The room was circular, with five four poster beds with emerald hangings and comforters around the wall. Everything was made of dark wood like in the common room below them, snakes carved into the legs of the tables and beds. Small windows looked out over the lake, which seemed to be mere feet below them. "Are you okay?" Leighton said as Kurt moved into the room and threw his bag onto the floor.

Kurt turned to him, catching his concerned expression, and shook his head. "No," he said. "I...Blaine and I broke up."

Leighton looked stricken. "Oh god," he breathed. "I'm...this is all my fault. I'm so sorry, Kurt."

"You didn't do anything wrong," Kurt said, shaking his head. He felt tears forming in his eyes again as he thought of some of the things Blaine had said. "He said...he said some really horrible things." Leighton's expression darkened a little. "About you?" he said.

"Sort of," Kurt muttered, shrugging. He couldn't meet Leighton's eyes, was afraid of seeing disapproval or judgment there. "I'm sorry... I can't imagine what you must think of me."

"I think you're human," Leighton said softly.

Kurt looked up in surprise. "I—you aren't freaked out?" he said. "I'd be. And everyone's going to be awful to you now...because of me. Because of something that happened months ago and doesn't even...*mean* anything."

Leighton smiled. "I've dealt with hate before for Quidditch," he said. "It doesn't really bother me. If people want to call me names, I can deal with it. Right now I'm more concerned about if *you're* alright. I heard the things they were saying about you. You don't deserve that, Kurt. None of it's true."

Kurt felt a lump rise in his throat again. "Thank you," he choked.

Leighton nodded. "I'm sorry about Blaine," he said. "I didn't think...I mean...I thought he'd understand."

"Me too," Kurt said, wrapping his arms around himself to try and stop the cold that was creeping through him.

Leighton hesitated for a moment before moving to pull him into a hug. Kurt broke down at the touch, sobbing into his shoulder and wishing more than anything that Blaine was the one who was holding him and telling him not to cry. He managed to compose himself after a minute and wiped his eyes as he pulled back.

"I've told everyone in Slytherin to leave you alone about it," Leighton said, watching him closely. "They know not to say anything to you. I'll do my best to make sure everyone else backs off, too."

"Why are you doing this?" Kurt said softly. "You were just humiliated in front of the whole school because of me."

Leighton shrugged. "I told you," he said. "That stuff doesn't bother me. I don't care what anyone else thinks about me. The Slytherins know it wasn't real; they listen to me." He paused. "I'm sorry she did that to you. I...I never thought she'd be capable of something that mean."

"She had help," Kurt said. "I'm sure of it. Cole O'Brien...I'm assuming that's why they've been hanging out. They've been...planning this.

They must have stolen the memory from the Pensieve." He rubbed his eyes, a dull ache building behind his temple. He didn't want to think about facing the rest of the school on Monday, didn't like to imagine what he'd have to deal with after everyone had been given the weekend to speculate about him...about both of them.

"Here," Leighton said, taking Kurt's bag and moving it to set beside the bed at the far end of the room closest to a barely cracked door

through which Kurt could see a bathroom tiled in dark green with silver snake taps on the sinks. "Sit down before you get sick." Kurt moved without even really thinking and sat on the edge of Leighton's bed, staring at his lap. Leighton sat down next to him, leaving a foot of space between them and staying silent.

"Do you want to stay here?" Leighton said after a few minutes. "I mean...I understand if you don't want to go back to your tower." Kurt nodded, not looking at him. He knew it couldn't get any better if people knew he was staying in the Slytherin dorms but he also knew he couldn't be around Blaine right now and that it was going to be bad no matter what he did.

The door creaked open and they both looked up to see Thad peek into the room anxiously.

"Thad?" Kurt said, blinking in surprise as Thad slid inside, clutching a bag over his shoulder.

"Hi," he said in a small voice. "I thought I'd find you here."

"I'll leave you alone," Leighton said, standing up. He flashed Kurt a small smile and patted him on the shoulder before walking out past Thad, who smiled very faintly at him.

Thad stared at him for a moment. "I brought some of your things," he said, holding up the bag he was carrying. "I...Blaine said you didn't want to sleep in the tower."

Kurt didn't reply, wondering what else Blaine might have said about him...what the rest of them thought about what had happened.

"Are you alright?" Thad said, setting down the bag and moving to sit next to him. "They were being horrid to you out there."

Kurt turned to him. "So you know it wasn't real?" he said quietly.

"You...you're not creeped out or anything?"

Thad shook his head, smiling reassuringly. "You're my best friend, Kurt," he said, moving a little closer to him. "I know you love Blaine. I'm sure he'll come round soon enough."

Kurt shook his head. "I don't care if he does," he said, anger welling up inside him. "The way he acted...I can't believe him. He doesn't even care that I was just humiliated in front of the entire school."

"I'm sure he cares," Thad said softly. "He's probably just upset right now."

"And I'm not?" Kurt said, his voice cracking as tears sprang to his eyes. "All he cares about is if—" he stopped. Thad still didn't know that Leighton had kissed him.

"Kurt, you're not telling me something," Thad said, giving him a steady look, his dark eyes searching.

Kurt sighed, staring at his hands. How had everything blown up in his face like this?



"Kurt?" Thad said, taking his hand and giving him a kind smile. "You can tell me anything."

Kurt hesitated for a moment before giving in and telling him everything, about Leighton kissing him and admitting his feelings and confusion and all that Blaine had shouted at him in the dormitory. Thad listened in silence, squeezing his hand when he broke down again in tears.

"I'm sorry," Thad said, resting his head on Kurt's shoulder. "Blaine shouldn't have said those things to you. And I promise I'll turn anyone who talks about you into a toad."

Kurt let out a strangled laugh. He sniffed and wiped his eyes hastily.

"Thank you, Thad," he said. "You have no idea what it means to me to have you on my side. What...what do the others think about all this?"

Thad sighed. "Well, Flint of course listened to me when I explained it wasn't real. Nick and Jeff seem to be a little confused by it all. I don't think they're much for taking sides. As for everyone else...I think they're split. Some people were saying some really awful things when I left and I told them to shut up but...most people don't really seem to care either way. They're just happy to have something to gossip about." He scowled, looking annoyed.

"I seem to be the topic of a lot of Hogwarts gossip," Kurt muttered, thinking of the previous year when he and Flint had broken up and the whole school had thought that he'd cheated on Flint with Blaine. But he'd had Blaine by his side then, and everyone had just been guessing then...they hadn't had such..."*proof*".

"You're not going to leave, are you?" Thad said. "I mean...I understand if you want to, now that Karofsky's not at McKinley, I just...I'd be lonely."

Kurt paused, considering the proposition. Really, he *could* leave if he wanted to. McKinley would still have its bullies but with the worst one gone, could Hogwarts be any better now? He'd fought to stay at the school after being attacked the year before because he had Blaine and the idea of being away from him had been painful. Now the thought of Blaine glaring at him with something close to hate was just as, if not more, painful.

"I don't know," he said at last. "I...I really don't, Thad. I'm sorry."

"It's okay," Thad said, smiling sadly. "I understand. I don't know if I'd be able to deal with it either."

"But at least you'd have Flint to punch anyone who said anything about you," Kurt said, feeling another painful twist in his gut as he thought of Blaine yet again.

He still couldn't believe that they were over. After everything they'd been through and all the plans they'd made together for their future. It

was like an entire reality, an entire life that might have been his, was being ripped away from him.

He knew he'd always love Blaine, though. But right now...after what Blaine had said...he couldn't be with him. And he really didn't think Blaine wanted to be with him, either, for that matter.

"Did...did Blaine say anything about me?" Kurt said anxiously.

Thad bit his lip, avoiding his gaze.

"Thad."

Thad sighed. "He...well, he's a bit upset right now. He was crying when we got back to the dorm and he didn't really say much but he said you'd left and that you weren't together anymore. Nick and Jeff couldn't believe it. I think they thought you two would end up married or something.... We all did."

Kurt swallowed back a lump in his throat and blinked away tears. "So did I," he whispered.

Thad stayed with him for the next few hours, curled up on Leighton's bed drinking tea and trying to take his mind off things. But Kurt's mind kept traveling to Blaine, replaying their fight over and over in his head. It was like a bad movie that wouldn't end, intermingled with flashes of the crowd in the Quidditch stadium jeering at him as the memory played out.

"Are you sure you're alright?" Thad said when he got up to leave as the sky darkened outside of the windows.

"Not really," Kurt said, shrugging. "But...I'll manage."

Thad hugged him tightly. "Let me know if you need anything," he said, "Flint and I are here for you at least."

"You're a good friend, Thad," Kurt said as Thad reached the door.

Thad smiled a little, looking sad. "Don't let them tell you you're a bad person, Kurt. Because you're not." He rocked back and forth on his toes for a moment before leaving, closing the door softly behind him. Kurt lay back on the pillows, taking in the calming scent of pine and lavender and gazing through the window at the scattered stars. He spotted the star Blaine had bought him for his birthday the year before, whose position in the sky he'd memorized, and turned away, rolling onto his side and curling into a ball.

The door opened and soft footfalls approached him.

"Kurt?" Leighton said softly.

Kurt shifted a little in reply, not really in the mood to talk at the moment.

The mattress sank next to him and Leighton's hand came to rest on his arm. The warmth of the touch calmed him slightly.

"I'll sleep on the floor," Leighton said softly, barely moving his fingers as he brushed them reassuring over Kurt's forearm.

"No," Kurt said, sitting up quickly and finding himself only a few inches from Leighton. He backed away. "No, I...I can sleep downstairs or something."

"Don't be stupid," Leighton said, the corner of his mouth quirking up in a smile. "You can have my bed. I always sleep on the floor when I stay with my cousins. It doesn't bother me."

"You're being too nice to me," Kurt said, pulling his legs up to his chest and wrapping his arms around his knees.

"Someone has to," Leighton said a little sadly. He sighed. "It's not going to be easy, you know. They're not kind. I've seen what they can do to people."

"I know," Kurt said, nodding. "I've dealt with plenty of it before. I just...I don't want to have to. I-I feel like I should just go back to Ohio and try and forget about all of this. Forget about Hogwarts. But I don't think I'll ever forget about this place. It's part of me now. Just like everyone I've met here is part of me." He sighed, resting his head on his knees as tears blurred his vision again.

Leighton reached out to run his hand lightly down Kurt's cheek. "I hate seeing you like this," he admitted, looking troubled. "I wish I could fix it. For you."

"I know," Kurt said, nodding against his own leg. "I know you would if you could."

Leighton tilted his head to the side, smiling gently. "You know, you're still beautiful when you cry," he said. "It's like...a tragic beauty. It hurts seeing you like this but it's still kind of...incredible. Your eyes sort of turn grey, like there are clouds behind them or something."

Kurt's breath caught a little in his throat at the words. It was almost painful hearing Leighton saying to him even when they both knew Kurt couldn't reciprocate his feelings.

Leighton stood up and pulled a blanket out of his trunk and tossed it on the floor next to his bed before turning towards the bathroom. He paused at the door, looking back at Kurt.

"I know you don't feel the way I feel about you, Kurt," he said sadly.

"But if you gave me a chance, I'd never break your heart." He smiled a little before walking into the bathroom, shutting the door behind him.

Kurt reached up to pull the hangings closed around the bed, not really caring about changing out of his clothes or anything else but just sleeping and trying to push it all from his mind. He laid down on his stomach and wrapped his arms around one of Leighton's pillows, closing his eyes and slowly breathing in the scent that had slowly become a comfort to him.

Tears wet the pillowcase beneath him until he eventually drifted to sleep, but he felt a little less like he was falling apart than he had

knowing that he at least had Leighton, Thad, and Flint on his side to back him up.

---

He woke the next morning to the sound of a door shutting and it took him a moment to realize where he was as he stared around at the unfamiliar cocoon of green curtains around him. Memories of the day before seeped through him and he took a deep breath to fight down tears.

\*Sitting up, he frowned as the sound of gentle piano music reached his ears, flowing from the bathroom, where it mingled with the gentle splash of water from the shower.

He stood and slipped off the bed onto the floor, his toes sinking into the plush carpet. Someone had removed his shoes and socks for him while he was sleeping. Well, he knew who it must have been.

Singing joined the piano melody and he realized with a jolt what the song was and who was singing it all at once.

Leighton's voice wasn't anything like what it had been when they'd sung together at Christmas. He sounded absolutely tortured, his voice quivering every now and then with what was unmistakably tears.

*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 felt tears pooling in his own eyes just hearing the pain in Leighton's voice. He'd never heard anyone put so much emotion into a song before. It was heart-wrenchingly beautiful.

*When the evening shadows and the stars appear*

*And there is no one there to dry your tears*

*And I could you for a million years*

*To make you feel my love*

He walked slowly towards the bathroom door, leaning against it and closing his eyes as he listened to Leighton singing, his heart breaking knowing that he was the one causing the raw hurt and longing that Leighton was pouring out with each word.

*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 shower shut off and he heard Leighton moving on the other side of the door. His voice shook with a broken sob and Kurt had to bite his own knuckles to keep from crying aloud as well.

*I'd go hungry, I'd go black and blue*

*And I'd go crawling down the avenue*

*No there's nothing that I would do*

*To make you feel my love*

The break began and the sound of strings rose in the song. Kurt tentatively turned the doorknob and pushed it open. The humid air of the room hit him as he stepped into the room. Leighton was slumped against the wall on the opposite side of the room, his hair plastered to his forehead and his clothes damp as he sobbed into his knees.

Kurt walked across the room and slid down the wall to sit next to him, very lightly laying his hand on his back. Leighton's breath stuttered a little at the touch but he leaned into it, lifting his head but keeping his eyes fixed on his lap as the music continued from Kurt's phone, which was sitting on the bench up against the wall.

*The storms are raging on the rolling sea*

*And on the highway of regret*

*The winds of change are blowing wild and free*

*You ain't seen nothing like me yet*

Leighton steadied his breath and turned to Kurt at the last verse, fixing him with a look so strong that Kurt felt like all the air had been drained from his lungs. His hands shook and tears fell slowly down his face as something splintered painfully in his chest.

*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*

Kurt opened his mouth as the song ended, trying to make words form, but his tongue didn't seem to want to work. Leighton sniffed next to him and wiped his eyes on his sleeve.

"Leighton," Kurt forced out at last, his voice hoarse and broken. "Are you...are you saying you love me?"

Leighton turned back to him, his blue eyes glimmering with tears. "I don't know, Kurt," he whispered. "I don't know if I'm gay or what right now, but I know I want to be with you. I want to be the one who holds you and wipes away your tears when everyone is hurting you like I know they're going to. It kills me knowing they're going to.

"A-and I don't know if what I feel is love because I'm just so confused about feeling anything at all and I still feel bad because I know I shouldn't feel like this because you and Blaine *just* broke up and you don't even feel anything like that towards me and—" He broke off, his head dropping to his knees as he shook with sobs.

"Leighton, I don't blame you for feeling the way you do," Kurt said, his hand still resting on Leighton's back. "You've been more than understanding with me, I can at least do the same."

Leighton raised his eyes to him. "I'm sorry," he said.

"Don't be," Kurt said, giving his shoulder a squeeze. "Please don't. You didn't do anything wrong."

"I feel like I have," Leighton said. "I know it's my fault Blaine did what he did and said what he said and I know how much it's hurting you. I know you still love him."

Kurt nodded. "I'll always love Blaine," he said softly. "But I can't be with him...not now...not after what he said."

"I'd never do that to you," Leighton said, watching him steadily. "I'd never hurt you, Kurt."

"I know," Kurt sighed, resting his head back against the wall. "I know."

---

He spent the day curled up on Leighton's bed, finishing homework and dreading the next day. Leighton left not long after their talk and had asked his roommates to stay out of the room as often as possible to give Kurt his space.

From what he said, Penelope had been suspended for two weeks after receiving a long lecture from a furious McGonagall and would be serving another two weeks of detention when she got back in addition to being banned from all Quidditch matches for the remainder of her time at Hogwarts. She'd also, predictably, given Cole up and he'd been stripped of his Prefect title and been given two weeks' detention.

Thad came to visit him again, bringing lunch with him and forcing Kurt to eat, though they didn't talk much, though Thad tried to convince him to talk to Blaine, who had apparently been spending his time holed up behind the closed curtains of his bed, refusing to talk to anyone.

"He misses you," Thad said timidly. "I can tell he does. And you miss him, too...don't you?"

Kurt didn't answer. Of course he missed Blaine, they'd been together for a full year; they'd been each other's first for so many things and no matter happened, they'd always had one another if things got bad.

Thad didn't push him any further and left soon after, looking forlorn.

Kurt was glad to have him to talk to, knowing that he at least had one more ally for when the storm hit the next day. But he also knew that Thad was hoping he'd get back together with Blaine, that they'd forget their fight and go back to the way things had been.

If Kurt was perfectly honest with himself, a part of him wanted the same thing. But another part, the stubborn, proud part of him, refused to let Blaine talk to him the way he had without suffering the consequences. And he was pretty sure Blaine didn't want to apologize anyway.

---

"Are you sure you'll be okay?"

Kurt glanced up from tying his shoes at Leighton, who was watching him in concern, waiting to walk Kurt to Transfiguration.

"Yeah," Kurt said, straightening up. "I'll deal with them. Thank you for bringing me breakfast, by the way."

"Well, you need to eat," Leighton said, looking worried. "You're going to get sick."

Kurt shrugged and slung his bag over his shoulder. "I'm fine," he lied. "Really."

Leighton looked doubtful but followed him out of the dorm into the hall and down into the common room. A few people turned to look at them when they entered but no one, as per Leighton's instructions, said anything.

Kurt felt his heart beating in his ears as he walked down the dungeon corridor, their footsteps echoing off the stone. He took a deep breath as he walked into the entrance hall, bracing for impact when the sounds of students leaving breakfast for their first class of the week hit his ears. The chatter turned to low muttering almost immediately.

"Just ignore them," Leighton whispered.

Kurt nodded sharply and kept his head held high as he walked past the gawking and giggling students up the marble staircase.

"*Whore*," someone hissed in his ear before laughing and running up the stairs.

Kurt tried to keep his expression blank but felt his lip quivering of its own accord. Leighton seemed to catch the movement because he shifted his bag and placed a comforting hand on Kurt's arm, giving him a small smile.

"Ignore them," he said. "They're not worth it."

Kurt would have given anything to be able to do what Leighton said, especially at the end of the day. Transfiguration wasn't too bad; Flint gave him a reassuring smile and glared at anyone who gave him a dirty look; Nick and Jeff still seemed a little confused about the entire situation, as though they couldn't quite comprehend the idea of Blaine and Kurt not being together, but they did approach Kurt after class to see if there was anything they could do to help him.

"I'm fine, guys, really," Kurt said, forcing a smile. "Don't worry about me."

They walked away looking like a pair of kicked puppies, talking softly and hanging their heads. Kurt felt they were taking it like two children whose parents had separated and he hated seeing them so upset, not at all their usual energetic selves.

He spent most of the day in the Slytherin dungeon as his only other class was Muggle Studies that afternoon, which he was dreading more

than anything as it was his first class with Blaine. Leighton walked him to class again, more for protection than anything.

Though Leighton wasn't dealing with nearly as much as Kurt, he'd still returned from lunch drenched in pumpkin juice, which a Ravenclaw fourth year had flung at him when he was walking past, shouting something that Leighton refused to repeat.

But Leighton was taking it all much better than Kurt was. He didn't seem at all phased by what anyone said, or, he wasn't showing it if he was.

"Are you coming to dinner or do you want me to bring you something again?" Leighton said when they stopped outside the Muggle Studies classroom.

"I don't feel much like eating," Kurt said miserably after receiving his third middle finger since they'd left the Slytherin common room.

"Well you need to," Leighton said. "I'll bring you something, alright?"

Kurt nodded and Leighton gave him a warm smile and squeezed his arm before turning and walking away to head to Potions. With a heavy sigh, Kurt turned into the Muggle Studies room and walked straight-backed to the back of the class to sit next to Thad, ignoring the eyes that followed him.

Thad gave him a small smile and patted his leg under the table as Kurt unpacked his book. As he straightened up, he saw Blaine watching him from across the aisle. Kurt held his gaze, his jaw tightening as he felt his eyes harden. Blaine's expression was unreadable, but the bags under his eyes and the rumpled state of his robes and hair were unmistakable.

After a tense moment, Blaine shook his head and looked away, burying his face in his book and not looking at Kurt for the rest of the lesson.

---

It wasn't like McKinley, where people had hissed insults and shoved him into lockers for being gay. They weren't afraid to voice their opinions of him now. There wasn't a single time between classes that Kurt didn't have at least one person call him a slag or a whore or throw him a dirty look.

The Slytherins weren't too bad, most of them taking Leighton's word to heart. The Ravenclaws seemed torn, either not caring or seeing Kurt as someone who'd betrayed their Captain and Head Boy, despite Thad—and Nick and Jeff's—defense of him. Flint and Dan tried to talk to the Gryffindors but not many of them listened. As for Hufflepuff, Kurt had no allies there and felt the full brunt of their disapproval and disgust.



On Tuesday before Transfiguration, he got stopped by a sixth year Gryffindor boy he'd never met before whose friends were egging him on and laughing.

"So, Hummel," he said, smirking. "If I gave you a Galleon, would you suck me off in the courtyard?"

His friends roared with laughter as Kurt felt the heat rise in his cheeks. "Probably doesn't even need paying," one of them shouted, those passing in the corridor laughing appreciatively.

"Didn't take him long to jump into Cross' bed, did it?" someone else jeered. "What's he like, Cross?"

"Leave him alone, Derricks," Leighton snapped, shoving away the boy who had approached Kurt. "He hasn't done anything to you."

"Not yet," Derricks said to more laughter. He walked off with his friends, giving Kurt a lewd look over his shoulder.

"Kurt," Leighton said, seeing the tears in his eyes. "Don't listen to them. They don't know the truth. They're not worth it."

Kurt wiped his eyes quickly, wishing he could brush off the insults like Leighton had been doing. But he'd never been so humiliated in his life and he didn't even have Blaine by his side now to stand up to them with.

"Kurt, please, don't listen to them," Leighton repeated, leading Kurt to the side of the corridor. "They don't know what they're talking about. You're better than all of them." He smiled softly and brushed Kurt's tears away with the sleeve of his robe. "They don't know you like me. They don't know how kind and caring you are and it's their loss if they don't want to take the time to learn. Don't give them the satisfaction of watching you break, okay? I won't."

Kurt nodded, taking a shaky breath and giving him a watery smile.

"Thanks," he said. "I'm sorry you have to deal with all this on your birthday. I know you were excited about it."

Leighton shrugged. "I'll have others," he said. "I just want you to feel better." He gave Kurt's arm a quick squeeze. "You want me to walk you to lunch?"

"No," Kurt said, shaking his head. "I...I think I can deal with them."

Leighton smiled. "Alright," he said. "I've got Care of Magical Creatures. Keep your chin up, okay?"

Kurt nodded, feeling fractionally better as Leighton walked away and he turned into the Transfiguration class, trying to ignore the low muttering that always started up the moment he entered a room and the disgusted looks being thrown in his direction.

Things didn't get much better as the week progressed, but Leighton continued to ignore everyone when it came to being insulted, concentrating his efforts on trying to get the rest of the school to leave

Kurt alone. But even Kurt was starting to feel a little numb towards everything, slowly growing used to the names and dirty looks.

"It's going to burn out eventually," Leighton said with a sigh as he walked Kurt to Muggle Studies on Friday morning. "If we just ignore them they'll get bored and find something else to talk about. Maybe if I light my pants on fire they'll concentrate on that instead." He grinned a little and turned to Kurt. "What do you think, should I give it a shot?"

Kurt found himself smiling for perhaps the first time since the previous Saturday. "Somehow I don't think putting yourself in the hospital wing for burns on your crotch is all that prudent."

Leighton laughed. "Worth a shot, I guess," he said, shrugging.

Kurt rolled his eyes as they rounded the corner to the Muggle Studies corridor. He stiffened a little when he saw Blaine up ahead talking to Thad, who looked a mildly annoyed. Blaine was shaking his head about something, staring at his shoes. He looked up when Kurt and Leighton approached, eyes flickering between the two of them. Thad dithered on the spot, looking flustered.

"Look, Hummel's closed his legs, someone call the *Prophet*," someone shouted as they passed, the only sound in the near-empty corridor. Kurt winced at the sound but didn't look away from Blaine. He thought he saw his gaze darken momentarily as it flickered to the person who'd shouted but couldn't be sure it wasn't just his mind playing tricks on him, hoping that Blaine cared when he'd given every indication otherwise.

"Hey!" Thad said, turning suddenly defensive. "Shut your fat mouth, Simmons, or I'll do it for you!"

Leighton made to pull out his own wand, looking furious.

"Don't," Kurt said softly, reaching out to touch Leighton's hand. "It's fine, really."

Leighton looked like he wanted to protest but sighed after a moment and removed his hand from his wand. He looked at Blaine, who was staring at where Kurt's fingers were hovering over Leighton's.

"You're a real idiot, you know that?" Leighton snapped.

Thad gasped, staring between Leighton and Blaine apprehensively.

"Leighton, don't," Kurt muttered. "Just leave it, please."

Leighton shook his head, giving Blaine a disbelieving look. He turned to Kurt. "I'll pick you up after your Defense lesson, okay?"

"Okay," Kurt said, forcing a smile, his earlier good mood long since evaporated.

Leighton gave Blaine one last disgusted look before squeezing Kurt's shoulder briefly and walking off to head to his free period, leaving Kurt alone with Blaine and Thad.

Thad bit his lip, glancing anxiously between the two of them.

"So are you two dating then?" Blaine said, his tone hollow.

"No," Kurt said, putting as much spite into the word as possible. "In case you forgot, we're just friends. You remember what friends are, don't you, Blaine? Those people who stick up for you when you're hurting. But I guess you're just like the rest of them, aren't you? You think I just jumped down his pants the second we broke up. You're unbelievable, you know that?"

Blaine opened his mouth to retort but closed it when Professor Hector peeked out into the corridor at them with her usual bright smile.

"The bell's going to ring any moment, boys, she said, ushering them in, her smile turning a little sad when she saw Kurt.

Kurt walked straight past Blaine into the room with Thad, who looked conflicted.

"Kurt," he said when they took their seats as the bell rang. "I think if you two just talked—"

"No," Kurt said firmly, feeling Blaine's eyes on him but refusing to meet them. "He made it very clear that he didn't want to be rational enough to talk."

"But you miss him," Thad said with a sigh. "You both want to get back together, we can all see it, it's just you're both too stubborn to see it yourselves."

"I have no desire to be with Blaine," Kurt lied, smoothing out his parchment and avoiding Thad's gaze.

"Then why are you still wearing this?" Thad said, reaching out to touch the spot where Kurt's diamond pendant rested against the hollow of his throat.

Kurt opened his mouth to argue but found he didn't have a sufficient answer to Thad's observation. Thad nodded, looking vaguely triumphant as he turned to face the front of the classroom.

So Kurt stopped at the bathroom before Defense and took off the necklace, which hadn't left his neck since Blaine had given it to him almost a year ago, and slipped it into his pocket with a heavy sense of finality.

It was strange, not feeling its weight against his skin, like a piece of him had been cut off or hollowed out. But he'd been feeling the same thing for a full week now since he and Blaine had broken up, like a chunk of him—not his body, his actual *being*—had been sheared away. And he didn't think that, no matter what he did, he'd ever really feel whole again. Not without Blaine.

---

It played out in his mind on a constant loop these days, the things he'd shouted at Kurt and what Kurt had just as loudly shouted back.

Something ached a little every time he reached the spot where he'd told Kurt to leave. What had he been thinking, saying those things? Well, he hadn't really been thinking at all. He'd been angry, was *still* angry, but his anger was laced with regret now. He always said things he wished he could take back when he was upset, but he knew he'd screw up more than usual this time. Because Kurt was gone.

The fact still hadn't really sunk in completely, though it hit him hard at certain moments, like when he woke up in the morning and rolled over, expecting to see Kurt sleeping in the next bed over only to find it empty and still made from the last time Kurt had been in it.

He'd considered trying to talk to Kurt—mostly because Thad hadn't stopped hounding him to since Sunday, insisting that Kurt was still just as in love with Blaine as he was with him—but he'd seen the way Kurt's jaw tightened and his eyes turned cold every time he saw Blaine.

He'd also seen that the only time Kurt was smiling lately—smiling for real, in the way that made his eyes light up and sparkle bright blue with the outer ring of green—was when he was with Cross. Cross, who'd been taking almost as much as Kurt had over the past week and had been defending Kurt every chance he got. Yes, Blaine had punched a sixth year Gryffindor in the gut when he'd heard him making fun of Kurt in the courtyard on Wednesday, but no one knew and he didn't think Kurt would care anyway.

It killed him seeing Kurt walking around putting up the cool, collected front he was so good at keeping—especially when he saw those moment where he was starting to crack under the pressure. But watching him smile at Cross, looking at him like his protector and perhaps something more, made him realize that he needed to let Kurt go, let him find happiness elsewhere, at least while Blaine figured out what he was doing, what he *really* wanted, because he simply didn't know anymore.

After lunch on Friday, he made his way up to the Room of Requirement, where he'd been spending a lot of his time lately when he needed to escape the whispers and questions.

The room was the way he'd left it when he and Kurt had been there last the previous year, bright and airy with plush carpet and a huge marble fireplace, books scattered across the table, untouched. Blaine sat down on the leather couch he'd laid on with Kurt so many times before.

He picked up the guitar leaning against the table, plucking it absently. Playing had given him something to keep him distracted, though he

often found himself playing or singing songs that said the things he wanted to say to Kurt.

\*His fingers moved of their own accord across the strings, pulling out a tune that had been crossing his mind a lot lately. Sighing, he set the guitar down and flicked his wand so it continued to play itself, allowing the sound to swell inside him as he let his voice ring out in the empty room, standing and walking to the door, wishing Kurt would just come through it and understand how he felt and why he'd said the things he'd said.

*You say 'I love you, boy'*

*I know you lie*

*I trust you all the same*

*I don't know why*

Kurt strode down the seventh floor corridor, keeping his head up and ignoring the hissed insults being thrown at him by passing students. It was harder without Leighton at his side; it made him feel bare and vulnerable when he was alone like this. He reached the blank stretch of wall where the entrance to the Room of Requirement was and stopped, memories flooding through him as he stared at the spot.

*Cause when my back is turned*

*My bruises shine*

*Our broken fairytale*

*So hard to hide*

Leighton turned the Claddagh ring over in his hand thoughtfully, no longer able to focus on the essay he'd been trying to work on in the library. He thought of Kurt and of all the undeserved pain he'd been putting up with. Kurt deserved to be happy. Leighton knew he could make him happy, if he just gave him a chance.

*I still believe*

*It's you and me to the end of time*

Kurt felt hot tears spill down his cheeks as he pressed his hand against the wall, wishing he could just sink into the safety of the room he knew could so easily become real if he asked for it.

*When we collide we come together*

*If we don't we'll always be apart*

Blaine's fingers splayed across the door as tears came hot and fast to his eyes.

*I'll take a bruise, I know you're worth it*

*When you hit me hit me hard*

Kurt took a calming breath, wiping his eyes and walking away. Because he couldn't hide, refused to. He was stronger than that now. It was the same reason he was staying at Hogwarts. He was tired of running.

*Sitting in a wishing hole  
Hoping it stays dry  
Feet cast in solid stone*

*I've got Gilligan's eyes*

Making his decision, Leighton clutched the ring in his hand and stood up, ignoring his friends' confused calls as he ran from the library to find Kurt.

*I still believe*

*It's you and me to the end of time*

Blaine thought his throat might tear from trying to keep his voice from shaking as he sang, each word leaving his body like physical pain.

*When we collide we come together*

*If we don't we'll always be apart*

*I'll take a bruise I know you're worth it*

*When you hit me, hit me hard*

Leighton tore down the corridor, his heart beating violently in his chest with apprehension. He didn't know what Kurt was going to say but he needed to try. He turned the corner around the seventh floor corridor and saw Kurt walking alone towards him, his eyes a little red. The thought that he'd been crying again tore him up inside.

"Kurt!"

*Cause you said love*

*Was letting us go against what*

*Our future is for*

Kurt looked up at the sound of his name to see Leighton striding towards him, looking determined.

"Leighton, I thought you had—"

*Many of horror*

"Kurt," Leighton said, cutting him off. "I know you've said you don't feel the same way about me that I feel about you, but I'm begging you. Give me a chance." He held out the ring in his open palm.

"Please."

*Our future is for*

Kurt stared down at the little ring in Leighton's hand, glancing up into the hopeful, anxious gaze.

*Many of horror*

Blaine slumped down against the wall, which faded from the light, cheerful blue that Kurt had made to a dull gray as the room started to drink in his pain and spit it back out at him.

*I still believe*

*It's you and me til the end of time*

"Kurt," Leighton said softly, smiling. "Just give me a chance."

Kurt opened his mouth, teetering on the edge of decision.

"I—okay," he said at last. "I...I'll think about it."

Leighton smiled a little wider as Kurt picked up the ring and slid it onto his right ring finger with the heart pointing towards his fingertip.

Unattached. Well...it was a start.

*When we collide we come together*

*If we don't we'll always be apart*

Kurt glanced back at the spot where the Room of Requirement lay before following Leighton down the hall, the Claddagh ring feeling strange and foreign on his finger and yet...it had a comforting weight to it, like Leighton's hand on his shoulder as he smiled softly at him.

*I'll take a bruise I know you're worth it*

*When you hit me, hit me hard*

The guitar fell silent, the only sound left in the room that of Blaine's gentle sobs as the paint cracked and peeled on the walls around him.

---

"Thad, you need to stop worrying yourself over this," Flint said, glancing up at Thad, who was once again pacing anxiously around the dorm room.

"But it's wrong," Thad said, throwing up his hands. "All wrong. They're supposed to be together and they darn well know it. Why do they both have to be so stubborn?"

Flint sighed, leaning back against the pillows. "You can't force them to want to stay together. They had a fight. You know, sometimes it can take awhile to get over these things, especially after what they said to each other."

Thad made a non-committal noise in the back of his throat.

"What about that Cross guy?" Flint said, shifting a little on the bed.

"What about him?" Thad said, pausing in his movement to look at Flint.

"Well he and Kurt seem to be pretty close," Flint said, shrugging. "I mean...I know they were doing anything before but...you said Cross likes Kurt, right?"

"Yeah," Thad said, looking vaguely suspicious. "So what?"

"Well, maybe Kurt needs some time to, I dunno, be with someone different," Flint suggested nervously.

"But...that's stupid," Thad said with a nonplussed look. "He *knows* he's supposed to be with Blaine. I listened to him all last year talking about all their plans."

"Sometimes plans don't turn out the way we want them to, pet," Flint said sadly. "People who love each other can grow apart. I don't like it either but we can't stop it from happening. We have to let both of them make their own decisions."

Thad gnawed at his bottom lip before sighing in resignation and flopping onto the bed next to him. "Maybe you're right," he said, looking morose. "I just don't like the thought of Kurt and Blaine not being Kurt *and* Blaine anymore."

"I know," Flint said, allowing him to snuggle under his arm. "Neither do I."

Thad pursed his lips thoughtfully, his brow furrowed in concentration. After a minute's silence, he looked up at Flint, his dark eyes full of question. "You'd never let this happen to us, right?" he said softly. "I mean...I know we had a fight but...it was nothing like this. You wouldn't say those things to me, would you?"

"As if I could," Flint said, brushing his fingers over Thad's ear. "Look at you. How could I ever get mad at you? Besides...I'd be too afraid of waking up with missing appendages."

Thad giggled a little, looking mildly better, though Flint knew he was still concerned about Kurt and Blaine. Flint was, as well, of course. He'd seen the deadened look in Kurt's eyes from all the bashing he'd been dealing with from what had happened at the match. But Kurt seemed marginally better when he was with the Slytherin Seeker. And while Flint hated seeing Kurt without Blaine, he knew that someone had to cheer Kurt up and, if Cross could do it, Flint wasn't about to get in the way.

---

There was a Hogsmeade visit that Saturday and Kurt was glad to finally have a chance to get out of the Castle away from everything he'd been dealing with. Granted, Leighton had been helping him immeasurably to stave off the onslaught but he simply needed a break.

He sat with Thad at breakfast, glad his best friend had finally gotten the hint—he suspected Flint had said something—and stopped trying to convince him to talk to Blaine, who was sitting further down the table with Jeff and Nick, staring blankly at his plate while the two Beaters tried to get him to talk.

The owls zoomed in through the windows with the morning post, covering them all with a flurry of snow from the gentle fall outside. There was a shout of excitement from the other end of the Hall and Kurt and Thad both looked up to see Flint running towards them clutching a broomstick in one hand and a letter in the other.

"I'm in!" he said as he reached them. "I've got a tryout! And Thad, you're Mum sent me a new broom!"

"She—what?" Thad said, staring at him in disbelief.



"Look," Flint said, holding out the broomstick. Kurt saw the words *Nova 450* etched in silver on the handle. "It's not a Falcon but it's still brilliant!"

"I...wow," Thad said, laughing a little in shock. Flint's other announcement seemed to sink in and he let out an excited squeal. "Oh my gosh, you have a tryout!"

Flint laughed as Thad practically threw himself at him in a hug, Flint catching him around the middle and kissing him happily.

Kurt forced a smile, though he couldn't stop the stab of jealousy that needled at him seeing his two friends so happy. He looked down the table at Blaine and saw him holding a letter like Flint's, though his face was blank. Jeff and Nick were patting him and giving him congratulations. Well, at least Blaine had his Quidditch to look forward to.

Leighton came over from the Slytherin table, smiling at Flint and Thad, who looked flushed and excited.

"Congratulations," he said, nodding to the letter in Flint's hand. "Kurt told me you're trying out for the Tornados. Well, I guess now you are for sure. Brill."

"Thanks," Flint said, beaming as Thad clutched his arm.

"Ready to go?" Leighton said, turning to Kurt with a smile.

Kurt glanced at Blaine, who was watching him and Leighton with a torn expression. "Yeah," he said, turning away from Blaine and standing up. "Yeah, let's go."

"See you later," Thad called out as they walked away between the Ravenclaw and Slytherin tables.

They strode through the oak front doors and down the path in silence, the snow crunching beneath their feet as they went. It was a little odd. Kurt had never been to Hogsmeade without someone he wasn't already dating—whether it be Flint or Blaine—and he still hadn't come to a decision as to what he wanted to be with Leighton yet.

He liked Leighton. Leighton made him happy, defended him, did everything he could to make sure Kurt was safe and smiling. He thought that it should be enough, but it didn't feel...right. He guessed it was the fact that he still loved Blaine. But he knew he always would and he didn't want to spend the rest of his life rejecting people who cared about him because he couldn't get past a high school relationship. "Feeling alright?" Leighton said as they passed the winged boars lining the path to the High Street.

"Yeah," Kurt said, smiling over at him. "Yeah, I'm actually feeling okay right now."

Leighton beamed. "Good," he said, knocking their shoulders together.

"It's nice seeing you smile. It makes everything a lot brighter."

Kurt felt his cheeks burn a little as he blushed. Well *that* was new. He brushed it off and followed Leighton into the Three Broomsticks. A few people gave him haughty looks as they walked to the bar together but thankfully most of the other students were too busy enjoying their day off.

Leighton ordered their drinks and leaned against the bar, tilting his head as he smiled at Kurt, who suddenly felt like he was being x-rayed by Leighton's dark blue eyes.

"What?" he said, wrapping his arms around himself self-consciously.

"Nothing," Leighton said, paying for their drinks and carrying them both to a table near the back of the pub. "You just look really nice today."

"I—thank you," Kurt mumbled, staring into his mug. He wrapped his fingers around it, feeling the warmth of the Butterbeer inside seep through him. "You know this isn't a date right?" he blurted out, feeling stupid the moment he said it.

"I know," Leighton said, nodding as he sipped his drink. "Doesn't stop you from looking nice."

Something prickled around Kurt's neck and he had to loosen his scarf as heat crept up his face.

Leighton seemed to catch his blush because the corners of his mouth twitched and he seemed to be fighting back a grin.

*Not a date*, was the mantra Kurt kept running inside his head the whole day. He had to. Because he thought if he didn't he'd lose himself in just how much fun he was having. From simply talking in the pub to laughing as Leighton dared himself to eat a blood-flavored lollipop only to spend twenty minutes insisting that it was all Kurt's idea after he nearly puked at the taste, to just enjoying the clear, cold air of the High Street as they walked down it together, Leighton was doing a good job of keeping up his promise to take Kurt's mind off of things back at the Castle. They even managed to spend time with Thad and Flint when they eventually showed up midday looking like they'd thoroughly celebrated Flint's impending Tornadoes tryout, something Leighton found highly amusing.

When they made their way back to the Castle that evening, pink-faced from the cold and grinning, Kurt felt lighter than he had in weeks, refusing to let himself think about what might come the following Monday when he had to deal with everything again. He thought he might be able to face it now, just going on the happy memories of the day alone.

He ended up eating at the Slytherin table with Leighton and his friends, who had been nothing short of kind towards him all week long. He could see by the way they all looked at Leighton that they really did

admire him. He knew they'd been upset when he'd broken up with Penelope but they seemed long over the fact and were taking equal part in voicing their less than approving opinions of her now.

"We've got to get back to the dungeons," one of Leighton's roommates, Brian Fisher, said, standing up and giving the other two sixth year boys significant looks.

"Oh, yeah, we'll come, too," Leighton said, pushing his plate away.

"No!" another boy, Scott Alden, said with a warning look. "You stay. Stay, Leighton. Stay."

Leighton quirked an eyebrow at his roommates. "I'm not at all suspicious," he muttered as the three of them walked away, talking quietly and casting him looks over their shoulder.

"I like your friends," Kurt said, smiling. "They're nice."

"Well, I told them to be," Leighton said.

"Thank you, by the way," Kurt said, setting his fork and knife down.

"For everything you've been doing for me. I really can't believe all the Slytherins listen to you."

Leighton shrugged with a look of feigned modesty. "I'm pretty much awesomeness," he said, nodding sagely.

Kurt rolled his eyes. They waited until the table was nearly empty, talking about the latest issue of *The Practical Potioneer*, which Leighton had been reading aloud when they had the dorm to themselves and no homework to worry about. Finally deciding they'd waited long enough, they made their way down to the dungeons together, Kurt feeling tired and content.

Leighton yawned and gave the password to the stretch of rough stone, rubbing his eyes as the wall slid back. A wave of sound hit them and Leighton yelped loudly in surprise.

"Very manly, that," Brian said, smirking as he pulled Leighton into the room, Kurt following and feeling confused.

"Way to make an entrance to your own party," Leighton's final roommate, the Prefect Grant Murray, said. "I'm sure Kurt's very impressed."

"W-what are you talking about?" Leighton said, laughing a little as he looked around at the small crowd of older Slytherin students and Quidditch team members.

"A party, Leigh," Scott said, rolling his eyes. "It's what you do when you come of age."

"For me?" Leighton said, looking shocked.

"No, for your bloody Auntie. Yes, for you, you moron," Brian said. He turned to Kurt. "He's really quite thick sometimes."

Kurt smiled, watching as someone shoved a shot of Firewhiskey into Leighton's hand.

"Oh, no, come on," Leighton said, wrinkling his nose. "I'm not drinking this."

"You are or we're injecting it straight into your arm," Scott said threateningly.

Leighton sighed. "Fine," he muttered. He grinned over the glass at Kurt before throwing back the shot. He coughed and doubled over at the burn.

"What the hell is in that?" he gasped. "Dragon fire?"

"Close enough," Grant quipped, pouring another shot and giving it to Leighton. "Have another."

Leighton tried to push the glass away, though he was half-laughing as he did. His friends egged him on and he took it eventually, spluttering and making a face as he downed the second shot.

"And now you're a man," Brian said proudly.

"Oh, is that all it takes?" Leighton said. "Wish I'd known sooner so I didn't have to put up with you three children any longer."

They smirked. A few people approached Leighton to wish him a happy birthday and Kurt stood back, leaning against one of the couches and smiling a little as he watched. Leighton's eyes kept flicking over to him even as he spoke.

"I'll be right back," Leighton said after a few minutes, smiling at the fifth year girls he'd been talking to before making his way over to Kurt.

"Happy belated birthday," Kurt said, grinning.

Leighton didn't reply as he stopped in front of him.

"What wrong?" Kurt said, eyeing him with mild concern.

"I really want to do something right now but I don't know if I should," Leighton said, the tiniest of delays in his voice from the alcohol.

"Okay," Kurt said, frowning. "Dare I ask what it is? Because if it's streaking through the common room I can tell you now that no one's going to think that's a good idea."

Leighton laughed, shaking his head. "It's not that."

"What then?" Kurt said.

Leighton fiddled with the hem of his shirt for a moment, staring down at his fingers.

"Leighton, you're being difficult," Kurt said.

Leighton lifted his eyes to Kurt's, looking anxious.

"Why don't you just tell me," Kurt suggested, getting a little curious now.

"I'd rather *show* you," Leighton said after a moment.

"Okay," Kurt said, giving him an expectant look.

Leighton swallowed nervously, reaching out to take Kurt's right hand, his thumb brushing over his ring as he leaned forward hesitantly. Kurt suddenly realized what he was talking about and froze. He didn't know

what he wanted to happen, if he should pull back or push him away or just let what was happening happen. He still didn't know how he felt about Leighton and he *knew* he still loved Blaine. But he also knew that he'd just had one of the best days he'd had in a long time and it had been Leighton with him, not Blaine.

Leighton seemed to take his lack of movement as permission to continue and Kurt held his breath as Leighton's other hand settled on the side of his face. His eyes searched Kurt's and they were so close now Kurt could feel his breath on his lips and suddenly they were kissing and he completely forgot what he'd been thinking.

It wasn't like kissing Blaine, he knew that. But it was...well, it wasn't *bad*. There was no spark or love or passion but it was tender and soft and Leighton's fingers brushed along his jawline. Kurt didn't respond much but he didn't pull away, still trying to gather his footing on exactly how he felt about what was happening to him.

Someone wolf-whistled and the room went silent. Leighton pulled away gently, giving Kurt a hopeful look as he waited.

"I-I still love Blaine," Kurt said softly, needing to know that Leighton was aware of the fact.

"I know," Leighton said, nodding.

"I always will," Kurt said.

"I know," Leighton said with a small smile. "I'm just asking for a chance, Kurt."

Kurt bit his lip. "You know I'm broken, don't you?" he said quietly.

Leighton slid his thumb over Kurt's ring gently. "Well, let me try and fix you," he said. "Just give me a chance. I know you're still hurting. I just want to make you happy."

Kurt hesitated, wishing there weren't twenty expectant faces watching him from around the room.

"O-okay," he said at last.

Leighton stared at him for a moment in disbelief. "Yeah?" he breathed. Kurt nodded.

Leighton whooped and spun around, punching the air triumphantly. A few people laughed and even Kurt couldn't help but smile a little when Leighton turned the Claddagh ring around on his finger for him.

"But...I want us to go slowly," Kurt said. "Very...very slowly."

"Of course," Leighton said, grinning from ear to ear. "Whatever you want, I don't care. As long as I can do this every now and then." He leaned forward and kissed Kurt gently, smiling against him.

Kurt smiled and allowed himself to kiss him back, hoping more than anything that he'd made the right decision.

## Chapter Sixteen

"Stop it."

"Stop what?"

"What you're doing," Kurt said, not looking up from his homework and smiling a little.

"I'm not doing anything," Leighton said, the grin evident in his voice.

"You're staring again," Kurt said, turning the page in his Transfiguration book.

"Well, I'm allowed to now, aren't I?" Leighton said. Kurt felt the bed shift a little and glanced up to see Leighton sitting cross-legged across from him, leaning back against the bed post and tilting his head to the side as he smiled softly.

"You should be doing your homework," Kurt said reprovably, nodding to the unopened books scattered in front of Leighton. "You know you have an essay due tomorrow, don't you?"

"I'm well aware of that, thank you, mother," Leighton said, smirking. Kurt gave him a dead-panned stare and flicked the cork from his ink bottle at him. Leighton caught it deftly.

"You're forgetting I'm a brilliant Seeker," Leighton said, winking as he flicked the cork into the air and caught it again.

"You're being more of a distraction right now," Kurt muttered, turning back to his book.

"Don't try and tell him what to do, Kurt," Brian called from his bed on the other side of the room where he was working on his own homework with Scott and Grant. "We've been trying to do it for nearly six years. It's useless."

Leighton laughed and Kurt rolled his eyes. He was still a little wary about entering into a relationship so soon after he and Blaine had broken up, but he knew Leighton cared about him and they'd agreed to take things slowly. Leighton had already asked him about a dozen times if he was okay with trying a romantic relationship.

"I pushed you into it," he'd said when he and Kurt had retreated to the dorm to talk the night before. "God, I just wanted you to give me a chance so badly. I'm sorry, Kurt."

"Leighton," Kurt had said, grinning and covering his mouth with his hand. "Shut up. I told you I want to try it."

Kurt flipped the page in his book, pausing to stretch and yawn, rubbing his eyes. He caught Leighton smiling at him and gave him a pointed look.

"Fine," Leighton said with a labored sigh, pulling his books towards him. "You should take over for my Mum, you know."

"Yes, I'm awful, I know," Kurt mumbled, settling down into the pillows a little more.

Leighton laughed softly but went to work on his essay. The windows rattled a little in the strong wind outside and Kurt shivered. A blizzard had settled in during the night and, as they were so close to the lake, the chill managed to seep through the stonework into the Slytherin dormitories. Kurt had bundled up in a sweater and thick woolen socks but still couldn't stop his teeth from chattering.

Leighton pushed his books away and slipped off the bed, moving to his trunk.

"I thought I told you to do your homework?" Kurt said, glancing up at him.

Leighton ignored him, reappearing from his trunk with the Slytherin blanket he'd had at the Ravenclaw-Hufflepuff match back in November.

"Move over," he said, grinning as he sat onto the bed next to Kurt. Kurt pursed his lips and sighed but slid over to allow him more room. Leighton slipped the blanket and his arm around Kurt's shoulders, holding him close and kissing his cheek. He pulled out his wand and waved it, Conjuring a steaming mug, which he passed to Kurt.

"Wow, not Butterbeer," Kurt said as he sipped the hot chocolate and smiled. "I'm shocked."

Leighton smiled and squeezed him around the shoulders.

"Do you two need some private time?" Grant called from across the room, the other two sniggering a little at his words.

"Yes," Leighton said as Kurt said, "No."

The others laughed and Leighton pouted. Kurt rolled his eyes and sipped his drink as Leighton rubbed his back gently. It was still a little strange having Leighton touching him in a way beyond platonic. But it was nice being cared for and he still hoped that trying this relationship would help him forget Blaine.

"We're heading to dinner," Scott said a few minutes later, standing up with the other two and moving towards the door. "You kids be good."

"I'm not making any promises," Leighton said, grinning as Kurt rolled his eyes next to him.

Grant said something Kurt couldn't make out and the other two laughed as the door closed behind them.

Kurt went back to work on his essay, frowning at a passage on Inanimate Transfiguration. Leighton continued to move his hand gently over his back. Kurt could feel his eyes on him again and finished off the paragraph he'd been working on before setting down his quill and turning to him.

"Homework, Leighton," he said sternly.

Leighton smiled. "You know, you're just so cute when you're annoyed," he said with a smirk.

"Don't make me Charm your books to beat you over the head until you're finished your essay," Kurt said bluntly.

Leighton shrugged. "I think I could handle it," he said, leaning forward to press his lips gently to Kurt's, his hand tightening in Kurt's sweater. Kurt sighed, relaxing at the touch and closing his eyes as he moved his lips against Leighton's.

"You're a really good kisser," Leighton murmured against him, smiling faintly.

Kurt laughed lightly.

Leighton's tongue slid against his lips tentatively and Kurt opened his mouth a little in reply, allowing for Leighton to lap against his teeth before he caught Kurt's bottom lip and bit down gently. Kurt's breath caught in his throat, the woodsy scent that always lingered around the other boy suddenly making him feel light-headed. Leighton made a small sound of enjoyment in the back of his throat and Kurt pulled back quickly, taking a steadying breath.

"I'm sorry," Leighton said, lifting his arm away from Kurt's back and staring straight ahead with wide eyes. "Too fast."

"Yeah," Kurt breathed, nodding as he calmed his heart rate.

Leighton coughed awkwardly and slid across the bed to his books, pulling his essay towards him and working silently until they decided to go to dinner together. They'd chosen not to be open about their relationship immediately, sure that the backlash would be more than either of them was ready to deal with right now. Kurt had turned his ring back around so that anyone who knew what it meant thought that he was still single and Leighton had made sure none of the other Slytherins who knew about them said anything.

It was difficult for him to sit next to Thad, who, while not saying anything straight to Kurt about it, was dropping very heavy hints that he should talk to Blaine. He didn't think Thad would approve of him trying to start something with Leighton when the hurt of his break-up with Blaine were still so fresh. But he knew why he was doing what he was doing and didn't feel the need to explain himself to anyone.

It was hard for him to mourn the break-up in light of their arguments, which had been like a hot iron to cauterize the wound. It would leave him scarred, he knew that, but it was closed off now and set to heal faster than if they'd broken up without the fight.

Leighton was still sleeping on the floor in the dorm room, both of them agreeing that it was much too soon for them to share a bed. Kurt had considered going back to the Ravenclaw dorm since Blaine had been leaving him alone; he was a little afraid that he and Leighton might get



sick of each other if they kept spending as much time together as they had been.

"I understand if you want to," Leighton said as he walked Kurt to Transfiguration Monday morning after Kurt voiced the thought to him. "I'm sure you miss your bed and everything."

"I do," Kurt admitted with a sigh. "And I feel like I'm running away by staying in your dorm. I don't want to hide from them, from...him anymore."

"As long as you're happy," Leighton said with a smile as they stopped in an alcove down the corridor from the Transfiguration room. He peered up and down the corridor to make sure they were alone before taking Kurt's hand and giving him a short kiss.

"I'll see you at lunch," he said, giving his hand a brief squeeze.

"Bye," Kurt said, smiling and watching him go for a moment before turning and heading to his class.

Jeff and Nick looked up when he entered and smiled timidly, still looking like a couple of rejected toddlers.

"How are you, Kurt?" Jeff said when Kurt took his usual seat next to Flint.

"Fine," Kurt said, smiling brightly. No one had insulted him all morning and he was doing much better than he had the whole previous week. They looked a little taken aback by his mood but perked up a little.

"Are you and Blaine back together then?" Nick said hopefully.

Kurt paused in the process of unpacking his book. "No, we're not," he said a little stiffly. "We're not getting back together, guys. Please, don't try and push me to."

They hung their heads again, exchanging a disappointed look. Kurt sighed, feeling a little guilty as he turned back to his books.

"You're with Cross now, aren't you?" Flint said softly.

Kurt froze. "I—no," he said hastily.

"It's fine," Flint muttered. "I won't tell anyone. As long as you're doing better. If he makes you happy...I think we all wish you were with Blaine but...I understand."

Kurt gave him a grateful look.

Flint smiled a little sadly, shrugging as he pulled out his ink and parchment. "But Thad might not feel the same," he said. "I'm just warning you now."

Kurt nodded. "I know," he said with a sigh. "I don't expect many people will. Why do you think we're hiding it?"

---

Blaine tried to be excited about his Tornadoes tryout that was coming up that Saturday, but he just couldn't feel...well, anything right now. He just felt numb. He hated himself for the awful things he'd said to

Kurt, wished he could take them back and convince Kurt to forgive him. But most of all he missed Kurt.

He never would have thought that he would miss someone so much when they were sitting ten feet away from him, but it was worse in classes when Kurt was close, his gaze fixedly averted from Blaine's. But nothing could have prepared him for what happened when he returned from his patrol on Monday evening, feeling drained and having spent the whole two hours not saying a word to the fifth year he was patrolling with.

The others were scattered around the common room when he'd entered—other than Thad, of course, who'd practically moved into the Gryffindor tower. Nick and Jeff looked up from their chess game, looking mildly concerned, but Blaine waved them away and climbed the stairs to the upper hall.

He heard soft voices coming from the dormitory. Thinking it must be Thad and Flint, he almost turned around and went back downstairs. But his exhaustion overtook his ability to care and he pushed the door open. He froze, his heart plummeting in his chest at the site that greeted him.

Kurt. And Cross. Kissing.

They broke apart when he entered. Cross' arm tightened protectively around Kurt's waist, Kurt's own expression unreadable as he met Blaine's gaze.

"Oh," was all Blaine could manage to say.

Kurt turned to Cross. "Why don't you head on back to your dorm, Leigh," he said softly. "I can finish unpacking. Really, I'm alright." Cross looked reluctant to leave but complied, giving Kurt's hand a squeeze, brushing his thumb over the ring Kurt had started wearing the previous Friday, before walking out past Blaine without looking at him.

They stood in awkward silence for a moment, the air thick around them with all the things they'd said to each other the last time they were in the room together.

"So," Blaine said after a full minute. "You're back."

Kurt seemed to take his words as a reason to move and continued unpacking the bag lying on his bed. "Yes," he said curtly.

"And...you two...I thought you said you weren't dating," Blaine said, trying to keep his voice level.

"Well, we weren't at the time," Kurt said in the same clipped tone, flashing a glare in his direction. "I'm not a liar, Blaine."

Blaine went silent, not wanting to start another argument. But his curiosity—and apparent hidden streak of masochism—won out. "Do you love him?" he said softly.

Kurt sighed. "No, Blaine," he said, not looking up as he shifted a few things in his trunk. "Not yet."

*Not yet*, Blaine repeated in his head.

"Does he love you?" he said.

Kurt clucked his tongue in annoyance. "Not that it's any of your business, but, no," he said.

"Right," Blaine said, moving to sit on his own bed. He watched Kurt unpack for a moment. "Do you still love me?"

Kurt stilled, his hands hovering over a book he'd just unpacked. He looked up at Blaine, eyes full of hurt and anger. "What are you doing this?" he said softly.

"Why are you?" Blaine replied just as quietly.

They stared at each other for a moment, the year they'd spent together stretching out between them like a ribbon of film. Then Kurt shook his head and returned to unpacking, breaking the moment as the ribbon sheared in half.

"I still love you," Blaine said, watching him carefully. "You can't say you don't love me back."

"Okay, fine, yes, Blaine!" Kurt said, his voice rising as he slammed his books into his trunk and straightened up to glare at him. "You *know* I love you, but you're realizing it a bit late. Every time I think about it I get sick to my stomach because all I can do is hear the things you said to me. Just because I love you doesn't mean I want to be with you."

"But I can fix it," Blaine said, his voice shaking. "Let me try, Kurt."

"I'm sorry, Blaine," Kurt said with a horrible air of finality. "But you lost the chance to do that when you told me to leave. I'm giving someone else the chance now."

"But you don't even love him," Blaine croaked, not bothering to stem the tears sliding down his cheeks.

"I didn't love you when we started dating either, Blaine!" Kurt said loudly. "Leighton cares about me so I'm giving him a chance, don't be mad at me because you gave up yours to be the world's biggest ass. I need someone who's going to be there for me and actually take the time to prove that our relationship is more important than the other things in their life. And I don't need him to love me to make me happy."

"But *I* love you," Blaine said. "You know I always have."

"Yes, well, there was a time before *I* loved *you*, Blaine," Kurt snapped, tears in his own eyes now. "Right now I just hate you because I know I'll never stop loving you and you've ruined me for anyone else who might love me in the future."

He snatched up his bag and strode into the bathroom, slamming the door and locking it behind him.

Blaine punched his headboard, gritting his teeth in pain and throwing himself back on his mattress. He let out a noise of frustration, gripping his head in his hands and wishing he could turn back time and stop himself from ruining the one thing that had made him happy, the one thing he should have taken the time to focus his efforts on keeping when all he'd done was sit back and let it all fall apart.

He didn't try to talk to Kurt again when he returned from the bathroom later, filling the room with the sweet, slightly fruity scent of his soaps and products that sent such a powerful rush of memories over him that he was glad that Kurt pulled the hangings shut around his bed so that he couldn't see his tears.

His dreams—more like nightmares—were plagued with images of Kurt kissing Cross and giving Blaine spiteful glares as he shouted that he wished he'd never loved him.

When he woke up Tuesday morning, it was to find Kurt already gone and the necklace Blaine had given him sitting on Blaine's bedside table with a note that said "I don't want it anymore" in Kurt's handwriting next to it.

Blaine stared at the pendant, watching the way it managed to catch even the dimmest light. It had reminded him of Kurt in that way, how he always managed to light up Blaine's world even when things were darkest.

He swept the necklace into his drawer, unable to look at it without a lump rising in his throat.

Jeff and Nick, who didn't have Potions like the rest of them, were the only ones still in the room. They seemed to sense Blaine's distress because they moved from where they were working on their homework on Jeff's bed to sit on either side of Blaine.

"You miss him, don't you?" Jeff said sadly, his arm resting on Blaine's shoulder.

Blaine nodded at his lap.

"Maybe he just needs to be reminded how happy you were together," Nick said hopefully. "You know...before."

Blaine shook his head. "It's too late," he said. Because Kurt had found someone else to make him happy now and Blaine needed to move on before everything else in his life left him behind.

He was determined to stay busy, to keep his mind off of Kurt and Cross, who hadn't made it known to the rest of the school that they were together yet. Blaine kept his mouth shut as well, mostly for the fact that he didn't think he'd be able to tolerate seeing them display more affection than they already were.

But he'd still catch the soft smiles they shared when they looked at each other, the way they let their fingers brush when they were

walking down the hall. He just hoped Kurt didn't start bringing him back to the dormitory. He didn't think he'd be able to stomach it. The rest of the week went by in a blur of bad dreams and equally depressing reality. None of it felt like he was really a part of it, this world where he and Kurt were in love but not together and he was watching Kurt falling for someone else and there was nothing he could do about.

Friday morning he was picking at his breakfast, Jeff and Nick on either side of him as usual, when someone coughed behind him and he turned to see Cole standing there.

"What?" Blaine grunted, in no mood to deal with one of the people who'd been involved in unraveling his life.

Cole fiddled with his sleeve, glancing at Jeff and Nick, who glared at him.

"I'm sorry for what we did," he said in a small voice, looking timid. "It was wrong."

"You think?" Blaine said, turning back to his plate.

Cole wrung his hands a little. "But don't be mad at me, Blaine," he said. "It was her, all her. She...manipulated me. And now I'm not even a Prefect anymore."

"What do you want, a damn pity party?" Jeff snapped.

"You're a meddling little elf," Nick said, glowering.

"I just wanted to show you that you're boyfriend was a—a—" He flailed a little as he tried to find the right word.

"A *what*, exactly?" Blaine said, slamming his fork down.

Cole jumped at the noise. "He just...he didn't deserve you, Blaine," he said, staring at his feet.

"And what, you think *you* did?" Blaine said in disbelief.

Cole shrugged, not looking at him.

"Let me make something perfectly clear, Cole," Blaine said, raising his voice a little. People were watching curiously now, turning in their seats and muttering. "I don't like you. I don't want to date you; I don't want to be your friend. You're a jealous, whiny, annoying little prat who can't take a hint. Just stay the hell out of my life, you've done enough to screw it up already."

Cole's eyes brimmed with tears, his lip quivering. A few people sniggered and made noises of agreement. Blaine simply didn't care anymore. He'd tried being nice, he'd tried letting him down easy, he'd tried to be the better person, but Cole obviously wasn't actually upset about the damage he'd caused and Blaine just *didn't care*.

He returned to his plate as Cole burst into tears and ran out of the Hall to jeers and laughter. Jeff and Nick stared at Blaine in disbelief, looking perhaps a little frightened by his outburst. Blaine ignored

them, shoving his plate away and swinging his bag over his shoulder as he stood.

He strode past the Slytherin table, where Kurt was sitting with Cross. Blaine locked eyes with him and Kurt's lips parted a little with surprise at the ferocity of his gaze, his eyebrows lifting up his forehead.

Blaine looked away, keeping his eyes fixed ahead as he walked across the entrance hall towards the marble staircase, feeling bitter and annoyed.

---

"Just wait here, pet," Flint said smiling as Thad huffed a little, tapping his foot. "And keep your eyes closed."

"I am," Thad said, folding his arms over his chest. "Thought I don't understand what we're doing up here. I have a Runes essay I need to write and you have to rest for your tryout tomorrow."

"I know," Flint soothed, kissing his hair gently. "Trust me, this will be worth the wait."

He stared at the stretch of wall, thinking of the instructions Kurt had given him. Checking that Thad's eyes were still closed, he turned and walked back and forth in front of the wall three times, concentrating hard on the scene he'd been thinking about for the past week.

He took a deep breath and turned, feeling triumphant as he looked at the door that had sprang into existence. Taking Thad's shoulders, he led him gently into the room, smiling and gazing around appreciatively at what the room had produced.

"Where are we going?" Thad said, turning his head blindly. "Why's the floor all shifty?"

Flint smiled. "Okay, open your eyes," he said in Thad's ear.

Thad did as he said and gasped, staring around at the sunny stretch of sand and glittering water Flint had instructed the room to produce.

"Flint—what?" Thad turned to him with an awestruck look.

"Kurt told me about it," Flint said, smiling at his wide-eyed expression.

"It makes whatever you tell it to. I was going to bring you here sooner but after everything with Kurt and Blaine...well, I at least wanted you to see it before my tryout tomorrow since so much is hanging on what happens. I wanted to do this first."

"What do you mean?" Thad said, tilting his head to the side curiously. Flint tried to calm his suddenly racing pulse as he broke into a nervous sweat. "Seeing what happened to Kurt and Blaine made me think," he said, taking Thad's hand. "I don't want to risk the chance of losing you, pet."

Thad smiled. "Well, I'm not leaving," he said, moving to press his palm against Flint's and examining the difference between their hands; his looked so small in comparison to Flint's.

"I still want to be sure that you know how much I love you," Flint said, sliding his other hand down Thad's arm lightly.

"I know how much you love me," Thad said. He blushed, looking sheepish. "I mean...you put up with me being rubbish with you when you were planning this nice surprise for me."

"You don't understand," Flint said, gripping his hand. "I love you, Thad. I love how you keep me from losing my temper and help me stay grounded and can make me feel like everything's perfect just by looking at me the way you do like you love me so much you don't even need to say it."

Thad smiled, ducking his head and biting his lip.

"I meant what I said at Christmas," Flint said, waiting for Thad to look up at him again. "I'd marry you if I could."

"I know," Thad said softly, cocking his head a little as he took in Flint's anxious gaze.

"So...will you?" Flint said.

Thad blinked. "Will I what?" he said with a look of innocent curiosity.

"W-will you marry me?" Flint said, reaching into his pocket to pull out the little ring he'd bought Saturday while Thad was with Kurt and Cross.

Thad's eyes widened as Flint held the ring up in his trembling fingers.

"I know we can't get married because of...well, the laws and all that but I want you to know I'd do it if I could. I don't want to risk the chance of losing you, pet. I love you." He watched Thad stare at the white-gold band, the three small, starbright diamonds inlaid across it glittering in the light.

"If they changed the law, I'd do it, Thad," Flint said, tightening his hold on Thad's hand. "I swear I would."

Thad continued to gape, his lips parted in shock and his dark eyes wide and glistening.

"Thad?" Flint said nervously. "Please say yes, pet."

Thad burst into tears, pulling his hand away to clutch at his face.

"Oh god, you don't want to," Flint said, his heart dropping into his gut.

"I'm sorry, pet, I thought—"

"Oh, shut up," Thad sobbed, throwing his arms around him and kissing him.

Flint laughed and fisted his hands in the back of Thad's robes, trying to kiss him back even as the other boy laughed and cried all over him.

"So...yes?" Flint said breathlessly when Thad pulled back, wiping his eyes and looking flushed.

Thad nodded furiously.

Flint suddenly felt giddy with relief and joy as he slipped the ring onto Thad's finger, grinning so hard it hurt. Thad squirmed a little, biting his lip and letting out a nervous giggle.

"You're perfect," Flint said, pulling him close. "You know that, don't you?"

Thad snuggled against his chest. "So are you," he sighed happily. Flint squeezed him, breathing in the smell of his hair and resting his head on top of Thad's. "So what now?" he said, smiling.

Thad lifted his head from his chest and looked up at him with the faintest of smirks, his eyes darkening. "Well, I ought to thank you, don't you think?" he said, running his finger down Flint's chest.

"I'd say you don't need to thank me but I'm not about to pass up your offer," Flint said, shivering as Thad leaned up to grazed his lips over his ear, letting out a low, seductive laugh as he did.

"Well, I think I should change a few things then," Thad murmured, working at the spot at the back of Flint's jaw as the room changed around them, shrinking as the water and sand were sucked into the floor until they were standing on dark carpet, the walls covered in shiny paneling. Flint thought it looked a bit like a study, except for the fact that there was a bed up against one wall instead of a desk.

Thad wrapped his fingers around Flint's tie and pulled him towards the bed, giving him a hungry look as he walked backwards in front of Flint. He tugged at his own tie as he went, unfastening his robes and shrugging them off one shoulder. He stopped when his knees hit the back of the bed and let Flint's tie go, his robes dropping from his arms to pool around his feet.

Flint tried to take off his own robes but Thad shook his head and went to work doing it himself, pushing Flint's black robes off before loosening his tie, which he slipped off and tossed aside before starting at the buttons of Flint's dress shirt.

"You know," Thad said as he struggled a little with the small button on Flint's cuffs. "I'm starting to think that Hogwarts uniforms were designed with the sole purpose of cockblocking students."

Flint laughed, moving his arms so Thad could shove the shirt off onto the floor. His eyes ran over Flint's arms and chest and he smiled.

"I like that you're so strong," he said, lifting a hand to ghost it down Flint's bicep. He bit his lip, tilting his head to the side as his fingers trailed a path down Flint's chest to the waistband of his slacks. He hooked his fingers in Flint's belt loops and pulling him closer. He bit down on Flint's shoulder, groaning faintly as he pressed open-mouthed kisses across his neck and chest.

Flint sighed at the contact, his fingers finding their way to undo Thad's tie from around his neck as well as the first few buttons of his shirt.



Then Thad sat down on the edge of the bed, continuing his way down Flint's torso with his lips.

Flint held back a groan when Thad looked up at him with another smirk and licked a wide path up Flint's stomach.

"Thad," Flint gasped as Thad scraped his teeth across his side before biting down above his hip.

Thad looked up at him again, licking his lips deftly as he undid the rest of the buttons on his shirt and pulled it off. He kept his eyes trained on Flint's as he undid Flint's belt and slacks, giggling as he palmed Flint through his boxers and Flint's eyes rolled back a little at the touch.

Flint kicked off his shoes and socks and stepped out of his slacks before pushing Thad back onto the bed and planting light kisses over the soft skin of his shoulders and chest. Thad tilted his head to the side to let him access his neck, letting out a soft whine of pleasure when Flint sucked gently at the spot under his jaw.

Thad clawed at his back, his nails raking across his skin as he wrapped one leg around Flint's hip and pulled him closer so Flint's legs were on either side of Thad's thigh. Thad pushed up to try and gain friction, mewling softly as his chest rose and fell rapidly under Flint's lips.

Flint trailed kisses up Thad's jaw before Thad moved his hand to curl in his hair and force him to meet his lips, his tongue lapping hungrily at Flint's mouth as a moan rose in his chest. Thad tugged at his hair to twist his head to his breath was hot on Flint's ear.

"I want you," Thad breathed. "I love you."

"I love you," Flint said, nipping his earlobe lightly before straightening up so he could pull off Thad's shoes, socks, and slacks. He climbed onto the bed, pulling Thad up towards the headboard and waiting until he was settled comfortably against the pillows before latching onto his neck again.

"Flint," Thad gasped. "Flint...wait."

Flint stopped and looked up at him. "What's wrong, pet?"

Thad's eyes searched him and he smiled softly, his hand slipping up to glide down Flint's arm. "I love you," he said, his eyes swimming with sudden tears and so full of love Flint thought his heart might burst.

He leaned down and Thad's eyes fluttered closed as Flint kissed them softly, his lips catching the faintest trace of moisture from the tears clinging to Thad's eyelashes. "I love *you*," he whispered.

Thad's hand searched out his on the bed and their fingers intertwined as Thad angled his head up and pulled him down into a kiss. Flint's fingers brushed over Thad's ring and he couldn't help but smile. Thad's leg hooked around his thigh and gently pushed him down against him. Flint groaned at the friction as their hips ground together, Thad gasping into his mouth and tightening his fingers in Flint's. Flint

pressed gently against him again, pulling Thad's lower lip between his teeth and sucking lightly as Thad trembled.

"I love you, Thad," Flint whispered, touching their foreheads together as he kissed Thad, wondering what he'd done to deserve his perfect boyfriend...no, fiancé. The word made him smile again. It was surreal. "L-love you," Thad whimpered, tossing his head back as Flint rocked their hips together slowly.

Flint brushed his hand over Thad's cheek, watching the way his lips quivered as he exhaled with little breathy moans and his eyes flickered almost closed in ecstasy. It was almost painful to look at him, he was so completely perfect.

Thad's eyes opened and clouded with concern as he looked up at Flint. "Why are you crying?" he said softly, reaching up to brush away the tears from Flint's face.

"I just love you," Flint said, smiling.

Thad returned his smile and pulled him down into a kiss, wrapping his arm around Flint's back, his other hand still clutching Flint's on the bed beside them. He let out a breathless sigh, Flint's name on his lips as his fingers dug into Flint's skin and he shook beneath him, Flint following not long after.

Thad panted lightly as Flint kissed his slightly sweaty forehead, lying down next to him and pulling him close, their hands still clasped loosely together.

"I'm glad I decided to kiss you that day," Thad said with a small smile. Flint pushed his dark hair back, returning his smile. "Me too."

---

Kurt woke up Saturday morning to a loud thump followed closely by a muttered oath. He blinked blearily and sat up, rubbing his eyes as he looked around the quiet dormitory. Blaine was standing at the foot of his bed, clutching his foot and making a pained expression. His broom and Quidditch pads were stacked on his bed and he was dressed in his cloak and scarf.

He caught Kurt watching him and stopped hopping around on one foot. "Sorry," he muttered, turning away hastily. "Kicked my trunk."

Kurt yawned, nodded absently. He stopped when he remembered that they were fighting and hurried to occupy himself, leaning over to check his watch. It was just past six. Groaning, he flopped back on his pillows. Glancing over, he saw that Thad's bed was still unoccupied. He'd disappeared with Flint after dinner and Kurt had not seen him since. He thought Flint might have finally taken the opportunity to use the Room of Requirement and grinned a little knowing what they'd be up to.

"What's so funny?" Blaine grunted, looking up from packing his things into his bag.

"Nothing," Kurt muttered a little sharply.

Blaine mumbled something he couldn't hear and swung his bag over his shoulder. He paused. "Well...bye," he said, shrugging as he walked to the door.

Kurt hesitated for a moment before saying, "Good luck."

Blaine stopped and looked back at him, smiling faintly. "Thanks," he said, standing there until the air became awkward between them and he left, closing the door softly behind him.

Sure he wasn't going to be able to go back to sleep, Kurt got up and moved to his trunk, pulling out a sweatshirt to tug over his pajamas and sliding his feet into his slippers. Yawning, he left the dorm and made his way out of the tower and through the Castle, his slippers slapping against his feet as he walked.

"*Lacus atrum*," he muttered when he reached the stretch of wall that concealed the entrance to the Slytherin common room. The wall slid open and he stepped inside, stumbling a little in his tired haze. He stifled another yawn as he climbed the spiral staircase to the dormitory hallway.

The door to Leighton's dormitory creaked a little as he pushed it open and slid inside, closing it softly before moving across the room to where Leighton was sprawled across his bed on his stomach like an octopus. He grinned at the sight and shifted one of Leighton's arms so he could lie next to him.

Leighton groaned in protest and immediately clung to Kurt like a limpet, draping one leg over Kurt's and slinging an arm across his chest.

"You're much too clingy when you sleep," Kurt murmured, laughing a little as he tried to pry Leighton's arm off of him.

Leighton shook his head, the corners of his mouth twitching.

"You're awake, you idiot," Kurt whispered, rolling his eyes.

"No 'm'not," Leighton mumbled. "'M'still sleeping." He gave a fake snore.

"And I'm Merlin's ghost," Kurt muttered, rolling onto his side so Leighton's leg was forced off of him and they were facing each other. Leighton opened his eyes, grinning. "Hi," he said.

"Hi," Kurt replied, unable to stop himself from smiling.

"You're up early," Leighton said, running his hand over Kurt's forearm absently.

"Blaine has his tryout today," Kurt said, suppressing a yawn. "I woke up when he was leaving."

"And you came to see little old me?" Leighton said. "I'm flattered."

"I can go see my other boyfriends if you'd like," Kurt said, smirking and making to get up.

"No," Leighton said, clinging to him again. "Mine."

Kurt laughed and Leighton relaxed his grip a little, grinning.

"I'd like to kiss you now," Leighton declared, leaning forward to do just that.

Kurt moved his lips lazily in reply, sighing as Leighton's fingers brushed over his cheek and settled on the back of his neck. "You're obviously a morning person," he muttered when they broke apart a few seconds later.

"I'm an always person," Leighton said cheerily.

"You're insane is what you are," Kurt said with a yawn, shifting a little so his head was resting against Leighton's shoulder. "I'm going back to sleep."

"Whatever you say," Leighton said, kissing the top of his head and slipping an arm under him to hold him close.

Kurt smiled and allowed himself to drift off into a light sleep, Leighton's hand grazing over his arm gently and his head leaning against Kurt's. It was nice being held like this again. He'd missed it more than he'd realized, the comforting warmth of arms around him as he slept. Leighton hummed a little, occasionally singing softly.

"What's that song?" Kurt murmured when the sun was finally peeking through the windows and casting its pale light over them. "I like it."

Leighton smiled against him. "I'll sing it for you sometime," he said. "I think it's a Muggle song. It's one of Simone's favorites and I was forced to listen to it enough times, I'm pretty sure it's permanently engraved in my brain."

Kurt laughed drowsily, tilting his head to press a kiss to Leighton's neck. His stomach rumbled loudly.

"You want to head up to breakfast?" Leighton said, grinning.

Kurt groaned. "I really don't want to go in my pajamas," he said. "I didn't think this through very well. I should have brought clothes."

"No one's going to care if you're in pajamas," Leighton said, rolling his eyes. "I'll go in mine if it makes you feel better. Honestly, you care too much about your appearance. You look great, as always. Seriously, I get up in the morning and my hair looks like it's been ravaged by angry doxies and yours is like automatically perfect or something."

"I've trained it," Kurt mumbled. He sighed. "I don't want to get up."

"Can I just stay here? I'll just starve slowly."

Leighton laughed and squeezed him gently. "I'll bring you something."

He slipped his arm out from under Kurt and stood up, stretching and looking much too awake to be natural. "Anything in particular?"

Kurt grumbled into the pillow he'd just buried his face in.

"Kippers and blood sausage, got it," Leighton said, the grin evident in his voice.

Kurt lifted his arm and flicked him off, not removing his head from the pillow and Leighton laughed.

"I'll be back in a bit," he said, kissing Kurt on the back of the head before leaving.

Kurt pulled the blankets around him and breathed in the scent of Leighton's cologne, smiling a little as he fell back asleep. It was strange, almost foreign after dealing with pain for so long. He felt truly happy for the first time in two whole weeks.

---

Blaine had met up with Flint in the entrance hall, watching as he approached with Thad, who was swimming in a pair of Flint's pajamas and looking tired but pleased about something. Watching them whisper goodbyes and 'I love you's made Blaine's heart ache for Kurt and when they used to be the same. What in the world had happened to them?

He saw something glitter on Thad's left hand when he hugged Flint a final time and then again when he waved goodbye from the top of the marble staircase.

"Was Thad wearing what I think he was wearing?" Blaine said as he strode with Flint down the path towards Hogsmeade. He glanced over to see Flint beaming.

"Yeah," Flint said, sounding breathlessly happy as he nodded. "Yeah, I asked him yesterday."

"Oh," Blaine said, feeling something tighten in his chest at the thought that he'd never done the same for Kurt, never even discussed the idea with him. "Congratulations."

"Thanks," Flint said, grinning. He seemed to realize the weight of Blaine's silence and clapped him on the shoulder comfortingly. "I'm sorry about you and Kurt. I know it might seem pretty hopeless now, but you could still end up together, you know. Don't give up."

"What's the point?" Blaine said, sighing. "He's dating Cross and he's happy with him."

"Oh, you know about that?" Flint said a little anxiously.

"You did too?" Blaine said, glancing over at him.

Flint shrugged. "I'd guessed. I could kind of tell, Kurt seemed...well, he seemed a little...happier," he muttered the last word, looking like he regretted it as he gave Blaine an apologetic look.

"Yeah," Blaine said tonelessly. "I know. I've seen it too." He felt his eyes sting in the cold as he swallowed back the lump in his throat. He wanted to Kurt be happy. But he wanted Kurt to be happy with him, not Cross.

As he hadn't taken his Apparition Test yet, he traveled to Tutshill by Side-Along Apparation with Flint from the quiet High Street of Hogsmeade.

"I don't think I like that much," he said when they'd reappeared outside the Tornadoes practice pitch and Blaine doubled over as a wave of nausea hit him.

Flint patted his back. "It's hard to deal with the first few times but the effect will wear off once you've done it enough," he said, shifting his bag and broom on his shoulder.

Blaine bent to pick up his own broom, which he'd dropped when they'd arrived, and straightened his cloak. "So," he said, looking towards the pitch, where a group of people clutching broomsticks was gathered.

"Let's go." He only felt a little flutter of nerves as he strode with Flint towards the other hopefuls. He supposed if there was one good think about how numb he'd been feeling lately, it was that he wasn't nearly as anxious as he normally would be.

A middle-aged man in sky blue robes was waiting with a clipboard at the front of the group. He smiled faintly as they approached.

"Lo, boys," he said, glancing at his clipboard. "Name and position?"

"Blaine Anderson," Blaine said, glancing at the forty or so others trying out as well. "Keeper."

"Flint Wilson. Chaser," Flint said, grinning excitedly.

The man ticked them off on his clipboard before tossing them each a sky blue t-shirt with their names across the back in block letters.

"Keepers are there, Chasers there," he said, nodding to two of the groups of others waiting to try out. Blaine moved to stand with the other Keepers, a little self-conscious about the fact that he was the shortest, and obviously the youngest, of the group.

"Okay, it looks like this is everyone," the trainer said, checking his clipboard again. He looked around at them all. "For those of you who don't know me, I'm Clarence Barrow, Assistant Trainer for the Tornadoes and Head Trainer for the back-up squad. We're looking for a new Keeper, one Chaser, and one Beater to take over for the players either leaving or moving up to the regular squad. Today is just the preliminary tryout. We'll contact those called back for a second tryout and interview within the next week.

"So, why don't you all get suited up and we'll call you out one by one." He gestured towards the changing rooms to the side of the pitch sitting next to the Medic's office and Blaine followed the rest of them in, his nerves suddenly starting to kick in when he saw the actual Tornadoes players walking from the changing rooms in their practice uniforms with their trainer, talking and laughing.

They smiled in their direction and Roger Trenton, the Chaser Captain, had a flicker of recognition cross his face when he saw Blaine. He waved briefly and Blaine raised a hand in reply, trying not to think about the fact that when he'd met Roger for the first time he'd been with Kurt. Everything he did reminded him of Kurt in one way or another; it certainly didn't help that the sky was a clear, vivid blue today, the exact same shade as Kurt's eyes when he was happy. Trying to push Kurt from his mind, he changed into his practice shirt and strapped on his armguards and kneepads, lacing up his heavy boots and pulling on his leather gloves, which brought another painful lump to his throat as he remembered that Kurt had been the one to give them to him.

No one talked as they waited nervously for their name to be called. Blaine watched the others go out one by one, some swaggering out confidently and others looking like they were ready to vomit if they opened their mouths.

"Nervous?" Flint said, looking completely calm himself.

Blaine shrugged. "A bit, I guess," he said, turning his broom over in his hands.

"Blaine Anderson," a voice called into the changing room.

"Good luck," Flint said, flashing Blaine a grin as he left the changing room.

Blaine smiled in reply and strode out onto the pitch. The sun was higher in the sky now, instead of resting around the horizon like it had been when they'd arrived over an hour before. He saw the Tornadoes flying around the opposite side of the pitch.

"Go ahead and man the goalposts," Clarence said, smiling and flipping the page on his clipboard.

Blaine climbed onto his Nimbus and moved to hover in front of the three tall hoops. Two Chasers from the back-up squad were waiting for him, one of them holding the Quaffle under her arm.

"Just fly however you normally would," Clarence called as he noted something on his clipboard.

Blaine gripped his broom, watching the Chasers zip off around the pitch, passing the Quaffle deftly back and forth as they zoomed at Blaine. One of them dipped down, throwing the Quaffle up so the other could catch it before hurling it towards Blaine's left hoop.

He jerked his broom to the side and caught the bright red ball in his hand, feeling a sudden swoop of confidence as Clarence made a sound of delighted approval.

Though he nearly fell off his broom to make one of the saves, he managed to block all of the dozen or so shots the Chasers made

against him and was feeling a little giddy with excitement as he landed back on the pitch at Clarence's command.

"Great, really great," Clarence said as he scribbled something onto his clipboard. "We'll let you know within the week."

"Thank you," Blaine said, trying not to grin too much.

"Oi, look out!"

Blaine turned at the shout to see a Bludger rocketing towards him from the other end of the pitch. He tried to throw himself out of the way but the black ball caught him across the arm before slamming into the ground. It shot back up, careening crazily.

"*Immobulus!*" Roger shouted as he landed next to Blaine, who was picking himself off the ground, clutching his throbbing forearm and thankful he'd been wearing his armguards. The Bludger froze in midair and plummeted to the ground with a soft *whump* in the snow.

"Blimey, sorry about that," Roger said, helping Blaine up. "Charm seems to be wearing off that one. It's Blaine, right?"

Blaine nodded, grimacing in pain.

"Is it broken?" Roger said, sounding worried.

"No," Blaine said, flexing his arm. "No, I don't think so."

Roger looked relieved. "Alright, good," he said. "Go on in and see the Medic, he'll patch it up for you."

"Thanks," Blaine said, wincing as he picked up his broom.

Trying to ignore the pain arching from where the Bludger had struck his arm, Blaine strode into the Medic chamber as Roger had instructed, glad that he at least hadn't screwed up his trial and wondering how Flint's was going to go.

"One minute," someone called from the office when he pushed the door open. "Just have a seat and I'll look at it in a second."

Blaine sat down on one of the benches, peeling off his gloves and armguard to examine the bruise blooming on his forearm.

"So what have they done to you? I—"

Blaine looked up at the voice and felt something twist painfully in his gut as he met ice-blue eyes wide with shock and hate rose in his chest.

"Blaine?"

"What the hell are you doing here, Jeremiah?"

---

"You know," Kurt said as Leighton stole another bite of his toast. "I thought you bringing me breakfast was sweet. Now I see it was just an excuse to take food from me."

Leighton grinned, chewing happily. "It's all a ruse," he said when he'd swallowed.



Kurt rolled his eyes and finished off his eggs, setting his empty plate on the bedside table. "Thank you," he said, kissing Leighton's cheek. Leighton finished off the toast he'd stolen with a smile.

"So what are we doing today?" Kurt said, yawning and stretching.

"Well, I can think of one thing," Leighton murmured, pushing him lightly back into the pillow and catching his lips in a kiss.

Kurt relaxed into it, smiling as Leighton's hand settle on his hip, his thumb sliding over the narrow strip of skin showing where his top hitched up a little from scooting down the bed.

Leighton angled his head to deepen the kiss, his tongue flicking across Kurt's lips before dipping into his mouth. He groaned faintly as Kurt's hand slid up to wind in his hair. Leighton's fingers tightened around his hipbone.

"Mmm," Leighton hummed as he pulled back a few seconds later, his lips still ghosting over Kurt's. "I reckon you taste better than Butterbeer, you know that?"

Kurt smiled. "Such compliments," he said as Leighton lay down next to him. "You really are too kind."

"I try," Leighton murmured as he brushed his lips lightly over Kurt's ear, sending a little shiver down Kurt's spine.

He closed his eyes as Leighton worked carefully at his ear, his breath warm and the tip of his tongue occasionally flicking across his earlobe.

"How is it even your ear tastes good?" Leighton muttered.

Kurt laughed and he felt Leighton smile against him.

"The others will be back from breakfast soon," Leighton said, propping himself up on his elbow to look at Kurt. "My vote is you letting me spend the rest of the day tasting you."

Kurt snorted and Leighton made a face.

"That did not come off the way I meant it to," Leighton said, half-grinning. "But you know what I mean."

Kurt nodded, still laughing a little. "I do. But I don't feel like being lazy right now. I'm going back to the tower to get showered and changed and maybe we can walk around the lake or something if you're up for it?"

"Sound brill," Leighton said, smiling. "I'll come pick you up in a bit."

"Alright," Kurt said, kissing him gently.

"Maybe just a few more minutes," Leighton said, wrapping his arm around Kurt's waist and continuing the kiss.

Kurt smiled against his lips. A few minutes couldn't hurt.

---

"I work here," Jeremiah said, still looking floored. "What are *you* doing here?"

"Trying out, obviously," Blaine snapped.

"Still mad at me, I see," Jeremiah said, cocking an eyebrow.

"Do you blame me?" Blaine said, glaring at him.

"Not really," Jeremiah sighed. He paused, frowning faintly. "So how's what's-his-name? Kurt?"

Hearing Jeremiah bring up Kurt after what he'd done to him the year before made his hands shake in anger.

"Fine, I assume, no thanks to you," he growled.

"You *assume*?" Jeremiah said, a mildly curious look crossing his face.

"Aren't you two together anymore?"

"No," Blaine said shortly, looking away from him.

"Oh," Jeremiah said softly. "I'm sorry."

"No you're not," Blaine said, his eyes snapping back to him. "You don't give a damn about me, you never did."

"You know what, I'll heal my arm myself. I got good at this sort of thing after all the times I had to fix myself when your friends beat me unconscious because *you* told them to."

"Sit down," Jeremiah said in a tired voice. "Just...stop it, Blaine. I'm just here to work, you don't have to go pulling all that up."

Blaine made a noise of sardonic amusement in the back of his throat.

"Just let me heal your arm and then you can go," Jeremiah said, pulling out his wand.

Blaine eyes him warily before holding his bruised arm out. Jeremiah took it lightly in one hand as he knelt next to him; Blaine fought not to recoil from his touch.

"You know, I *am* sorry," Jeremiah said, looking up at Blaine, his wand hovering over his skin. "I'm not proud of what I did to you. Or to Kurt."

Blaine ignored him, staring at the safety posters on the wall and trying to block out the angry buzz rising in his ears.

"I saw someone, you know," Jeremiah said as he returned to examining Blaine's arm. "To talk about everything. They said the reason I did it was because I was channeling my anger at my father towards you. A twisted sense of blame or something."

"Nooo," Blaine said sarcastically. "I had no idea."

Jeremiah laughed softly. "You always were a tough nut to crack, Blaine. I guess that's one of the reasons why I loved you."

"Shut up," Blaine snapped, hate boiling inside him.

"I did," Jeremiah said.

"*Shut up*, Jeremiah," Blaine repeated. "I don't want to hear it."

"I'm not trying to make what I did any better, but I *did* love you, Blaine," Jeremiah said, eyeing him closely. "And you loved me, too."

"Maybe I did," Blaine said, refusing to look at him. "But that was a long time ago and all I feel now is the strong urge to break your face again."

"I don't blame you," Jeremiah said, tapping Blaine's arm with his wand. The bruise retreated slowly. "I was awful to you."

"If you're looking for forgiveness, I'm not giving you any," Blaine said as he flexed his newly healed arm. "You don't deserve it."

"You're probably right," Jeremiah said as he pushed himself up off the floor. "But you might want to learn to tolerate me because if you get on the squad, you're going to be seeing a lot of me."

"I can hardly fucking wait," Blaine murmured as Jeremiah walked towards his office.

The corner of Jeremiah's mouth quirked up in a half-grin as he stopped at the door to the office. "You can hate me all you want, Blaine," he said. "But we both know that at one point you loved me. We loved each other. As sick and twisted as it might have turned, you can't take it back and neither can I. And frankly, I don't want to." He retreated into the office, shutting the door softly behind him.

Blaine stared at the door, despising that what he'd said, no matter how much he wished otherwise, was true; he couldn't take back how he'd once felt about Jeremiah. He hated more than that the fact that somewhere, buried deep beneath the hate and disgust and barely even existing at all, there was a tiny piece of him that would always feel something for him. It was nothing like the chunk of him that would always love Kurt but it was there, undeniably, infuriatingly, solidly there.

---

Trying to ignore the curious looks he was getting for walking through the Castle in pajamas and slippers, Kurt made his way back up to the Ravenclaw tower, unable to stop himself from smiling.

The common room was relatively empty as many people were either at breakfast or still asleep. When he opened the dormitory door, it was to find Thad sitting on his bed reading, Acorn curled happily in his lap. Wes and David had gone to breakfast and Jeff and Nick were still fast asleep, snoring loudly.

"Hey," Kurt said, smiling as Thad looked up at him with a wide grin.

"Someone's happy today. Good night with Flint?"

"You could say that," Thad said, looking like he was bursting to tell him something.

Kurt cocked an eyebrow. "Why are you—*WHAT IS THAT?*"

Thad giggled and blushed as Kurt gaped at his hand, where a narrow band of white gold inlaid with diamonds glittered on his finger.

Jeff and Nick groaned, pulled from sleep by Kurt's shout.

"I didn't do it," Nick grunted, looking like he was still half asleep. He woke up a little upon spotting Kurt. "Oh...wait, what's going on?"

"Kurtsie, why are you yelling?" Jeff said drowsily, sitting up and blinking slowly.

"Oh, Thad's just wearing a freggin engagement ring is all," Kurt said, still completely flabbergasted as he moved to Thad, snatching his hand off the bed to look at the ring.

"*What?*" The Beaters shouted in unison, eyes flying open wide as they stared at Thad, who blushed deeper, giggling and burying his face in his other hand.

Jeff and Nick leapt off their beds, scrambling to Thad and trying to look at the ring.

"Don't rip his arm off," Kurt said warningly as they wrenched Thad's hand away from him.

"Wildcat, when did this happen?" Jeff said, holding Thad's finger half an inch from his face as if to determine if the ring was real.

"Yesterday," Thad said, grinning so broadly he looked like his face might split in two. "After dinner."

"And you didn't tell us immediately?" Nick said, staring at him.

"Unacceptable."

"Well, we were busy with...other things," Thad said, chewing on his bottom lip.

"I'm speechless," Kurt said as he sat down and pulled Thad into a hug.

"You've literally shut me up for good, Thad."

Thad giggled again and hugged him back.

Jeff and Nick flailed and whined a little as they waited for Kurt to release Thad so they could hug him from either side so hard Kurt thought they might squish him.

"I get it, I get it!" Thad cried, laughing.

"Oh, Thaddeus, we're so happy," Jeff declared, pretending to sob into his hands.

"I'm just a mess. I'll be a mess all day," Nick said, throwing up his hands in defeat and falling facedown onto the mattress.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Not dramatic at all, are they?" he said, grinning at Thad.

"Not at all," Thad said, watching them sob into each other's shoulders.

"You realize that the second the law changes, I'm going to start planning everything for you, right?" Kurt said offhandedly.

Thad nodded, smiling. He suddenly looked a little sad. "I'm sorry," he said, glancing at Kurt. "I feel bad that I get to have this and you don't right now. It doesn't feel fair."

"Don't you *dare* apologize to me about being happy," Kurt said warningly. "Besides, I'm happy *for* you. And Flint. I'm doing alright anyway."

Thad lowered his voice. "Leighton makes you happy?" he said softly.

"Flint told me," he said in response to Kurt's wide-eyed look.

Kurt's heart sank a little at the look in Thad's eyes. "Yeah," he said, nodding. "He does."

Thad nodded sadly at his lap. "Well, I'm glad you're happy," he said. "I kind of wish it was with Blaine, though."

"I know," Kurt said with a sigh, hugging him around the shoulders.

There was a part of him, the part that still loved Blaine, that wished the same thing.

---

Blaine returned to the changing rooms to wait for Flint to finish his tryout, still seething at having seen Jeremiah again. He wanted to rage at him for what he'd done, break him all over again and make him suffer like he'd done to Blaine.

Flint walked in a few minutes later, grinning.

"How'd it go?" Blaine said, standing and hitching his bag on his shoulder as Flint undid his pads and boots.

"Fantastic," Flint said. "Scored eighteen times on the Keeper they were using."

"Cool," Blaine said, forcing a smile.

"And yours?" Flint said, looking up from pulling on his trainers.

"Great," Blaine said.

Flint grinned. "Well if we keep this up, we might be teammates." He laughed. "Can you imagine how awkward it'll be at the Final?"

Blaine laughed hollowly, his mind still focused on his anger towards Jeremiah.

"You alright?" Flint said, his face falling into worry as he shouldered his bag and broom.

"Fine," Blaine lied, giving him a tight smile that probably looked more like a grimace.

Flint seemed to sense he was lying but didn't press it. "Guess we should head on back then," he said. He smiled. "I can't wait to tell Thad."

Blaine felt another painful jerk in his chest at the fact that he wouldn't have Kurt waiting to hear the results of his trial. He didn't have anyone really, besides his parents, not like Flint had Thad, and probably Dan, to care about what happened. The thought made his eyes burn as he rested his hand on Flint's shoulder and turned on the spot on the edge of the snowy Quidditch pitch.

---

With the news of Thad and Flint's engagement fresh in their minds to push away Kurt and Blaine's break-up, Jeff and Nick were at least momentarily back to their old selves. Kurt laughed as he watched them bounce around the dormitory in between trying to get dressed. Kurt showered and changed while the others went to breakfast, heading down to the common room as they were returning, Jeff and Nick still looking almost manically happy and Thad smiling shyly. "Kurtsie, we brought you a present," Jeff said, pulling Leighton into the common room with him.

"They kidnapped me from the corridor," Leighton said, grinning.

"He said you're going outside," Nick said. "We want to come, too. And Thad."

Thad looked a little surprised by the pronouncement but shrugged in agreement.

Kurt smiled, a little disappointed that he wouldn't have the time alone with Leighton but more glad that his friends weren't looking downcast like they had been for the past two weeks.

They dragged Thad upstairs to get gloves and cloaks, leaving Kurt alone with Leighton.

"Pretty exciting about Thad and Flint," Leighton said, smiling as he moved to stand by Kurt, holding his hand lightly.

"I'm honestly surprised Thad didn't explode with happiness," Kurt said thoughtfully.

Leighton laughed, releasing his hand as the other three returned from upstairs. Thad looked a little conflicted seeing Kurt next to Leighton but didn't say anything, knowing Jeff and Nick might not react well to the idea of them dating.

"Time for snow!" Jeff said, leaping over the table, tripping, and flying face-first into the couch.

Nick sniggered and helped him up as Leighton laughed and Kurt exchanged a grin with Thad. They all trooped downstairs to the entrance hall, Jeff and Nick loudly discussing their plans for a wildcat-lion wedding. Leighton looked mildly bemused listening to them but smiled all the same when Kurt laughed at the inside jokes.

"Sorry you don't have any idea what they're talking about," Kurt said as they descended the marble staircase.

"It's alright," Leighton said, his gloved hand brushing against Kurt's in a way that could have easily been seen as accidental. "It's worth the confusion getting to hear you laugh."

Kurt smiled, feeling himself blush faintly at Leighton's words.

Thad let out an excited squeal and Kurt looked up to see him running down the stairs towards Flint, who had just walked through the oak front doors with Blaine, looking pleased. He dropped his broom and

bag to catch Thad around the middle when he threw his arms around his neck. Flint laughed and spun him around, kissing him happily. Kurt found himself exchanging a smile with Blaine at seeing their friends so in love. They both seemed to remember the situation at the same time, looking away from each other quickly.

"So it went well?" Thad said as he slid back onto the floor, arms still around Flint's neck.

Flint nodded. "Brilliant," he said. "And so did Blaine's from what he said."

Kurt's eyes flicked to Blaine again to find Blaine's hazel ones fixed on him again as he smiled fondly. Kurt dropped his gaze to the floor as pain rose in his chest and tears suddenly welled in his eyes. The look Blaine had given him was so familiar, so full of everything they'd shared that the loss of it all hit him hard at that moment.

"Ready to go?" Leighton said softly, lightly touching his arm.

"Yeah," Kurt said, blinking rapidly. "Yeah, let's go."

Jeff and Nick were still bouncing around Flint and Thad, talking over one another excitedly as Flint laughed and Thad simply rolled his eyes as the four of them walked out into the snow, Flint still carrying his broom and bag.

Kurt paused as he and Leighton reached Blaine, glancing over at his ex. "Congratulations," he said, a little afraid to meet Blaine's eyes but doing it just the same. "You...you deserve it."

"Thanks," Blaine said. "I haven't gotten the position yet, though."

"I know," Kurt said, smiling faintly. "But I'm sure you will." He continued on past Blaine out into cold after the others.

"I'm glad you two are getting along at least a little better," Leighton said, glancing back to make sure they were alone before sliding his arm around Kurt's waist as the others were still well ahead of them. "I don't like knowing he was making you upset."

Kurt leaned into his hold. "Yeah," he said, resting his head on Leighton's shoulder. "It's...well, I think we both have silently decided to be at least civil for the sake of everyone else's sanity."

Leighton kissed his temple gently. "So," he said, watching the snow being kicked up by their feet as they walked down the path around the lake, Jeff and Nick's shouts of laughter drifting back towards them.

"Valentine's Day is coming up soon."

Kurt nodded. "Yeah," he said.

"What do you want to do?" Leighton said a little apprehensively.

"What do you mean?" Kurt said, glancing up at him.

"Well," Leighton said haltingly. "If we go to Hogsmeade together for it, I think everyone's going to figure out we're dating. I know we were both worried about people finding out but they've pretty much stopped

with the insults now so...I mean, it's whatever you want, of course, darling."

"Darling?" Kurt said, laughing a little. "Well that's new."

"No?" Leighton said, scrunching up his face in thought. "How about duckie? My Dad calls my Mum duckie all the time."

Kurt laughed. "Oh god, I can just picture Jeff and Nick's faces if they heard you call me duckie," he said. "They would never stop making fun of me."

Leighton smirked. "Oh, I can get loads more, I'm sure," he said, squeezing Kurt around the waist. He sighed. "So...what about Valentine's?"

Kurt paused to think about it, their feet swishing in the soft snow.

"Yeah," he said at last, smiling. "Yeah, we can definitely go together. I don't think it'll be too bad. Like you said, they've gotten bored gossiping about us."

Leighton beamed at him and kissed him soundly. "Plus we have our first Slug Club meeting of the year the day before," he said when he pulled back as Kurt blinked dazedly. "I'll bet that Potioneer comes and makes Amortentia again."

"Awesomeness," Kurt said, still a little breathless. "I can't wait."

Leighton's gaze softened and he kissed him on the cheek. "I'm so glad you gave me a chance," he said.

Kurt smiled, nodding. "Yeah," he said, resting his arm around Leighton's waist. "So am I."

---

Cole stabbed at his plate moodily, glaring at his potatoes and blinking back angry tears. His eyes were red and raw from crying after Blaine had yelled at him the day before.

How could he? How could he yell at him when all he'd done was prove that Hummel was just a big, fat fraud who dreamed about other boys and then walked away from someone as perfect as Blaine.

He sniffed, wiping a hand over his eyes and laying his fork down, not feeling at all hungry. He gazed around the Hall absently and spotted Marsh sitting at the Slytherin table near the door. She'd just returned from her suspension that morning.

Cole tapped his foot anxiously under the table for a moment before getting up and walking across the Hall towards her.

"Marsh," he said in a low voice, sitting across from her and leaning over the table.

"What?" she said in a dull tone, giving him a bored look.

"I need your help," Cole whispered desperately. "It's Blaine. He still doesn't want me and now he's mad at me!"



"So?" Marsh said, chewing a bite her lamp chop and cocking an eyebrow.

"So I thought you'd help me," Cole said, "I thought...I thought we were friends."

Marsh laughed lightly. "No, sweetie, we're not friends," she said, shaking her head. "I wanted to get back at Leighton and Hummel. I've done that. I'm good."

"But...but Blaine," Cole said, feeling confused. "You said—"

"I *said* that Blaine wouldn't be with Hummel anymore," Marsh said, taking a sip of pumpkin juice. "He's not. It's not my fault he still doesn't want you."

Cole felt tears welling up in his eyes. "But...I thought—"

"Listen, O'Brien," Marsh said, sounding annoyed. "You tried, you failed, *get over it*. There are plenty of other hobbits out there for you, I'm sure."

She pushed her plate away and stood, muttering in annoyance as she moved to sit with some of her friends.

Cole stared down at the table, tears dropping from his eyes onto the white linen. Sniffing, he scrubbed them away hastily and got up, forcing his feeling of betrayal down as anger swelled in him.

*Fine*, he thought furiously, stomping up the marble staircase. *Fine*. If Marsh didn't want to help him, he'd do it himself. And if Blaine didn't want to like him, well, Cole would *make* him see that he was right for him.

## Chapter Seventeen

There were moments, little fractions of seconds, where he knew, knew that their relationship wasn't what Kurt and Blaine's had been. He thought a part of him knew that it never would be. But he enjoyed the time he spent with Kurt, enjoyed laughing with him and holding him and, yes, kissing him. Kurt needed someone to comfort him and offer a shoulder for when the reality of his and Blaine's break-up reached in past his anger and hit him.

Leighton was willing to be that person. He knew Kurt hadn't really let himself hurt for Blaine yet. Kurt was stubborn and hard-headed and passionate, one of the things that attracted Leighton to him, seeing someone who was so set in their own way when he himself was so fluid. For now though, he was just enjoying the time he had with Kurt, enjoying watching the way Kurt's eyes lit up when he smiled and the way he made him feel like he knew who he was a little more than before.

He was still confused, still unsure about exactly where he stood in his sexuality. More or less, he'd come to the conclusion that he would love who he loved and not focus on if it was a boy or a girl that he loved, just that he loved them. He thought that was what love should be anyway. Though he still didn't *love* Kurt, he felt affection and attraction for him and Kurt felt the same to a certain extent so he let himself be happy.

They spent the two weeks before Valentine's Day as they had the week before, not much changing from what their relationship had been before they'd agreed to try dating other than the fact that they'd sometimes end up on Leighton's bed or in an alcove kissing softly.

On one such occasion, Kurt was curled up between Leighton's legs, leaning back against his chest, his head tilted back to suck lightly at his jaw with the latest issue of *The Practical Potioneer* lying abandoned beside them.

"That feels brill," Leighton murmured, closing his eyes and dropping his head back against the headboard.

Kurt hummed a little in reply, kissing a trail down Leighton's neck as he twisted in his arms to stop from craning his neck. He buried his face in Leighton's neck and inhaled deeply. "You always smell so good," he muttered, smiling against him. "It's like...a comforting smell, you know?"

Leighton smiled. "I'm glad," he said, rubbing Kurt's back as he held him close. "That's why I'm here."

Kurt moved a little further down his lap, his head resting at the crook of Leighton's neck. He fell silent, his gaze a little unfocused as he stared at nothing.

"You alright?" Leighton said, brushing his hand over Kurt's arm.

"Yeah," Kurt said a little absently. "Yeah, I'm okay."

Leighton paused, watching him closely. "So, I heard that Blaine got called back for a second tryout," he said.

Kurt nodded. "Yeah," he said, something flickering in his eyes at the mention of Blaine's name. "Both of them did. Him and Flint I mean."

Leighton smiled. "It's nice that Flint and Thad got engaged," he said.

"They seem really happy together. It's too bad Wizarding Law doesn't allow them to get married yet."

Kurt nodded absentmindedly.

"You miss him, don't you?" Leighton said softly.

Tears welled in Kurt's eyes at this.

"I just want to get over him," he said, his voice quaking. "I hate that he didn't care about what they did to us. I hate that he didn't even try to defend me and only wanted to know if I kissed you back. I mean...I understand that he was jealous but he didn't even tell me he was that jealous and I just kept telling him over and over again that I loved him and he wouldn't listen to me."

Leighton reached up to brush his tears away gently. "I know," he said, his chest aching to see Kurt hurting so badly as he finally let himself cry over what he'd lost. He'd been so busy being angry at Blaine and upset about all the pain the rest of the school had been putting him through that Leighton didn't think he'd had room between it all to feel for the break-up.

Kurt gripped his face in his hands and sobbed softly. "I hate that he can do this to me," he said, his voice muffled against his fingers. "I hate that I still love him."

Leighton blinked back his own tears and held him tightly, hushing him soothingly and rocking him gently. "It's okay, Kurt," he said. "It's okay to hurt about it."

"But I don't want to!" Kurt said, sounding desperate. "I don't want to hurt because he hurt me so badly and he broke me, he broke me and I don't think anyone or anything will be able to fix it. I hate it! I hate *him*."

"You don't," Leighton said. "You and I both know you don't."

"I want to hate him, then," Kurt sobbed.

Leighton tightened his hold around him and kissed the top of his head, allowing him to cry into his shoulder until he drifted off to sleep in his arms. He shifted him carefully, sliding out from underneath him and

lying on his side to watch him sleep, his pale face streaked with tears, some of which still clung to his eyelashes. He didn't mind being the crutch for Kurt while he waited for his heart to heal. The only thing he wanted was for Kurt to be happy and if that's what he needed Leighton for now, that's what he would be.

---

He'd felt it for the first time talking to Leighton in the Slytherin dorm. Really *felt* that his relationship with Blaine was over. And now that he'd started, he couldn't stop. Memories kept hitting him at every turn, every inch of the Castle seemed to bring a fresh flash of their time together to his mind and there were times where he had to stop between classes to cry in the bathroom.

The worse part of it was when he had to see Blaine and he could see the same hurt in his own eyes that Kurt was just now starting to feel. He hated himself for feeling like this, for missing Blaine when he was still so angry at him for hurting him and betraying him, for making him wish that everything could go back to the way it had been before everything had gone to hell and Leighton was caring for him even when he *knew* that Kurt still loved Blaine and Kurt felt like a horrible person taking the affection from him. He didn't deserve any of it. The Friday before the Hogsmeade visit was Valentine's Day and the entire Castle became suddenly full of couples. Kurt tried not to think of the fact that the year before was the first time he'd told Blaine he loved him.

Leighton picked him up for breakfast that morning with a smile and a bouquet of daises.

"Roses are so cliché," he said as Kurt took the flowers, feeling mildly better as they walked down the hall together holding hands for the first time. "I thought daises would work because they're so bright and sunny. Just like you when you smile."

Kurt squeezed his hand at this, giving him a small smile.

"There you are," Leighton said, grinning as he leaned over to kiss Kurt's cheek.

People gaped and whispered as they passed, their past months' gossip finally confirmed. Kurt kept his head high as he walked, trying to ignore the occasional hissed insult he knew would be coming their way when they'd decided to take their relationship public.

"Just ignore them," Leighton said, smiling. "They can't touch you, Kurt, remember that."

Kurt smiled, walking a little closer to him as they made their way to the Great Hall. Unsurprisingly, Thad was sitting at the Ravenclaw table close to tears from all that Flint had been doing for him since he'd woken up to find his bed covered in rose petals.

"I'm still freaked out," Jeff muttered as Kurt took his seat next to a hysterical Thad and gave Leighton a brief kiss goodbye. "He was in our dorm while we slept."

"At least he didn't draw things on our faces," Nick said, nodding sagely. "That's what we'd have done to Thad as a surprise."

Hanna, who was sitting next to him wearing a silver charm bracelet Nick had given her that morning, giggled and shook her head. "I sometimes wonder why Thad hasn't kicked you two out of the room yet," she said.

"Because he loves us," Jeff said, grinning. "And we're brilliant."

Thad wasn't paying much attention to what they were saying, too busy crying happily over his plate as he clutched the long letter Flint had written him in Runes that, from what Kurt gathered through the tears, was a list of all of Flint's hopes for their relationship. When Thad had reached "and maybe one day we'll adopt a little girl with big dark eyes like yours" he'd completely lost it and had yet to finish the letter.

"Thad, you're going to hurt yourself," Kurt said as Thad collapsed into a fresh wave of sobs.

"It's just not f-fair," Thad said, leaning against him. "He's too p-perfect."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "I hadn't realized that was a problem," he muttered as he draped an arm around Thad's shoulder and tried to console him.

Blaine said down on Thad's other side next to Jeff, glancing in concern at Thad when he saw his tears.

"I think Flint's broken him," Kurt explained, smiling.

Blaine laughed, shaking his head and patting Thad's shoulder. "I thought it might happen one day," he said. He was still smiling as he met Kurt's gaze, sadness blooming behind his hazel eyes as reality sunk in again and he turned away.

Kurt sighed and continued to try and calm Thad down, avoiding looking at Blaine. If he was honest with himself, it wasn't being *with* Blaine that he missed the most. It was just being around him, the old him, the Blaine that wasn't angry and moody, the Blaine that laughed at Jeff and Nick with him and was simply a friend.

Leighton walked him to Muggle Studies after breakfast, Flint trying to get Thad to calm down as they walked ahead of them.

"You doing alright?" Leighton said as they stopped outside the classroom. "You seem a little down. Or is this about the other day?" Kurt shrugged. "A little, I guess," he muttered, staring at his feet. "I just...I feel like I don't deserve this relationship. You know I still love Blaine and that...that I might not be able to love you if you love me...."

"Hey," Leighton said, touching him lightly under the chin so he looked up. He smiled. "It's okay, Kurt. I told you it was. I'm just happy to have the chance to be with you and cheer you up."

"But I don't want you to get hurt," Kurt said softly. "I care about you, Leighton."

"I know you do," Leighton said, squeezing his hand. "That's why I know you won't try and hurt me. We both agreed that we're just trying this for now and that's what we're doing."

Kurt nodded and kissed him, gripping his hand and hoping he knew that he really *did* care. He did feel something more than just friendship towards Leighton, he felt affection and attraction and maybe not love but he wasn't just messing around with him as someone to help him get over Blaine. Leighton meant something to him.

"I'll pick you up for Slughorn's party after dinner okay?" Leighton said when they broke apart.

Kurt frowned. "Are you busy after last period?" he said, knowing there was a full hour between the last class on Fridays and dinner.

"I've got something I need to work on," Leighton said cryptically.

"What?" Kurt said suspiciously.

"It's a secret," Leighton said, tapping him on the nose and grinning.

"For some reason, I feel this can't be good," Kurt said, eyeing his expression.

"Doubt not, duckie," Leighton said with a smirk. "All shall be revealed in time."

"You're insane," Kurt said, smiling.

Leighton nodded, giving him a short peck on the cheek before striding off in the other direction, winking over his shoulder at Kurt.

Rolling his eyes, Kurt walked into class, sitting with Thad as usual. The other boy had calmed down a little bit since breakfast, his eyes still overly wet as he sniffled happily.

Professor Hector decided to have a free period for the holiday and they all spent the hour and a half making Muggle Valentines out of colored construction paper and glitter. Kurt spend most of the time helping Thad, along with Blaine, to make a ridiculously elaborate card for Flint, which included pop-up hearts and was Charmed to shoot little paper streamers out the moment it was opened. He didn't actually talk to Blaine much but it was nice laughing with him again as Thad, happily flustered, gushed about Flint and cut out little paper hearts.

He went to Defense feeling the depression he'd felt earlier evaporating and clutching a simple card Thad had insisted he make for Leighton, with displayed two cartoony paper ducks kissing.

It was a little strange how normal everything felt. Jeff and Nick were back to their hyperactive selves—they'd figured out about Kurt and

Leighton and had been upset but seemed to accept the fact that Kurt and Blaine were not together when they saw they were both some semblance of happy—Thad and Flint were overly sweet as always, and Blaine had been looking a lot less miserable lately. The only thing that remained solidly different was that Kurt was with Leighton and Blaine was alone.

After lunch, he had a free period in addition to the hour after classes ended and decided to try and get as much of his homework done as possible so he wouldn't need to focus on it over the weekend.

He was sitting alone at the back of the library reading a book for Charms when Blaine walked in by himself. He stopped when he saw Kurt, looking conflicted, before sitting at the other end of the room with his back to Kurt, who tried to continue reading.

"Pst, Hummel."

Kurt looked up to see the Gryffindor sixth year Derricks lurking between the shelves nearby. Trying to ignore him, he turned back to his book.

"Hummel," Derricks repeated, walking towards him with a sneer.

"Just leave me alone," Kurt said, wishing his voice didn't shake nervously.

"So when you're done with Cross, can I be next?" Derricks hissed with a cruel, soft laugh.

Kurt kept his eyes fixed on the page.

"Come on, Hummel, we all know you'll do anything for it," Derricks said. "You're just panting for it, aren't you?"

Kurt's vision blurred with tears and his hands trembled.

Derricks stopped behind him, his hands resting on the back of Kurt's chair. "You know, it's rude not to look at someone when they're talking to you," he hissed in Kurt's ear. Kurt flinched and recoiled, his hands shaking so badly he nearly dropped his book.

"Look at me," Derricks said sharply.

Kurt ignored him, tears slipping down his cheeks.

"I said, look at me, whore!" Derricks said loudly, fingers suddenly tightening around Kurt's shoulder. Kurt let out a terrified sob.

There was a loud *bang* and Derricks' hand flew off him. He turned to see the sixth year slumped back against the bookcase he'd just been thrown back into. Looking around, he saw Blaine standing on the other end of the room, his wand held out and a look of disgust etched on his face as he looked at Derricks.

Derricks stirred feebly and groaned as Blaine strode towards him.

"I told you," Blaine said when he'd placed himself protectively between Kurt and the other boy. "Talk about Kurt again and I'd do a lot more than punch you like I did last time."

Kurt stared at him in disbelief.

"Now get out," Blaine snapped at Derricks. "Before I make it worse." Derricks struggled to his feet and hurried out of the library, stumbling a little as he did.

Blaine glared after him for a moment before turning to Kurt. "Are you alright?" he grunted, pocketing his wand.

Kurt nodded mutely. "You—why did you do that?" he said softly.

"Well, for one, he's a git and deserved it," Blaine said. "Two, I warned him if he talked about you again, he'd regret it, and three—" he stopped, pausing. He sighed heavily. "Well, three, I still love you and you don't deserve it."

"Then why didn't you do anything before?" Kurt said. "Why did you *care* before?"

Blaine was silent for a moment before answering. "Because I was angry," he said. "I was angry and jealous and I felt betrayed that you didn't tell me about that...dream."

"I did it because I knew it would upset you," Kurt said quietly. "I knew you'd be hurt and it didn't matter because it didn't mean anything. I didn't want to hurt you."

Blaine sighed. "I know that...now," he said, eyes fixed through the window at the snowy grounds. He turned to Kurt at last, eyes questioning. "Are you happy?"

Kurt was a little taken aback by the question. "I—yeah. I mean...sort of," he said honestly.

Blaine nodded slowly. "Good," he said absently. "I'm...I'm glad."

"What about you?" Kurt said.

Blaine shrugged jerkily. They stayed in thick silence for a moment.

"I'm sorry, you know," Blaine said at last. "For what I said. It was...it was stupid."

"I—me too," Kurt said. "I'm sorry, I mean. All I wanted to do was save you from hurting and it blew up in my face."

"A lot of what we do seems to do that," Blaine said, the corner of his mouth twitching. "I guess I was too angry to listen to you." He sighed. "But that's what happens when two people as stubborn as us get together." He gave Kurt a steady look, regret clear in his face. "As long as he makes you happy, I guess." He glanced at Kurt's ring, opened his mouth, closed it, and walked away with his head bowed.

Kurt chewed at the inside of his cheek as he watched him go, turning back to his book after a minute and feeling even more confused than he had before.

---

Leighton picked Kurt up after dinner to head to Slughorn's office, laughing at the card he'd made in Muggle Studies for him. He could tell



something had happened since they'd last talked by the way Kurt spoke softer than usual and barely met his eyes, his face falling into confusion and sadness when he thought Leighton wasn't looking. The room was draped in red and white hangings and with much fewer people. As Leighton had predicted, one of the Potioneers from the Ministry stopped by to make a vat of Amortentia and told them stories of incidents when the potion had backfired hilariously. Leighton and Kurt were the only ones interested in the actual *making* of the potion and watched excitedly as it simmered away, steam rising in spirals as the surface shimmered.

"Now, I'm sure you all know that Amortentia will smell differently to everyone depending on what they're more attracted to," the old Potioneer said, his eyes twinkling as he ushered them closer to the cauldron. "I think some of you may be surprised by what you smell." Leighton grinned at Kurt and leaned over the cauldron, inhaling the scent of Butterbeer and rain. The third scent was something like cherries. It had confused him the year before when he'd smelled it and it brought up a wave of emotion that completely shocked him. He had no idea why the smell should be important to him and felt annoyed that he couldn't place it.

He looked at Kurt and saw tears in his eyes; somehow he knew he was smelling Blaine when he breathed in the steam. Leighton laid a comforting hand on his arm.

"Can we go?" Kurt said, only half meeting his eyes.

"Yeah," Leighton said, smiling kindly and taking his hand. They walked in silence back towards the Slytherin common room, Kurt sniffing occasionally. The room was crowded when they entered and they retreated to the quiet sanctuary of the empty dorm.

As soon as they were inside, Kurt pushed him against the wall and kissed him hard, fisting his hands in his shirt even as tears slid down his face. Leighton slid his hands through Kurt's hair as teeth and lips and tongues worked against each other furiously.

He could feel Kurt's anger and hurt and confusion in every touch of his fingers as he pushed Leighton's shirt up and over his head, taste the tang of his tears as his own fingers fumbled with the buttons of Kurt's sweater. Kurt wanted to forget, wanted to stop feeling for Blaine and he was putting everything into his kiss to try and feel for Leighton instead.

They knew. They both knew they were only pretending at this point now that Kurt had finally let himself feel, let himself *care*. Leighton was Kurt's crutch and Kurt was his, offering each other some kind of escape from the mess and confusion inside their own heads.

They fell onto the bed, hot breath hitting lips as hands grazed bare skin and sweat-slicked chest rubbed together.

Leighton pressed kissed across the hot skin of Kurt's neck and shoulders, his heart aching when he looked up to see tears streaming down Kurt's face.

"I'm sorry," he breathed in Kurt's ear. "I'm sorry I can't fix it."

Kurt sobbed into his mouth as he kissed him again. "I don't want to feel anymore," he said, sounding completely broken. "I wish I didn't feel anything at all. Being numb would be better than this."

Leighton moved to lie next to him and held him close, allowing him to cry against him.

"You don't have to do this," Leighton said, rubbing his back gently.

"You don't have to be with me."

"N-no," Kurt said, shaking his head. "I want to. I c-care about you, Leighton, I really do. I just hate this...I hate myself...I wish I could go back to not caring."

He hated seeing Kurt cry, hated Blaine for causing it and yet knowing that part of Kurt would never be happy without Blaine. But he was okay with pretending for now, okay with being Kurt's life raft in the torrent of emotion he was drowning in if only to see him smile every now and then.

---

Cole was nervous. Nervous to steal from a teacher's office even though he'd done the same with the memory. He was working alone now, he thought that was what scared him the most. Then again, it might have been excitement making his heart pound in his chest. The possibility of having Blaine as his own was becoming suddenly possible.

"*Alohomora*," he whispered, tapping the lock of Slughorn's office door with his wand. It clicked and the door swung open. He stepped inside, glancing briefly around the dark corridor before closing the door.

The office was dimly light by an old gas lamp sitting on Slughorn's desk. The light shimmered off the mother-of-pearl surface of the small cauldron of Amortentia sitting in the corner. Shivering with excitement, Cole produced a flask from his robes and walked towards the potion. He inhaled the scent of chocolate and what he thought might be lilac, along with the unmistakable scent of Blaine. He giggled giddily and spooned some of the potion into the flask, watching it shine and shift beneath the glass.

Tomorrow he was finally going to be with Blaine. Blaine was going to love him. *Love* him. The thought made it difficult for him to keep from letting out an excited shout as he snuck through the corridors back to the Gryffindor tower.

---

Saturday morning dawned warmer than it had been in months, the sun bright in the clear sky and working at melting the blanket of snow that had been covering the Castle and grounds since December. Kurt went to breakfast with Thad, who'd managed to calm himself down since the day before, though Kurt suspected it had something to do with the fact that he and Flint had disappeared—presumably into the Room of Requirement—after afternoon classes and hadn't reappeared until Thad returned to the tower well past curfew looking thoroughly ruffled and sated.

Kurt had left the Slytherin dungeons after he'd slept fitfully for an hour in Leighton's bed. He had no idea what he wanted anymore, everything becoming a muddled jumble of emotions in his head. All he wanted at this point was to push it all aside and feel...normal again. The air filled with the sound of wings as the owls flew in to deliver the morning post and Kurt moved his plate aside to allow Pav to land next to his sugar bowl. He untied the three letters the eagle owl was carrying, cringing upon seeing Mercedes', Tina's, and even Finn's handwriting. He knew they were letters wondering why he and Blaine had broken up and pocketed them, thinking he'd read them after they got back from Hogsmeade.

Thad was reading the *Daily Prophet* next to him, his face scrunched up in concentration. He turned the page as he took a sip from his goblet and spat pumpkin juice everywhere.

"What?" Kurt said in alarm, trying to read the sopping pages.

Thad shoved the paper at him and leapt up, screaming, "I LOVE HERMIONE WEASLEY!" at the top of his voice as he ran towards the Gryffindor table.

Kurt frowned and looked at the article he'd been reading.

*"The Wizengamot has officially passed its newest law Friday by a landslide vote after a moving speech by Member Hermione Weasley, Order of Merlin, First Class.*

*"I've fought for the rights of house elves for years,' a teary-eyed Weasley said after the law, which will legally allow same-sex Wizarding couples to marry, was passed, 'but this is something that needed to be changed for Witches and Witches everywhere. It's even more fitting that they'd pass it on Valentine's Day, don't you think? Our Ministry has made unbelievable steps since the War and this is just another—'"*

Kurt stopped reading when he heard Flint's excited shout and looked up to see him embracing a sobbing Thad. He smiled, feeling a swell of happiness in his chest for his two friends, though it was lessened a little by sadness. As he turned back to his plate, Blaine caught his eye. He was smiling as well but there was the same thing in his eyes that

Kurt was feeling, the thought that maybe, if things had turned out differently, they might have had the same thing. He was glad that Blaine at least wasn't alone, as he would be spending the day with Jeff, Nick, and Hanna. It was still painful, though, when Leighton came from the Slytherin table to pick him up and Blaine smiled and raised his hand a few inches off the table in farewell. "It's really starting to get to you, isn't it?" Leighton said as they walked down the path to Hogsmeade together. "You want to be with him."

Kurt didn't know anymore. He didn't know how to answer the question. The two sides of him were warring with each other. On one hand, he hated Blaine for what had happened and he wanted to give Leighton the chance he'd promised. On the other hand, he loved Blaine, remembered just how much they used to love *each other*, before everything had gone to hell.

"I understand, you know," Leighton said, squeezing his hand. "I understand you still love him. I can see it in your eyes how much you're hurting and I hate it, Kurt. I hate it because I love you." Kurt froze, eyes widening.

"Not like that," Leighton said hastily. "I mean, I love you because you're my friend. I care about if you're happy. I'm not *in* love with you, I guess is what they say. But I do love you to the extent that I just want you to be happy, even if it's not with me."

Kurt sighed. "I...I don't know what I want," he said truthfully. "And it's not fair to you or to Blaine to sit by and wait for me to make up my mind. I'm just...I'm being selfish."

"You're not," Leighton said. "You're just trying to be happy."

"But it's not my happiness that should decide everything, though," Kurt said, staring at his feet. "What about your happiness? What about Blaine's?"

Leighton smiled sadly. "I think you need to think about what will make *you* happy right now and not what will make *us* happy. One of us is going to end up without you and I don't think either of us want you making the wrong choice."

Kurt sniffed and wiped his eyes. "But I don't know what choice to make anymore," he said. "I...I don't know anymore, Leigh, and I hate it."

"I know," Leighton said with a sigh. "Why don't we just try and enjoy the day? There's plenty of time to figure it all out later. Besides, I have a surprise for you."

"What?" Kurt said, suddenly suspicious as they turned up the High Street, the cobblestone littered with puddles from the melting snow.

"You'll see," Leighton said, grinning.

Kurt sighed, smiling in spite of himself. They reached the main square and he looked around. "So, where to first?" he said, glancing at Leighton.

Leighton frowned in thought. "This works well, actually," he said, smirking.

"What are you talking about?" Kurt said.

Leighton ignored him and released his hand, turning to him. "You've just been really down lately and I want you to know that I care about you, Kurt. I want you to be happy, even if we're not together, I want us to be friends like we were before all this happened."

"Okay," Kurt said slowly.

Leighton nodded. "So...right," he said. He turned around, raising his voice. "Oi!" he shouted, looking around at the people walking down the High Street. "I've got something to say."

"Leighton, what the hell are you doing?" Kurt hissed as Leighton moved to stand at the very center of the square, grinning over his shoulder.

"Cheering you up," he said simply, pulling out his wand as people turned to watch him curiously. He flicked his wand and music streamed out of it as he opened his mouth and started to sing.

*Baby, I love you,  
I never want to let you go  
The more I think about  
The more I want to let you know  
That everything you do  
Is super fucking cute  
And I can't stand it.*

Kurt stared at him, heat creeping up his cheeks as a few people laughed appreciatively and Leighton simply grinned cheekily.

*I've been searching for  
A boy that's just like you  
Cause I know  
That your heart is true*

Kurt turned and tried to walk away, shaking his head, but Leighton ran up to him and grabbed his arm, turning him around and half-laughing as he sang.

*Baby, I love you  
I never want to let you go  
The more I think about  
The more I want to let you know  
That everything you do  
Is super duper cute  
And I can't stand it.*

"I'm going to kill you," Kurt hissed.

Leighton simply laughed and danced around him, grinning like there was no tomorrow as Kurt shook his head and buried his face in his hand.

*Let's forget*

*And run away to sail the ocean blue*

*Then you'll know*

*That my heart is true*

Kurt sighed, resigning to the fact that Leighton was going to do this if he liked it or not. He knew Leighton didn't even mean it romantically, that he was just trying to make him feel better, let him know that he cared.

*Baby, I love you*

*I never want to let you go*

*The more I think about*

*The more I want to let you know*

*That everything you do*

*Is super duper cute*

*And I can't stand it.*

Leighton walked back to him, smiling softly as he took his hand.

*You, you got me where you want me*

*Cause I'll do anything to please you*

*Just to make it through another year*

*You, I saw you across the room*

*And I knew that this was gonna*

*Blossom into something beautiful*

*You're beautiful*

Leighton laid his hand on Kurt's cheek. "You're beautiful, Kurt," he whispered, brushing his thumb over his face before his hand moved to settle on Kurt's shoulder.

"And you're ridiculous," Kurt said, smiling.

Leighton shrugged, nodding.

*Baby, I love you*

*I never want to let you go*

*The more I think about*

*The more I want to let you know*

*That everything you do*

*Is super duper cute*

*And I can't stand it.*

Kurt couldn't stop himself from laughing as he watched Leighton practically bounce around the square, dancing over-enthusiastically as he always did.

*Baby, I love you  
I never want to let you go  
The more I think about  
The more I want to let you know  
That everything you do  
Is super duper cute  
And I can't stand it.  
No I can't stand it.  
No I can't stand it.*

He moved back to Kurt, taking his hand and kissing him on the cheek gently.

"You're insane," Kurt said even as he smiled and pulled Leighton into a hug, a few people laughing and clapping lightly around them. "And you know everyone's going to think that was just a big confession of you loving me, don't you?"

Leighton shrugged. "Who cares what they think?" he said. "I know what it meant, you know what it meant, that's all that matters."

Kurt sighed. "Thank you," he said, squeezing Leighton a little tighter.

"You're welcome," Leighton said, kissing him on the cheek again. "So," he said as he pulled back, grinning and taking Kurt's hand. "Now that that's taken care of, where would you like to go?"

"Actually, I need a new quill," Kurt said thoughtfully. "The ones I got for Christmas last year are finally giving out."

"Then to Scrivenshaft's," Leighton said dramatically.

Kurt laughed and walked with him towards the little paper shop, finally oblivious to the looks and murmurs they were getting. If there was one thing he got out of this, out of Leighton, it was that he needed to stop caring about what everyone else thought about him and let himself figure out what he wanted. No, what he *needed* in all of this.

---

Cole's palms sweat a little as he walked down the High Street, head turning left and right in his search for Blaine. He'd seen him leave the Great Hall with his friends not long ago but he'd managed to disappear in the crowd. Then he spotted him through the window of the Three Broomsticks, his back towards the window and his head thrown back as he laughed at something.

People were talking and laughing about something as they walked by Cole, though he wasn't sure what it was about. Biting his lip, he wrapped his fingers around the flask in his pocket as he slipped into the pub.

He kept his head lowered as he moved to the bar, trying to make sure Blaine and his friends didn't spot him.

"Um, can I have a Butterbeer, please?" he said when the barkeep came over to him, looking expectant. He slipped a few coins onto the bar, jiggling his foot nervously and glancing over his shoulder at Blaine, who was shaking his head about something and smiling. Cole sighed dreamily.

"Anythin' else?" the barman said as he set the mug of Butterbeer down in front of him.

"No, thank you," Cole muttered, taking to drink and moving to the back of the pub. Keeping his back to the crowd, he pulled out the flask, heart hammering in his chest. "Okay, Blaine," he said, emptying the contents of the bottle into the mug. He knew the potion was only supposed to be used in small doses but he wanted to be *sure* it worked. Steam rose in spirals, forming a curly heart before wafting away.

He squirmed with excitement and glanced back at Blaine, who was standing up and saying something to his friends. He laughed lightly before pushing in his chair and moving towards the bathroom. Cole watched him for a moment before slipping a hand in his pocket and pulling out the Decoy Detonator he'd bought by Owl Order the week before, thankful everything was working out so far.

"Go," he whispered, setting the little black object on the ground and watching it scurry through the tables and chairs across the pub. Moving quickly, he slipped through the crowd towards the front of the pub where Blaine's friends were sitting. There was a sudden loud *bang* and a few people screamed as everyone turned towards the disruption.

Blaine's friends stood up and looked towards the sound in confusion and Cole quickly grabbed Blaine's Butterbeer and replaced it with the one laced with Amortentia while they were distracted.

"Sounds like a Decoy Detonator, that," Blaine's blonde friend said thoughtfully as he returned to his seat.

"I was thinking the same thing," the other friend said, frowning and putting his arm back around his girlfriend's shoulders. "We may have a problem, Jeff. Looks like someone's trying to take our place."

"No one will ever be as brilliant as us," the other boy said reassuringly. Cole rolled his eyes as he moved away, setting Blaine's Butterbeer down on an empty table before walking out of the pub into the warm air. Now he just needed to wait. He stood on the opposite side of the street, watching anxiously through the front window as Blaine returned from the bathroom and took his seat, cocking his head to the side as his friends told him about what had happened.

His hands shook a little as Blaine lifted his mug to his mouth and took a gulp of his drink, his throat bobbing as he swallowed. Cole waited with bated breath. "Come on," he muttered, his hands trembling.



Blaine set his mug down, laughing at something his friends had said. Then it happened. His laughter faded away and a look of sudden realization crossed over his face, his lips parting and his eyes taking on a faraway look. He said something to his friends, who frowned. Cole watched him stand, ignoring his friends' protests as he pushed his chair aside and almost ran towards the front door.

Letting out an excited laugh, Cole watched Blaine throw open the door and step into the sunlight. His eyes flicked around the square before falling on Cole, who nearly fainted at seeing the hazel light up at the sight of him, a wide smile filling Blaine's features.

Blaine walked towards him, expression full of love and desire.

"Cole," he said when he reached him, the name sounding like music on his lips.

"Hi," Cole said breathlessly.

"I love you," Blaine said abruptly. "I don't know why I didn't see it before."

"And Hummel?" Cole said nervously.

"Forget about him," Blaine said, his hand finding Cole's cheek and stroking it gently. Cole whimpered and sighed at the touch.

Cole's mouth went dry when Blaine's fingers trailed down his neck.

"Can we go for a walk?" he said, his voice a nervous squeak.

"Whatever you'd like, love," Blaine said, sounding almost painfully in love. He laced his fingers with Cole's, smiling softly. "Let's go."

Cole shivered with happiness, trying not to skip as he walked by Blaine's side. People gaped at them as they passed and Cole straightened up proudly. "So, are you my boyfriend now?" he said hopefully, looking at Blaine, who was watching him with a lovestruck expression.

"Anything you want, love," Blaine said. "Anything."

Cole nodded enthusiastically. He didn't even care that it wasn't real. This was *Blaine* holding his hand and smiling at him like he was the best thing he'd ever seen in his life. This was all he wanted coming true. This was perfect.

---

Kurt pushed open the door to Scrivenshaft's, the little bell tinkling overhead as he walked inside with Leighton and looked around at the shelves of quill, parchment, and ink. The smell of new paper filled the air.

"I'll be with you in a moment, lads," a voice called from the back in a thick Irish accent.

"Blimey, and I thought my accent was bad," Leighton said with a laugh as Kurt moved to look at a display of eagle quills sitting on the front counter.

"It is," Kurt said absently. "Well, okay, not as bad as that but you're so very Irish, Leigh."

"Well, growing up in Ireland will do that to a person," Leighton said with a smirk. "And Kenessey is full of proud Irish Wizards."

"I'm happy for it," Kurt said, frowning and turning over a quill in his fingers. He heard the door to the back open as footsteps approached them. "What do you think about this one, Leighton, I—"

He stopped as he looked up at Leighton, whose mouth was hanging open, his eyes wide and staring. He looked like he'd seen a ghost—well, figuratively, of course, given he saw actual ghosts every day. Kurt turned to see a young man with dark hair and vibrant blue eyes rimmed with a thick ring of dark grey standing behind the counter looking equally shocked as he gaped at Leighton.

"Leighton?" the man said in a breathless voice.

"Gavin?" Leighton said, his voice tight with emotion.

"Blimey," the man said. "It's been—"

"Four years," Leighton finished for him, eyes shining with tears.

The man, Gavin, nodded.

"You left," Leighton said.

"I came back," Gavin said, sounding a little nervous.

"Why did you stop writing me?" Leighton said, voice laced a little with anger.

Gavin licked his lips nervously. "I...I had my reasons," he said, not meeting Leighton's eyes for the first time.

Kurt frowned between them. Nostalgia was etched clearly on both of their faces. "Er," he said, feeling completely lost.

Leighton jumped a little at the sound. "Oh, Kurt, I'm sorry," he said, shaking his head to clear it. "I...wow, I'm just a little shocked at the moment."

Kurt cocked an eyebrow, glancing at Gavin, who looked equally flustered.

"Kurt, this is Gavin Connolly," Leighton said, nodding towards the young man. "He...well, we were...friends when we were kids."

"Best friends," Gavin interjected.

"Yeah," Leighton said, nodding and sniffing a little. He laughed. "I...I can't believe you're here, Gav. What the hell happened to you?"

Gavin rubbed the back of his neck nervously. "Well...you know part of it," he muttered.

"I know you left when your parents split," Leighton said. "You dropped out of Hogwarts and your Mum homeschooled you. I know the two of you moved all over the place."

Gavin nodded. "That's about it really," he said, shrugging. "I finished off school two years ago and moved around with Mam for awhile. I moved in here a few months ago."

"*Months?*" Leighton said in a choked voice. "Gavin, why the hell didn't you say something?"

"Well, I assumed you'd forgotten about me," Gavin said, shrugging. Leighton shook his head, gripping his face in his hand.

"Do you two need time to talk?" Kurt said, feeling awkward.

"I...yeah," Leighton said, nodding. "If that's okay with you."

Kurt nodded, smiling and giving him a short kiss on the cheek. "I'll head on back to the Castle, okay? I'll see you later."

"Sorry," Leighton said softly. "I had...this is just kind of a shock to me."

"It's fine," Kurt said, nudging him. "Really, you think I wouldn't understand you wanting to talk to your long lost best friend?"

Leighton gave him a grateful smile. "I'll come find you later, alright?"

"Sure," Kurt said, hugging him briefly before walking out of the shop, feeling mildly confused and thinking he'd work on his remaining homework. Funnily enough, he wasn't all that disappointed that he wasn't going to be spending the rest of the day alone. He smiled, feeling like he was finally starting to figure out what it was he needed to do.

---

"I love the way your hair looks," Blaine said with a sigh.

Cole smiled, blushing and fighting back a pleased laugh. It was so amazing hearing Blaine talk to him like this, just hearing *someone* say those things about him for the first time in his life, that he almost didn't know what to do.

"Thank you," he said, glancing over at Blaine, who hadn't stopped looking at him since they'd left the village.

"I want to kiss you," Blaine said. "Can I kiss you, love?"

Cole took a shaky breath and nodded excitedly, stopping in the middle of the empty path and turning to Blaine, who rested the hand that wasn't holding Cole's on the side of his neck.

His heart was doing backflips in his chest, something fluttering in his stomach as Blaine smiled and leaned down to kiss him. He sighed at the touch. His first kiss. It was like everything he'd ever wanted and it was *Blaine*. Blaine was running his thumb along his jaw and moving his lips gently against his and it was so perfect he wanted to cry.

Blaine's fingers pulled away from his hand so he could wrap his arm around his waist and pull him closer and, oh, was that his *tongue* sliding on his lips? He blushed, not really sure what to do, and opened his mouth a little. That's what people when they kissed,

right? He thought tongues were supposed to come into it somewhere but had never really known why. But then Blaine's tongue glided against his and he groaned as he understood why people made such a big deal over this.

Blaine responded at the sound and his arm tightened around him. Cole laid his trembling hands on Blaine's waist, not sure exactly where to put them. Blaine moaned and dragged his fingernails down his neck. It hurt a little and he winced.

Blaine's fingers slid up to grip his hair tightly and he whimpered at the pain. Now Blaine was moving his mouth frantically against him, biting his lip as he held him so tight he was struggling a little to breathe.

"No," he murmured, pushing a little against Blaine. "No, stop." This wasn't right. It was too much. He wanted to go back to the beginning when Blaine was kissing him gently. But Blaine wasn't listening and he started to panic.

"Stop," he said, pushing hard against Blaine's hips. "Stop it, Blaine, stop!"

Blaine ignored him, moving his mouth to his neck and sucking so hard it hurt. Suddenly he was scared. He didn't want *this*. He'd used too much potion and now Blaine's hands were all over him and he felt sick.

"Stop!" he shouted, shoving Blaine off of him and pulling out his wand in one swift movement. "*Stupefy!*"

A red jet of light shot from this wand and hit Blaine in the chest, throwing him back. He collapsed in the grass, limp and still. Cole dropped his wand and clapped a hand to his mouth.

"Oh no," he squeaked. "No, no, no, no, this wasn't, this isn't...I didn't—" He wrung his hands and tears stung his eyes. It was wrong, all wrong. It wasn't supposed to have ended up like this at all. He just wanted Blaine to like him, wanted the affection he'd seen him giving Hummel so many times.

He couldn't breathe. His whole body shook in fear and he bent down to pick up his wand, staring at Blaine's unconscious form for a moment before taking off down the path towards the Castle.

---

The air was warm and breezy as Kurt walked up the path, avoiding the puddles of melted snow scattered around him. He didn't meet anyone once he'd left the village, everyone else still enjoying their time off. Inhaling deeply the fresh air, he smiled. Really, even with everything, he couldn't help but enjoy the warm weather.

He rounded a bend in the path and frowned as his eyes fell on a prone form on the side of the road. At first he thought it was someone just lying in the grass, but their limbs were a little off-kilter. His stomach

twisted and he picked up his pace, looking around for someone else, but he was alone.

"What the hell happened?" he muttered, jogging towards the figure. He caught sight of the blue peacoat and dark curls and his heart stopped. He was running now, pulling out his wand and sending sparks shooting into the air, hoping *someone* would see it.

"Blaine," he gasped, dropping into the grass and ignoring the cold water that seeped through his jeans. "Blaine, can you hear me?" He tapped the side of Blaine's face gently with his hand. "Shit." He fumbled with his wand, tears stinging his eyes suddenly. "You'd better be okay, you idiot. *Rennervate*," he muttered, pointing his wand at Blaine's face.

His hazel eyes opened slowly and he groaned. Kurt laughed in relief, wiping away the tears that had been sliding down his face.

"Kurt?" Blaine said, looking at him steadily.

"What the hell happened to you?" Kurt said, trying to catch his eye as Blaine was looking around in confusion.

"Where's Cole?" Blaine said, frowning.

"Co—what?" Kurt said as Blaine pushed him away and stood up, turning on the spot.

"Cole," Blaine repeated, not looking at him. "He was just here! I need to find him."

Kurt stared at him. "Did Cole Stun you?" he said, anger bubbling inside him.

"Just tell me where he is!" Blaine shouted, looking annoyed. "I can't be away from him now! Not on Valentine's. I love him!"

Kurt blinked in shock. "You what?" he said, almost laughing at the complete absurdity of what he'd just said.

"I love him!" Blaine repeated, voice constricted with emotion. "I need to find him. What did you do to him?"

"I haven't done anything to him," Kurt said, pushing himself up from the grass as realization sunk in. He knew the effects well enough.

"Blaine, you've been drugged."

"I haven't!" Blaine said, shrugging when Kurt tried to take hold of his arm. "I love him and he's gone. Do you think he stopped liking me? Did I go too fast?"

"Blaine!" Kurt said, grabbing his face and looking at him sternly. "Stop it and just listen to me, okay? Someone gave you a Love Potion. You're coming with me to the hospital wing for the antidote, got it?"

"But Cole," Blaine said, flailing on the spot. It would have been funny if Kurt wasn't so furious at Cole and worried about Blaine.

Kurt sighed. "Alright, fine, I'll take you to Cole," he lied, gripping Blaine's arm firmly and steering him down the path.

"Really?" Blaine said, sounding thrilled. "I love him, Kurt, I do." Kurt felt a stab of annoyance hearing Blaine say this but pushed it aside and let his concern take over. "That's...great, Blaine," he said. Blaine quivered happily next to him and started prattling on about Cole.

Kurt drowned him out, unable to listen to Blaine talking about that little...he couldn't even think of an appropriate word for Cole at the moment. He couldn't believe he'd actually used a Love Potion on him. Not only was it illegal, it was dangerous. *And* he'd Stunned Blaine. He was ready to hunt the Gryffindor down and teach him a thing or two. He struggled a little with keeping Blaine under control as he dragged him up to the hospital wing.

"I thought you were taking me to Cole?" Blaine said, rounding angrily on him when Kurt had shut and locked the door behind him. Better safe than sorry.

"Blaine, you've been drugged," Kurt said wearily as he moved towards a confused-looking Madam Pomfrey. "Love Potion," he muttered as Blaine sat down and crossed his arms sulkily when the door wouldn't open.

She sighed and nodded. "There's always at least one every year," she said, moving towards her office and returning with a small cup of something.

"What's that?" Blaine said suspiciously when she forced it into his hand.

"Just drink it, Blaine," Kurt said, rubbing his eyes tiredly.

Blaine narrowed his eyes at the glass for a moment before obeying. He sat for a few seconds looking annoyed and impatient. Then something seemed to clear in his face and he stared at Kurt.

"I'll kill him," he said.

Kurt laughed. "Better then?" he said as Blaine looked disgusted.

"What the hell is wrong with him?" Blaine said, making a face. "God, I *kissed* him." He shuddered.

"Yeah?" Kurt said, another jab of jealousy hitting him. He turned to Madam Pomfrey. "Can you check him over? He was Stunned, too."

"Quite the day you're having, Mr. Anderson," she said, shaking her head and sighing. "You two seem to end up here together quite a lot."

"Tell me about it," Blaine muttered. He frowned and looked up at Kurt. "What about Cross? I thought you two were spending the day together."

"Long story," Kurt muttered.

Blaine nodded and allowed Madam Pomfrey to give another potion. He gave her a muttered thanks and she returned to her office, mumbling something about the students being the death of her.

"Thank you," Blaine said when the door closed behind her. "Who knows how long I'd have been there if you hadn't come along." Kurt shrugged. "I'm just glad you're okay," he said truthfully, thinking of how sick he'd felt seeing Blaine lying there unconscious.

"You were worried?" Blaine said, sounding surprised.

"Of course I was," Kurt said, feeling a little hurt that he was so shocked.

"Why?" Blaine said.

"Because I care about you," Kurt said softly. "I...I still love you, Blaine. I just...I'm still hurting about what you did. But I'm not about to leave you lying on the side of the road like that. I'm not heartless."

"I know you're not," Blaine said quietly. They stayed in silence, Kurt leaning against one of the beds and Blaine sitting next to the door. Blaine sighed and stood up at last. "I think I'm going to go back to the tower and scrub my mouth for the next five hours."

Kurt laughed and Blaine grinned and for the briefest moment it was almost like they were back to normal again. But then reality hit again and Blaine unlocked the door, giving him a sad smile before striding out into the corridor.

Kurt watched him go for a moment, the same confusion he'd been feeling all week sinking into him again. He knew the one thing he needed to do though. He set off purposefully as anger seeped through him again.

He didn't know where he'd find Cole, but he knew that he needed to hunt him down. He'd make him understand that if he touched Blaine again he'd get a lot more than a few weeks of detention. The fifth year wasn't in any of the classrooms he passed on the way to the library, which was almost completely empty.

He was almost ready to give up and go to the Gryffindor tower when he caught a flash of red hair moving between the shelves.

"Cole!" he shouted, running towards the spot.

Cole stopped and squeaked in fear when he spotted Kurt.

"Are you insane?" Kurt snapped. "You could have seriously hurt him! I don't know what the hell goes through your head but you need to leave Blaine alone or you're going to end up getting expelled."

Tears welled in Cole's eyes as he shrank away from him.

"I don't understand why you won't get the hint," Kurt said, folding his arms across his chest. "I don't get why you can't just accept the fact that Blaine *doesn't like you*."

Cole hung his head, sniffing and wiping his eyes. "I just wanted someone to spend Valentine's Day with," he said softly. He lifted his eyes to Kurt's and he saw the hurt and pain clear in them.

Something shifted inside Kurt as he suddenly saw the other boy in a new light. He was scared. Scared and alone and he'd been twisting it all into anger, he thought his association with Penelope might have something to do with it as well.

"Why are you doing all this, Cole?" Kurt said, trying to sound a little kinder though he was still seething.

Cole shrugged, tears sliding down his face. "I just...no one likes me," he said. "I thought maybe Blaine would."

Kurt sighed heavily. "You're trying too hard," he said. "You need to stop being so angry towards everyone. I get that you're afraid of being alone but taking it out on other people and pulling stunts like this isn't going to help anything."

Cole stared at his feet, his shoulders slumped.

"You're setting yourself up for rejection when you act like that," Kurt said, grimacing as he laid a hand on Cole's shoulder. He really didn't *want* to be nice to him, but he knew what it was like thinking you'd never find someone, never stop being alone. It hit him then how much he'd made a mess of things. He *had* found someone and he'd let himself screw it up. Well, they'd both screwed it up.

"I'm sorry, Cole," Kurt said, softly. "But chasing after Blaine is just going to end up in you being hurt again. I know it's hard being turned down by someone."

"How would you know?" Cole muttered. "You get everything you want. You're basically perfect."

Kurt laughed lightly. "I'm not, trust me," he said. "I'm not immune to fu—screwing things up. Nobody's perfect. Not me or you or Blaine even."

Cole looked a little doubtful at this, squinting at his feet.

"Just...try being a little nicer to people and you'll be a lot happier," Kurt said, smiling. "Trust me."

Cole looked up at him through red eyes. "Why are you being nice to me?" he mumbled.

"Because I've been a bit of a jerk to you," Kurt said. "I didn't know you were hurting, I thought you were just obsessing over Blaine. I'm...sorry."

Cole wrapped his arms around himself, staring at his shoes again.

"Thanks," he muttered. "Me too, I guess."

"So you're better?" Kurt said, trying not to think of how bizarre the sudden turn of events was.

Cole nodded, smiling very faintly.

"Alright," Kurt said, nodding and suddenly feeling awkward.

"Well...good."



Cole looked fractionally happier as Kurt patted him on the shoulder before turning and walking out of library. This was turning into one of the strangest days of his life.

---

Leighton stared in disbelief at the person he hadn't seen for nearly four long years. The one he'd shared every laugh and smile with from the time he was learning how to walk to when Gavin had left with his mother.

The years stretched between them, memories uncurling like ribbons and fluttering down like petals from a dying flower. Silence thick with unspoken questions and equally mute answers filled the air.

"So," Gavin said after a full minute of silence after Kurt had left. "Are you two together then?"

"I—sort of," Leighton said, frowning. He wasn't really sure what his relationship with Kurt was becoming. Honestly, he didn't think either of them knew what they wanted anymore. He knew he liked Kurt and everything they did together but right now Gavin's appearance was pushing everything else from his mind. It was like seeing someone come back from the dead.

*"We're moving," Gavin said, sitting down next to him at the Slytherin table.*

*"What?" Leighton said, dropping his fork and staring at him. "What do you mean?"*

*"Mam and I," Gavin said, looking thoroughly depressed. "I'm leaving Hogwarts to go with her. I don't want to live with Dad."*

*"But...what do you mean?" Leighton said. "You can't really be going?"*

*"I am," Gavin said, not meeting his eye. "I'm finishing out fourth year and then...then I'll be gone."*

*Leighton stared at him.*

Gavin nodded slowly. "I see," he said. "I didn't know you were gay."

"I'm not," Leighton said. "Well...I'm not really sure what I am, honestly."

"Right," Gavin said, quirking an eyebrow.

"I can't believe you're here," Leighton said. "I haven't seen you since I was thirteen."

"I know," Gavin said, not meeting his eye. "I was fifteen. I remember."

*"It's not fair," Leighton said, leaning back against Gavin's headboard and staring at the yellow hangings pulled closed around them. He liked visiting Gavin's dormitory. It was bright and cheery in the Hufflepuff dorms. Plus, they were close to the kitchens and could sneak out to steal food when they were hungry.*

*"I know," Gavin said, sitting back next to him. "I don't like it either."*

*"But you'll write me, won't you?" Leighton said softly. "I mean...I'll write you."*

*"Course," Gavin said, though he didn't meet his eye. "All the time. It'll be brill. We'll be like quill pals."*

*Leighton smiled. "Yeah, brill," he repeated. He'd adopted the word from Gavin when he'd returned from his first year at Hogwarts with it added to his vocabulary.*

Leighton shoved his hands in his pockets. "Care to tell me why you stopped writing?" he said, trying not to sound as angry as he was. Gavin sighed heavily. "Why don't you come in the back? We can talk there." He pulled out his wand and flicked it so the sign turned from 'open' to 'closed'.

Leighton walked around the counter and followed him to the back room, where there were wrapped packages of quills and parchment stacked high. There was a side room with a small couch shoved against the wall. Books were scattered across the table in front of it and dusty bottles of Butterbeer sat on the side table.

Gavin gestured to the couch and Leighton sat down next to him.

"How've you been?" Gavin said, watching him closely.

"Fine," Leighton said a little sharply. "I'd really just like you to answer the question, though."

"I told you," Gavin said, pulling a wrapped candy from his pocket. "I had my reasons." He unwrapped the candy and Leighton caught a whiff of cherries.

He blinked in surprise as he realized that it was the same thing he smelled when he smelled Amortentia.

*"You eat too many of those," Leighton said, grinning as he looked up from his Potions essay to see Gavin popping another candy into his mouth.*

*"Me mam says I'm going to rot my teeth," Gavin said, grinning around the candy. "But they're so good."*

*Leighton grinned. "You're crazy," he said.*

*Gavin winked and stuck out his red-stained tongue at him. "You're jealous because you don't like them," he said.*

*"I never said that," Leighton said, picking up one of the candies and placing it in his mouth. He wrinkled up his nose. "But they're too sour."*

*"You just have a sweet tooth is all," Gavin said. "I'll sneak you a Butterbeer from the Three Broomsticks sometime."*

*"Will I like it?" Leighton said, sucking absently on the candy.*

*Gavin nodded and pushed him lightly. "Why don't you ever trust me?"*

*"What?" Gavin said, catching the look on his face.*

*"I forgot you used to eat those all the time," Leighton said softly.*

Gavin shrugged. "I guess I'll always be addicted to them," he said, smiling. He sat back in his seat and sighed.

"I hated you, you know," Leighton said. "I hated you for leaving and I hated you for ignoring me."

Gavin sighed. "I know," he said.

"I missed you," Leighton said.

"I know," Gavin replied in a tired voice, uncorking one of the bottles of Butterbeer sitting on the side table. He handed it to Leighton and picked up one for himself.

*"Try this, Leigh," Gavin said excitedly, shoving a bottle into his hand.*

*"What is it?" Leighton said, sniffing the bottle and inhaling a sweet scent. Something like butterscotch.*

*"Butterbeer," Gavin said, sitting down on the bed next to him and popping a candy into his mouth. "It's brill!"*

*"Where'd you get it?" Leighton said.*

*"In Hogsmeade, of course," Gavin said. "Oh, Leigh, I can't wait until you can go, too! It's so brill! And the joke shop and everything is just, it's brill!"*

*Leighton laughed and took a drink of the Butterbeer. It sent warmth seeping through him to the tips of his fingers. "Whoa," he said, staring at the bottle as Gavin grinned at him. "That's good!"*

*"I told you, Leigh," Gavin said, shoving him playfully. "Why don't you ever trust me?"*

*Leighton smirked and took another sip.*

"I needed you. I needed my best friend and you didn't care." All the things he'd felt years ago welling up inside him again.

"I did care," Gavin said softly. "I cared too much."

"What's that even supposed to mean?" Leighton said, his voice rising.

"You abandoned me, Gav!"

Gavin didn't deny it, simply fixed Leighton with a steady look, his blue eyes the same shade of piercing blue he'd always remembered.

"I can't deal with this right now," Leighton said, tears welling in his eyes as he set the Butterbeer down. "I can't, this is...this is just too much."

"What?" Gavin said as he stood up. "No, Leigh, don't go, please. Just...just talk to me, okay? I'm sorry."

"Why did you come back?" Leighton said, rounding on him. "Why did you even bother? You had to know you'd see me! Why did you come back, Gavin?"

Gavin didn't answer immediately, his gaze digging into Leighton in a way that was so familiar, pulled up from a past he'd all but forgotten, that it actually hurt to hold it. "Part of me knew I couldn't stay away," he said at last.

*"Don't forget to write me," Leighton said anxiously as Gavin dragged his trunk across the front walk.*

*"I won't," Gavin said, his eyes a little sad. He turned to Leighton, looking like he wanted to say something. "Why don't you ever trust me?" he said, giving him a tight smile.*

*"We'll always be best friends right, Gav?" Leighton said, twisting his fingers in the hem of his shirt.*

*"Right," Gavin said, nodded at his feet.*

*Leighton chewed on his cheek for a moment before pulling Gavin into a hug. He'd never hugged another boy before but this wasn't another boy, this was Gavin, his best friend. The one who made fun of him for being obsessed with Quidditch and stayed up in the middle of the night to send notes to each other until Gavin's owl got annoyed and stubbornly refused to fly down the street to deliver anymore.*

*"I'll miss you, Gav," Leighton said. He felt like crying. He'd never wanted to cry so badly in his life but he didn't want Gavin to think he was a little kid. Gavin was two years older than him and Leighton had always looked up to the other boy—though he was the taller of the two—and he wasn't about to let him think he was girly or something.*

*"I'll miss you too," Gavin admitted. "A lot."*

*"You're not making any sense, Gav!" Leighton said, on the verge of shouting now. "You left me and you forgot about me and I hated you. I waited every day for you to write me! Every damn day and you wrote me twice and then you just stopped! You know how long I waited?"*

*There were tears in Gavin's eyes now, too. "I know," he said in a tight voice. "I know you hated me. I needed you to hate me, Leigh."*

*"Why?" Leighton yelled. "I don't understand, Gavin."*

*"I know you don't, Leigh, I know," Gavin said.*

*Leighton waved as he watched the Knight Bus pull away from the curb, Gavin watching him from the back with his hands pressed against the window. He looked sad, broken even, just like Leighton felt.*

*Then there was a loud bang and the purple bus vanished and Gavin was gone.*

*Leighton stared at the spot for a moment, not really sure what to do next. Tears suddenly welled in his eyes and before he knew it, he was sobbing into his hands and running down the street. He reached Gavin's old house, looking up at the closed shutters and felling as empty at the quiet cottage.*

*The old tree they used to climb when they were younger swayed in the front yard, looking lonely and bare without the treehouse Gavin's father had made for them before his parents had started fighting. It had been his and Gavin's sanctuary when his father started shouting, which had happened a lot in the past year.*

*He remembered a particular occasion when he'd woke up in the middle of the night with Gavin's owl tapping on his window with a note from Gavin that simply said 'He's doing it again.'*

*He'd snuck out of the house and down the street, where Gavin was curled up in the treehouse, staring at the wall blankly.*

*"Are you alright?" Leighton had said, sitting next to him. Gavin shook his head, not looking at him. "Gavin, what's that?" he said, pointing to the purplish mark on Gavin's right arm.*

*"Nothing," Gavin said hastily, tugging his sleeve down to hide the bruise.*

*"Did your dad do that?" Leighton said softly.*

*Gavin nodded, burying his face in his knees.*

*"I'm sorry," Leighton said, not knowing what to do. He'd never heard of a parent hurting their child before and it made him sad to see Gavin so upset.*

*"Will you stay with me?" Gavin said, looking up hopefully, his eyes bright.*

*"Course I will," Leighton said, smiling. "It'll be like a sleepover."*

*Gavin smiled a little crookedly and sniffed. They'd stayed up half the night until Leighton finally had Gavin laughing again until they fell asleep next to each other.*

*Leighton climbed up onto the biggest branch and leaned back against the trunk, crying so hard he thought he'd never stop. He already missed him.*

*"Just tell me then," Leighton said, tears streaming down his face. "Just tell me why you stopped."*

*Gavin closed his eyes, tears slipping from them. He took a shaking breath and opened his eyes at last. "Because I loved you," he said in barely a whisper. "I loved you and all you did was talk about girls and Quidditch and I knew you didn't feel the same way about me and we were so young I thought I could just go and forget about you."*

*Leighton looked up expectantly as his mother untied the letter from the owl that had just flown through the window.*

*"Is that from Gavin?" he said hopefully.*

*"No, sweetie," his mother said sadly. "It's your booklist for school."*

*Leighton's heart sank like it did every time an owl arrived and it wasn't from Gavin. He didn't understand why he'd stopped writing to him.*

*Leighton had sent him two dozen letters in the past month and a half and Gavin had only replied twice. Short, impersonal letters that barely said anything at all.*

*"I don't want to go back to school," he said, staring at his cereal.*

*"Why, sweetie?" his mother said in concern.*

*"Because Gav won't be there," Leighton said, tears filling his eyes. He looked up at his mother. "Mum, why did he stop writing me?"*

*"I don't know, dear," she said with a sigh. "Maybe he's just busy."*

*"But I don't get it," Leighton said. "We were supposed to be best friends forever and he was going to take me to Hogsmeade for the first time this year and I was going to show him how to play Quidditch and he was going to come watch me play when I made the House team and-and I don't understand!"*

*"I know, sweetie," his mother soothed as he cried into her shoulder.*

*"I'm so sorry."*

*"What?" Leighton breathed. "You...loved me?"*

*"Love," Gavin said heavily. "I tried. I tried so damn hard to stop but you kept writing me even when I stopped and I hated myself and I hated you for making me feel like that when I was so young and it wasn't fair."*

*Leighton tried to process this new information, unsure of exactly how to react. He was still in shock from seeing Gavin after all this time and now this? He didn't think his heart could handle it all.*

*Leighton took a seat in an empty compartment on the train, staring out at the Platform blankly. It was strange getting onto the train without Gavin sitting beside him, eating his candy and laughing at him when he talked too much about Quidditch.*

*He'd numbed himself to it for the most part. He thought that, in time, he'd forget about him. Gavin had obviously forgotten about him. It hurt, thinking about it, that Gavin could abandon him so easily and leave him to hurt alone. All he wanted was to forget about him and move on. He had to stop letting himself be affected, had to block himself off to what people said and thought, knew that if he let someone else in he'd just end up being hurt again.*

*"Aren't you going to say anything?" Gavin said.*

*Leighton merely stared at him. He didn't have anything to say in reply to what Gavin had just told him. He hadn't even known he was gay.*

*Gavin smiled despite the fact that he was still crying. "You never were one with words, Leigh," he said, shaking his head. "I take it you're still obsessed with Quidditch, too?"*

*Leighton shrugged. "I play on the House team, if that's what you mean," he said. "I have since third year."*

*"Welcome to the team, Cross," the Captain said with a broad smile.*

*Leighton smiled a little in reply, gripping his broom tightly. He didn't know what he didn't feel as excited as he thought he would be about getting onto the team. He loved Quidditch, always had. Suddenly, he thought of Gavin. Gavin who would be laughing and shaking his head about his over-enthusiasm about the sport. There were so many things*

*that reminded him of Gavin in the Castle and he hated it, hated the lump that rose in his throat when he looked at the Hufflepuff table.*

"I knew you'd get on," Gavin said. "There's something wrong with the world in which Leighton Cross doesn't play Quidditch."

Leighton didn't answer. "Why didn't you tell me?" he said at last. "Why didn't you tell me you loved me before?"

Gavin sighed, rubbing his eyes. "Because we were young. Dammit, Leigh you were *thirteen*. You know ridiculous I felt loving you at all? I didn't even know if that's what it was at first."

"And now?" Leighton said.

"Now?" Gavin said. "Yes. I mean...yes, I knew it was love a long time ago. And yes, I still love you. I just didn't think there would ever be a chance of you loving me back."

*Kurt rolled his eyes. "One of those, are you?" he said at Leighton's disbelief that there had been no Quidditch in America. "No, there's no Quidditch."*

*He didn't know why, but having Kurt act like that, a little snarky and sarcastic towards him, brought a strange feeling to the forefront of his brain. No one ever acted like to him. Everyone in Slytherin loved him and sometimes was almost too nice to him. It reminded him of something he couldn't place.*

"Well you never even gave me a chance," Leighton said. "You know I cared about you, Gav. I don't think you know how much I missed you when you left."

"But you forgot about me, didn't you," Gavin said. "I can tell you did."

Leighton shook his head. "I never forgot about you," he said. "I thought I did. I tried hard enough to."

They stood in silence, memories passing through both their minds.

"What now?" Gavin said.

"I don't know," Leighton said honestly. "You hurt me."

"I know I did," Gavin said. "I had to. It made it easier because I thought...I thought if I told myself that you hated me that I'd stop feeling the way I did."

"But you didn't?" Leighton said.

"No," Gavin said, shaking his head. "Never."

Leighton swallowed back the lump growing in his throat. There were so many emotions pounding through him, feelings he'd buried so deep inside him he thought they were long gone but were now bursting to the surface of his mind.

Gavin took a few steps towards him, fresh tears flowing down his face.

"I love you, Leighton."

"Gavin, please, don't," Leighton said, shaking his head. "Kurt—"

Gavin silenced him, pressing his lips to his gently and placing a hand on the back of his neck. It was like fire had erupted inside him and he kept telling himself that he couldn't do this, couldn't let Gavin do this to him when he'd messed with him so badly but he'd never felt this when he was kissing anyone before and he was kissing him back without even realizing.

"Stop," he said, gasping and pulling back, his heart thumping violently in his chest. "Gav, I can't. I—Kurt."

Gavin's face fell. "Do you love him?" he said softly.

Leighton shook his head. "No, but I care about him and I can't do this to him," he said. "Not like this."

Gavin nodded and took a step back. "Yeah...okay," he said, turning away. "I understand."

"I'll talk to him," Leighton blurted out. "Honestly I...I think it was ending anyway. But...in a good way, you know?"

Gavin quirked an eyebrow. "Not really, no," he said.

Leighton quirked up his mouth in a half grin. "Why don't you ever trust me?"

---

Kurt walked out across the grounds, not really sure where he was going and lost completely in thought. He needed to find Leighton. Needed to tell him what he'd realized. He'd been attached to someone in one way or another for so long, he just needed to be alone so that he could figure everything out that this point. He knew Leighton would understand, though. They'd practically made the agreement already.

"Kurt!"

He turned to see Leighton running towards him across the lawn.

"Oh, hey," Kurt said, smiling. "I actually needed to talk to you."

"I-I don't think I can do this, Kurt," Leighton said, panting a little as he reached him.

Kurt blinked in surprise. "What?" he said.

"It's Gavin," Leighton said as he caught his breath. "I think...I think I'm falling in love with him. Or maybe I'm in love with him already, I don't know. Hell, I think I was falling in love with him when I was thirteen and I didn't even realize it."

Kurt stared at him. "So...I'm confused, are you saying you want to break up?" he said.

Leighton gave him an apologetic look. "Yeah," he said. "I'm sorry I just...you needed me to help comfort you and I needed you to help figure everything out but...that's done now right? I'm sorry Kurt. I don't want to hurt you."

"No, it's fine," Kurt said, smiling and feeling a sweeping sense of relief.

"I was actually going to say the same thing."



"Yeah?" Leighton said, relaxing visibly. "Brill."

Kurt nodded. He took off the Claddagh ring and turned it around. He'd still wear it, Leighton was still his friend. But for now, he'd wear it as someone unattached. "I need some time. I haven't been alone in so long and right now...well, right now that's what I need."

"I'm here," Leighton said, taking his hand. "If you need anything at all, Kurt, I'll be there in a heartbeat."

"I know," Kurt said, smiling. "I know you will." He hugged him firmly.

"Thank you, Leighton. Thank you for being what I needed."

"You too," Leighton said, smiling as they pulled apart. He sighed, running a hand through his hair.

"So...Gavin?" Kurt said, cocking an eyebrow.

Leighton laughed. "Yeah, it's...it's a bit of a mess," he said. "But apparently he was—*is* in love with me."

"Oh," Kurt said. "Well that's...I'm still a little confused but I'm glad."

Leighton nodded absently.

"Well you should probably get back to him then," Kurt said.

"Yeah," Leighton said, sounding breathless and grinning. "We've got a lot to catch up on."

Kurt smirked.

"You know what I mean," Leighton said, laughing and hitting him lightly. "I'll see you around, Kurt."

"Bye," Kurt said, raising a hand briefly in farewell and smiling. Well, that certainly went better than he'd expected. He watched Leighton go for a moment before turning back towards the Castle. There was just one other person he needed to talk to now.

---

Blaine set down his toothbrush, wrinkling his nose and thinking he might take a shower as well. He just...he didn't understand why Cole wouldn't leave him alone. He got that the kid was lonely but there was only so much he could take of this.

Sighing, he walked out of the bathroom and collapsed face first onto his bed. At least Kurt had been there to help him. He frowned. Kurt said he still loved him, said he didn't love Cross and yet he was *with* Cross. It was just one big, confusing mess at this point. The door opened and he lifted his head from the mattress to see Kurt standing there looking breathless.

"Oh, hey," Blaine grunted, rolling onto his back and sitting up.

"I talked to Cole," Kurt said, looking anxious as he moved to sit on his own bed so that he was facing Blaine, only a few feet away from him.

"Okay," Blaine said.

"He's...well, he's a lot different than I thought," Kurt said, frowning. "I think he's really been hurting about being alone. I don't think he has that many friends."

"Oh," Blaine said, suddenly pitying the other boy at the thought. "I...I didn't know."

"Neither did I," Kurt said with a sigh. "But I talked to him and I think he's doing a little better. I told him to get the stick out of his butt and stop being so rude to everyone so maybe that will help."

Blaine laughed and Kurt grinned.

"Well, my word choice was a little different," he said fairly. He paused, looking up at Blaine. "Leighton and I broke up."

Blaine's eyebrows rose up his forehead in surprise. "Did you—"

"It was mutual," Kurt said, answering his unfinished question. He looked at Blaine steadily. "I still love you, Blaine, and...maybe at some point we'll be back together but right now I just need time to work myself out. I hope you understand and I'll understand if you don't."

"No, you're right," Blaine said, nodding. "I think we both need it right now."

Kurt smiled and stood up, moving to lean over and hug him. "Thank you, Blaine," he said. "I'm sorry for what happened between us but I think it needed to so that we would both have this time. We weren't working the way we were. Maybe later...maybe when we've cleared our heads and taken some time to...I dunno, *grow*, we'll work again."

"I hope so," Blaine said, smiling as Kurt returned to his bed.

"Yeah," Kurt said, nodding. "Me too."

---

Flint squeezed Thad around the shoulders and kissed the top of his head. He nearly ran into a dustbin and steered back into the street as Thad giggled beside him. He'd been so unbelievably happy since he'd found out about the law being changed that he kept forgetting to watch where he was going, choosing more to stare at Thad instead.

"Hush, you," Flint said, tapping him on the nose.

Thad grinned and snuggled against his side.

"So have you thought any more about when you want it to be?" Flint said, tilting his head back to soak up the warm sun.

"Well obviously not until after graduation," Thad said seriously. "I suspect Mum will have something to say about it but she was very excited about you asking so I don't think she'd be opposed to having it at our house. If you want to that is," he added hastily.

"Anything you want, pet," Flint said. "Anything. I swear, we could get married in the middle of a blizzard or in a dirty basement or—"

"I get it," Thad said, giggling.

Flint smiled. "What I'm trying to say is I don't care," Flint said. "As long as it's you I'm marrying, I'm happy. But I'll need a date."

"Okay," Thad said, scrunching up his face in concentration. "How's August?"

Flint blinked in surprise. "Really?" he said. "I mean...that's only six months away."

"Well if you don't want to," Thad said, half smirking.

"No!" Flint said hastily. "August is perfect. Perfect. You're perfect. I love you."

Thad grinned smugly. "Alright then," he said. "August it is. I'll have to talk to Kurt. I'm sure he'll have an opinion on the exact date as he's sworn he's going to plan it all."

Flint smiled softly and kissed him on the cheek. "You remember when I wasn't sure if you wanted me to call you my boyfriend?" he said, thinking back to the moment.

Thad nodded, blushing a little.

"Well I just can't wait until I can say you're my husband," Flint said, grinning at the thought. "It's crazy just thinking about it."

Thad blushed a little deeper and chewed on his bottom lip. "As long as I can call you mine, I really don't care," he said softly. "But I'm excited, too."

Flint smiled. "Good," he said. "I'd feel pretty stupid if I was the only one."

Thad laughed, musical and soft as it carried across the sunny, blue February sky.

## Chapter Eighteen

In the two weeks following Valentine's Day, Kurt kept himself occupied with the usual pile of homework in addition to starting his work on planning Thad and Flint's wedding in his free time. He had to admit it felt nice to be alone, to have the chance to focus on himself. For so long he'd thought he wouldn't be able to get by without someone else and he knew he had to learn to be able to be okay on his own.

Blaine seemed to think the same thing, that the break from their relationship was what they needed at the moment. They'd been having so many problems that they'd stubbornly been ignoring that they now had a chance to work out on their own before they tried to work them out as a couple.

The best part of it all was that he didn't even care about the whispers and stares he was getting. As far as the rest of the school knew, he'd started dating Leighton, been publically sang to, and broken up with him within forty-eight hours. Leighton found the whole thing hilarious, that the rest of the school had nothing better to talk about—he found most everything hilarious since Gavin had reappeared—and claimed his only regret was that everyone seemed to think Kurt had ended it.

"I mean, I could totally be a heartbreaker, too, right?" he asked Kurt when they were enjoying a free period in the library together one Tuesday at the end of February.

Kurt merely rolled his eyes and went back to flipping through the issue of *Wizards Weddings* he'd had delivered when he and Thad had settled on August thirty-first as the date for the event.

"Gav doesn't think so, though," Leighton said with a frown. "He reckons I'm too soft. But I *did* break up with Pen."

"And if I remember correctly, she repaid you with a book in the face," Kurt muttered, clucking his tongue at a truly hideous set of invitations opening and closing on the page. "How are things with Gavin, by the way? Have you finally stopped 'reconnecting' long enough to sneak down to Hogsmeade and have wild reunion sex in the back room of Shrivenshaft's yet?"

Leighton laughed, shaking his head. "No," he said as Kurt smirked next to him. "No, we're still just writing each other right now."

"Hmm," Kurt hummed, nodding. "It'll happen soon enough. I'll be sure to steer clear of the shop come next Hogsmeade visit. And I still need a new quill," he added with a scowl.

The coming Saturday was the Gryffindor-Hufflepuff Quidditch match and Kurt spent the night before in the dorm with Thad, drinking tea and discussing plans for the wedding—Thad still grinned and blushed

every time the topic came up—as they made inappropriate banners for Flint, Wes and David throwing them looks of mock disgust from where they were working on their History of Magic homework on Wes' bed and laughing as Acorn stuck his head curiously into the paint can and emerged with whiskers drenched in gold.

He did miss Blaine, though. Missed the way their relationship used to be. But they were able to talk and laugh with each other when they were part of the group, still a little apprehensive about the prospect of discussing things together until they'd taken the time to be separate. Saturday was the first of March, bringing a chill rain with it across the mountains. The windows were awash with the steady pelt of icy water against the glass when Kurt awoke to Thad shouting at Nick and Jeff for something.

"You're both mental!" he said, his usual annoyance clear in his voice as Kurt sat up, yawning and rubbing his eyes.

"I swear, I'll take you both off the guest list if you pull another stunt between now and then!" Thad said, huffing, hands on hips.

The two Beaters, who had been grinning and tittering beneath his glare, fell silent immediately.

"But we *have* to go!" Jeff said, looking as though the thought alone was completely absurd.

"Wildcat, who would spike the punch?" Nick said, sounding appalled.

"Or set off Stink Pellets when Kurtsie's speech gets too long?"

"Or put everyone else to shame with our dance abilities?"

"No one!" Thad snapped, the two cringing as he bristled with anger.

"That's the point!"

He turned on his heel and stormed into the bathroom, muttering angrily as Jeff and Nick slumped their shoulders, looking dejected. Kurt glanced at Blaine, who'd been watching the exchange in silence with a look of faint amusement.

"They were Charming all his books and clothes to say 'Thad "Wildcat" Wilson'," Blaine said in response to his questioning look.

"Ah," Kurt said, nodding and stretching as he stood up. "Of course they were."

Thad was still grumbling when they trooped across the damp lawns towards the stadium an hour later, Jeff and Nick keeping their distance lest he make good on his threat.

Kurt shivered under the umbrella he and Thad were sharing, bowing his head against a sudden gust of wind that swept across the grounds and reached through his layers of clothes.

"Here," Blaine said, draping the blanket he was carrying around Kurt's shoulders with a small smile.

"Oh—thanks," Kurt muttered, goosebumps erupting across his arms when Blaine's gloved hand brushed across his neck, though it may have been an effect of the chill.

"I know how much you hate the cold," Blaine said, eyes fixed ahead of him, his hands in his pockets.

Kurt mumbled another thanks. Of course Blaine knew that. Blaine knew more about him than his own family. He cleared his throat and pushed away the thought of Blaine, ignoring Thad's faint grin. Nick and Jeff seemed to think the smile was a sign that Thad was no longer upset and moved to stand under the umbrella, veering off towards Blaine when Thad flashed them a warning glare.

"Kurt, can you hold these?" Thad said when they'd reached the stairs to the stands, shoving the banners he was holding into Kurt's arms.

"I'm going to go wish Flint good luck."

"And we're going to go find Hanna," Nick said, Jeff nodding beside him.

The three of them scurried off before Kurt could do more than blink, leaving him alone with Blaine in the drizzle, the umbrella in one hand and a stack of fabric covered in sexual innuendoes in the other. He sighed, a little annoyed at them for trying to pull this.

"Well, they're not obvious at all, are they?" he muttered, frowning after them.

Blaine chuckled. "I can sit somewhere else if it bothers you," he offered, rubbing the back of his neck and looking a little discomfited as well.

"No, no, it's fine," Kurt said, shaking his head. "They're just..." He sighed and Blaine nodded, knowing what he meant without needing to say it.

As Wes and David were sitting with the Ravenclaw girls again, Kurt was forced to sit alone with Blaine, feeling incredibly awkward as he huddled under the umbrella with Blaine's blanket around him and Blaine sitting a foot away, looking equally uncomfortable as they sat in thick silence in the middle of the chattering crowd.

---

"Flint, your wildcat's here," Gwen muttered, smirking as she walked past Flint, strapping on her armguards.

Flint turned to see Thad walking into the changing room with a vaguely triumphant look.

"What's got you so happy, pet?" Flint said, smiling as Thad perched on the bench next to him, brushing water from his face.

"We finally got Kurt and Blaine alone together," Thad said, "now they *have* to talk."

Flint looked at him for a moment, taking in his faintly smug air. "Pet, I thought we agreed we weren't going to meddle with that? They need time to work out whatever it is they're going through."

Thad frowned. "But they love each other," he said. "They're being stupid."

"Yeah, well, let them work it out themselves," Flint said calmly.

"Forcing them back together isn't going to help anything."

Thad crossed his arms, glaring at the wall.

"Pet, don't be like that," Flint said with a sigh.

Tears welled in Thad's eyes and he hung his head. "I'm sorry," he mumbled. "I just want them to be happy again."

"I know," Flint said, sitting next to him and sliding his feet into his boots. "But they'll work it out. Even if they don't end up together again."

Thad turned to him, his dark eyes wide and vulnerable. "But you think they will, right?" he said softly. "End up together?"

"Probably," Flint said honestly. "But don't beat yourself up if they don't. It's not your fault."

Thad sniffed and slipped under his arm, wrapping his own arms around his chest and squeezing him tight. "I love you," he mumbled against him.

"Love you, too, pet," Flint said, squeezing him around the shoulders and kissing the top of his head.

Thad wiped his eyes, leaning against Flint's side. "Do you still have time before the match?" he said, glancing up at him.

Flint checked his watch. "Twenty minutes," he said. "Why?"

Thad blushed, gnawing on his bottom lip and jerking his head towards the Captain's office.

"Wha—oh," Flint said, heat rising quickly up his neck as Thad's eyes darkened and he grabbed his hand, dragging him towards the empty office. Flint barely had a chance to lock the door and cast *Muffliato* before Thad was pushing him up against the wall and dropping to his knees in front of him with a hungry look. He really couldn't believe that he was going to get to have this for the rest of his life.

---

Blaine stared across the pitch, jiggling his foot absently and wishing that someone else would return to sit with him and Kurt. He was starting to feel incredibly awkward sitting alone in silence with him. Not that he minded being around Kurt, there was just so much they had left to talk about that neither of them were really ready to discuss yet.

Kurt coughed, frowning at his hands. "So," he said, glancing at Blaine. "Erm, how are your parents?"

"Oh, um, good," Blaine said, a little taken aback that Kurt was trying to talk to him at all. "Dad is working with a new patient." Blaine's father, who worked to help acclimate newly infected werewolves for the Ministry, had just started meeting with a young man who'd been bitten just weeks before who was apparently causing a lot of problems and often ended up needing a member of the Magical Law Enforcement Squad to go to the meetings with him.

"Yeah?" Kurt said, looking interested.

"Yeah," Blaine said, nodding. "Someone got bitten a few weeks ago and they're a bit of a handful, Mum said."

Kurt nodded slowly, looking disappointed that the subject had not stretched further.

"And your family?" Blaine said.

"Good," Kurt said. "They're good...."

"Good," Blaine said, frowning. He'd never had trouble talking to Kurt before. It was bizarre having this awkward air between them. Though, he supposed it was good that they were at least talking again instead of merely ignoring each other.

Kurt licked his lips nervously and Blaine suddenly realized it had been a full month and a half since he'd kissed him, since he'd tasted the sweetness of his lip. He swallowed and faced forward, forcing himself not to think about kissing Kurt, about the sounds he'd make when they were alone together or the looks he used to give him. He swore and crossed his legs. Being with Kurt without being *with* him was going to be a lot harder than he thought.

Thad mercifully reappeared ten minutes later, his hair rumbled and his lips bruised in a way that made Kurt give him a pointed look. Thad blushed and muttered something about the match starting as he took a banner from Kurt and stretched it across his lap. Blaine chuckled softly and Kurt grinned, glancing over at him as he realized he'd read it.

*My Lion Knows How To Score*

Thad giggled a little, sinking down in his seat as a few people gave him odd looks for his banner. Kurt simply smirked, his eyes sparkling as he laughed. Blaine took a steadying breath, wishing it wasn't raining so that he wasn't forced to be so close to Kurt under the umbrella.

Their elbows occasionally brushed and it took all of Blaine's willpower to remind himself that they were not ready to be a couple again yet. There were times though, when they were around their friends like this, laughing and talking, when their eyes would meet and Blaine had



to look away if Kurt didn't first because the spark was almost overwhelming.

He could barely even focus on the match, he was too busy trying to stop himself from watching Kurt every time he laughed or teased Thad about Flint or pushed the strand of hair that had fallen loose across his forehead. He missed their relationship the most, but right now the only thing he could think about was the fact that it had been over a month since Kurt's hands had ran over his chest and arms and...other places. It hadn't been bad when they weren't hanging out together but now...

"You alright?" Kurt said, giving him a concerned look when Blaine let out a pained groan and gripped his head in his hands.

"Fine," Blaine muttered, giving him a tight smile.

Kurt looked worried for another moment but turned back around when the Gryffindor stands erupted in applause as their Seeker caught the Snitch, winning them the match by a full two hundred and twenty points. Thad was jumping up and down and clapping, ignoring the fact that he was getting soaked through by the rain as Flint paid no attention the rest of his team and landed in the middle of the stands, jumping off his broom and sweeping Thad off the ground, kissing him with complete disregard for the students crowding the stands around them.

Kurt smiled, rolling his eyes and laughing as Flint and Thad started getting handsy, rain plastering their hair to their faces, a few people cat-calling, though most of them were used to their public displays of affection at this point.

"Well, before they start stripping each other, I think I'm going back to the Castle," Kurt said, standing up and holding out Blaine's blanket.

"Thank you, by the way."

"Sure," Blaine said, smiling and not quite meeting his eye.

Kurt looked a little confused, frowning as he turned and walked away through the crowd, leaving Blaine alone in the chill rain feeling frustrated and lonely.

One thing Blaine could appreciate about his responsibilities is that they kept him distracted. He took on extra patrols when they didn't have Quidditch practice to keep him from thinking about Kurt. He knew they couldn't be back together until they'd talked about things but Kurt seemed content for the moment to keep himself busy working on Thad and Flint's wedding, though there were little moments when their eyes would meet across the dinner table when Kurt paused mid-stream in his discussion of colors—plum and champagne—or flowers—Blaine remembered him wondering aloud about if purple hibiscus would be too showy for the small ceremony they had planned—and Blaine could see how much he was enjoying himself and he ached inside for the

time when they'd be doing the same thing together. He wondered if Kurt felt the same way.

---

He forced himself to concentrate on the fact that it was Thad's wedding he was planning, tried not to imagine his own name curling across the top of the parchment invitations they'd ordered and had shipped to Thad's mother, who sent them one with a gushing letter about how amazing everything Kurt had been putting together for the day was. It was painful, though, getting excited about the date when he would catch Blaine's eye in class or at mealtimes and wonder if he wanted the same thing one day.

---

The morning of his second tryout, Blaine woke up long before the sun was up. He assumed it was nerves as his stomach was knotting painfully in his chest and he couldn't stop thinking about all the things that might go wrong, not to mention the possibility that he might run into Jeremiah. The thought left a bad taste in his mouth.

Sighing and resigning to the fact that he wasn't going to get anymore sleep, he got up and made his way towards the bathroom, tiptoeing past a sleeping Kurt, who was stretched out across his bed in a position that was simply too provocative to be allowed for someone doing something as innocent as sleeping, his head tilted back and one arm draped back across his pillow.

Tearing his eyes away from him, Blaine turned back towards the bathroom, scowling.

*"Blaine."*

Blaine froze, turning slowly on the spot to look back at Kurt, whose tongue darted across his lips as he let out a soft whine, turning on his side and rolling his head back. His mouth went dry as Kurt's fingers tightened in his blanket and he moaned faintly. His breathing became shallow, his hips twitching forward and his back arcing, the line of his spine clear through his shirt.

No, he couldn't watch this. He wasn't even with Kurt anymore. He turned around reluctantly and took a few more steps towards the bathroom.

*"Blaine!"*

Blaine shivered at the tone of Kurt's voice, closing his eyes to keep himself from turning around again. He pushed into the bathroom and shut the door firmly behind him. Taking a deep breath, he leaned back against the door, glowering and shoving the heel of his hand against his growing problem until he'd calmed himself down.

He straightened up and turned on the shower, moving to grab his bag from the bench and hearing the creak of bedsprings on the other side

of the door. He could have sworn he heard Kurt cursing softly and moving around in the dormitory.

He took a long shower, waiting until the steam had completely filled the room before stepping out onto the chill tile and drying off. He'd thought about...taking care of himself but the thought felt dirty to him knowing that Kurt was only about twenty feet away and, well, Blaine had come to accept that it wasn't always possible to control who you dreamed about after what had happened with Cross. At least Kurt wasn't calling someone else's name out. He supposed it was a step in the right direction.

Kurt's hangings were closed when he went back into the dorm half an hour later to collect his Quidditch things and broom. Blaine paused at the door, glancing briefly over at the stretch of blue fabric hanging around Kurt's bed. He sighed.

"I love you," he muttered, not really sure if Kurt heard him as he slipped out into the hall and closed the door behind him.

Feeling a little depressed, he made his way down to the entrance hall, where Flint was waiting for him already, giving Thad a very non-verbal goodbye next to the Gryffindor hourglass.

"Oh, Blaine, hi," Thad gasped when he realized Blaine was waiting awkwardly to the side, fiddling with his broom. "I was just...yeah." He blushed and planted a brief kiss on Flint's cheek before hurrying off up the marble staircase.

Flint watched him go with a lovestruck look.

Blaine cleared his throat and Flint jumped at the sound, rubbing the back of his neck and bending over to get his broom and pads. "Sorry," he muttered, following Blaine out onto the grounds.

Blaine shrugged jerkily, envy simmering gently in the back of his brain.

"Ready for your try-out then?" Flint said, obviously keen to take Blaine's mind off things.

"I guess," Blaine said. He sighed, dragging his hand through his curls.

"It's Kurt, isn't it?" Flint said, glancing over at him.

Blaine hesitated for a moment before nodding.

"Have you guys talked?" Flint said.

"A little," Blaine said. "But...not about that yet. Honestly, I have no idea how to broach the subject. And I also have no idea if he'd ready to talk about it yet. He's so busy with wedding stuff and he seems happy with it so...."

"Well, if you're ready to talk about it, you should say something," Flint said seriously. "I can tell he misses you just as much."

"Yeah?" Blaine said hopefully.

"Yeah," Flint said, nodding. "From what Thad says, he feels like *you're* the one who doesn't want to talk. He's pretty upset about everything he did on his end. Not telling you about what happened and everything."

"Well, I wasn't exactly straightforward with him either," Blaine said with a sigh.

"You're both so oblivious," Flint said, shaking his head as they turned down the High Street.

Blaine smiled faintly, feeling a little better and thinking that when he got back the first thing he was going to do was talk to Kurt. Maybe they wouldn't get back together immediately but they could at least get all the things off their chests that they'd been carrying around for nearly two months.

He laid his hand on Flint's shoulder lightly and turned on the spot, wincing as he felt like he was suddenly being squeezed very tightly around the chest. His feet hit solid ground a few seconds later and he gasped lightly, stumbling at the dizzy feeling Apparition still left him with.

"Alright?" Flint said, grabbing his arm to steady him.

"Yeah, thanks," Blaine muttered, straightening up and shaking his head to clear it. Fluffy white clouds skittered across the sky in the cool breeze, the sun randomly disappearing behind them only to reappear a few seconds later to leave them squinting against the light.

Clarence was waiting for them with a group of twenty or so others, his clipboard in hand and a tall, slender young woman with long blonde hair smiling next to him. She couldn't have been more than three or four years older than Blaine.

"Blaine, Flint," Clarence said, nodding and smiling as they moved to stand with the others waiting to try-out. He gestured to the blonde woman. "This is Kenna Hunter. She's the Captain for the back-up squad. She'll be watching your try-outs and helping with your interviews."

"Mornin'," she said nodding and smiling, eyeing Flint appreciatively. Blaine bit back a laugh. It never failed.

It went much the same as it had before. They waited in the changing rooms to have their names called to try-out. Flint flashed Blaine a thumbs up as he left first, clutching his Nimbus and feeling only mildly nervous.

"Well, Blaine, how've you been?" Clarence said, smiling and making a tick on his clipboard.

"Fine, sir, thank you," Blaine said, glancing up at the two Chasers hovering above him.

"Well, you know what to do," Clarence said.

Blaine managed to save all but one of the attempts this time around, missing only because he got distracted by watching Clarence and Kenna nervously out of the corner of his eyes as they talked quietly, glancing up at him occasionally. He felt a little annoyed as he landed, scolding himself for not paying attention.

"Alright," Clarence said, smiling as Blaine approached him and Kenna.

"Very nice. We've just a few questions for you and then you can go."

"How long have you been flying then, Blaine?" Kenna said, sweeping her long blonde hair back and smiling.

"Since I was six," Blaine said. "I had a miniature Nova that my parents got me."

"And you've been on the House team at Hogwarts since third year, right?" Clarence said, checking Blaine's application.

"Yes, sir," Blaine said, nodding and twisting his hands around his broom nervously.

Clarence nodded absently. "And did you always want to be a Keeper?" he said, glancing up.

"No, actually," Blaine said. "I originally tried for Chaser but the Captain suggested I go for Keeper instead."

"He knew what he was doing," Kenna said. "You're definitely built for a Keeper."

Clarence scribbled something on his clipboard. "And why did you want to join the Tornados?" he said, looking up at him.

"Well, I've always been a huge fan," Blaine said, shrugging. "Since I was eight I started following the team and, honestly, Roger was the reason I started playing Quidditch in the first place. I'd always love flying but hadn't thought about playing until he joined the team."

"Yes, Roger mentioned he met you," Clarence said, not looking up from writing something down.

Blaine stood in nervous silence as Clarence and Kenna talked softly for a moment.

"Well, Blaine," Clarence said at last, holding out his hand, which Blaine shook. "We'll let you know, alright?"

"Nice meeting you," Kenna said, shaking his hand as well and smiling.

"Thank you," Blaine said, wishing he had a little more confirmation either way as to what their decision was. The last wait had been almost painful, though it had been made worse by Kurt not talking to him. He thought maybe discussing things with his would help him get through the next week.

Sighing, he made his way back towards the changing rooms, smiling as Flint passed him on his way onto the pitch for his own trial.

---

Flint walked across the grassy pitch towards Clarence and Kenna, wondering vaguely how Blaine's trial had gone. Flint was sure he would do well. Blaine was one of the best Keepers he'd ever seen. His mind drifted to Thad and he smiled. It was hard not to when he thought of Thad, of the prospect of actually *marrying* him in just over five months.

Kenna flashed him a wide smile as he approached, winking as Flint climbed onto his broom. He frowned, wondering if maybe she was just overly-friendly. His trial went well enough, much like the last one had. Though he found himself a little uncomfortable at the way Kenna was watching him throughout his interview, her eyes barely leaving him and flicking to him even when she was talking to Clarence.

"We'll let you know," Clarence said, shaking his hand briefly and smiling kindly.

"Thanks," Flint said, trying to ignore the fact that he could still feel Kenna's gaze on the back of his head as he walked away.

"Ready to go?" Blaine said when he'd walked back into the changing room.

"Yeah," Flint muttered, glancing over his shoulder and suddenly anxious.

"What's wrong?" Blaine said, eyebrows rising up his forehead as Flint hurried to peel off his pads and boots.

"Nothing," Flint said, frowning. "I mean, I don't think there is."

"Okay," Blaine said slowly, sounding confused.

"It's nothing, really," Flint said, thinking he was probably just being paranoid. "Let's just get back to the Castle. I'm sure you want to talk to Kurt, don't you?"

Blaine nodded, looking faintly nervous at the prospect.

"Blaine, it's Kurt," Flint said, clapping him on the back reassuringly.

"You two were together for a year. I'm sure you'll work it out."

"I hope," Blaine said with a sigh as they left the changing room, nearly running head-on into Kenna.

"Oh, hello," she said, smiling at Flint. Her brow creased when her eyes fell on Blaine. "Leaving?"

"Yes," Flint said hurriedly, pushing Blaine outside and following him closely.

"Oh, *that's* why you're so jumpy," Blaine said with a grin. "Kenna seems to fancy you."

Flint sighed in annoyance. "Honestly, do I have to start wearing a sign that says I prefer blokes?" he mumbled.

Blaine laughed, shaking his head as he gripped Flint's arm and turned on the spot.

---

Blaine's heartrate was a little sporadic as he walked back to the Castle with Flint. He hoped Kurt would be ready to at least talk about things. He missed him more than he like to admit, the way they could just lie together on Blaine's bed without talking or kiss each other for hours without ever getting bored of just *tasting* each other. He wanted that back, the old love they'd had, not the strained semblance of a relationship they'd been struggling with for so long before the break-up.

"I'll see you later," Flint said, smiling and jogging to a waiting Thad, who looked thrilled when Flint started telling him about his trial. Blaine felt another pang of jealousy, wishing that Kurt cared as much as he used to about Blaine's future. He liked to think that a part of him did, that he was just hiding it since they were separated, though that may have just been hopeful thinking.

He wasn't sure where Kurt would be but he thought the library was the best bet given it was a Saturday and Thad was busy with Flint. He climbed the marble staircase, shifting his bag and broom and rolling his sore shoulders.

He rounded the corner and stopped, staring in confusion as Professor McGonagall and his mother were walking down the hall towards him.

"Blaine, oh thank goodness," his mother said, running towards him, tears streaming down her face.

"Mum, what are you doing here?" Blaine said, dropping his bag as his mother embraced him tightly, crying into his shoulder. McGonagall looked tense and worried behind her. "What's going on?"

"Blaine, sweetie," his mother said, holding him by the shoulders and giving him a steady look. "It's...it's your father."

Something wrenched in his gut. "What about him?" he said, glancing between the two women.

His mother broke down, sobbing softly as she held him close to her again.

"Mum, what's wrong?" Blaine said, panic starting to tear at his chest.

"He was attacked," McGonagall said, her voice quivering a little with emotion. "By one of his patients."

"W-what?" Blaine said, looking to his mother, who nodded, tears flowing steadily down her cheeks. "Mum, Mum, is he okay?"

His mother sobbed brokenly and shook her head.

Blaine shook and felt a lump rise painfully in his throat. "Mum," he said softly, "is he...?"

"He's at St. Mungo's," McGonagall said, her eyes glittering with unshed tears as she watched Blaine's mother weep into her hands. "He's...he's not doing well."

"Mum, what's she saying?" Blaine choked, tears coming quickly to his eyes and blurring his vision.

"Darling, they...the Healers said there's nothing more they can do for him," his mother said, brushing away a tear sliding down Blaine's face. She looked like her heart was being ripped in two. "They're not giving him more than a few days."

Blaine's broom clattered to the floor. He couldn't breathe, couldn't more than just stand there in absolute shock, his mother's hand resting on his shoulder as she and McGonagall watched him closely. It was like someone was tearing a piece of him away and there was nothing he could do about it.

"You're free to go see him, of course," McGonagall said, blinking a little rapidly. "Consider yourself free from your duties as Head Boy until you're...until you're ready to resume them."

Blaine didn't answer. There was a loud buzzing in his ears, a low whine that slowly built until it felt like it was coming from inside his own brain.

"Did you want to go, darling?" his mother said in a soft voice, her hand still warm on his shoulder, the only thing, Blaine thought, that was keeping him from losing it completely. "We're going to Floo over from the Headmistress's office."

Blaine nodded jerkily and bent over to pick up his things. He straightened up and looked around, feeling lost. "Mum," he said, glancing at her and dashing tears briefly from his eyes. "Mum, can...can Kurt come along?"

His mother looked taken aback by the request, knowing that he and Kurt had broken up almost two months ago, but nodded after a brief glance at McGonagall.

"Of course, dear," she said, smiling through her tears. "Do you know where he is?"

"I-I'll find him," Blaine said. "I'll be right back."

He turned, his feet carrying him automatically towards the library. He refused to think about what was happening, *couldn't* think about it. He just needed to find Kurt. Somehow, he thought everything would be okay with Kurt with him.

If there was one thing he knew, when he felt like someone was slipping a hot knife between his ribs, it was that he needed Kurt. He could face it alone and Kurt, no matter what they were or weren't at this moment, Kurt would understand.

---

"You've been checking your watch an awful lot, Kurt."

Kurt glanced over at Leighton, taking in his curious look, and sighed. He shifted a little in his chair and glanced towards the entrance of the



library. Though he tried desperately not to be so concerned about it, he found himself almost painfully anxious about Blaine's tryout. He knew Blaine would do well, he just needed to know for sure.

"Looks like you're daydreaming about someone," Leighton sang, grinning at Kurt's glare.

He'd been doing a lot more than daydreaming about Blaine lately. He'd been *actually* dreaming about Blaine. The kind of dreams made him infinitely glad that they were no longer doing Occlumency. He tried to tell himself that he couldn't be thinking about Blaine that way until they'd talked but then he'd catch Blaine running his calloused fingers through his dark curls or stretching his arms over his head when he was studying, revealing a strip of tanned flesh when his shirt hitched up. He had to force himself to remember that is was not, in the current state of their relationship, to want to run his hands along the line of skin and it *definitely* wasn't right to want to do the same thing with his tongue.

He felt himself growing hard at the thought and groaned, cursing his hormones and dropping his head onto the table. Sighing, he resigned himself to the prospect of unending sexual frustration, glowering at the thought that Thad was probably wrapped around Flint in the Room of Requirement at that moment.

Leighton stifled a laugh at the look on his face and Kurt glared at him. "You know, if you weren't both so stubborn you could just talk it out," Leighton said knowingly, turning back to his magazine. "It'd be better than spending all your time getting inappropriate—"

"Leighton!" Kurt hissed, feeling himself flush.

Leighton smirked.

"Just...go back to thinking about Gavin and all the things you're going to do to him next Saturday," Kurt said in an annoyed mutter.

"You know, not everyone is obsessed with sex," Leighton said, not looking up from the article he was reading about Restorative Draughts, chin resting on his fist.

"I—what—obsessed?" Kurt sputtered. "I am *not* obsessed!"

Leighton looked up, pursing his lips doubtfully and giving him a pointed look.

"Shut up," Kurt grumbled, flinging his book open with so much force that the cover ripped off.

Leighton grinned, returning to his magazine and leaving Kurt to repair his book with a hard tap from his wand. He was glad he and Leighton had ended things so easily, that he'd gotten Leighton out of his system and they could return to being like they were before everything got complicated. Leighton was happy as always, though now he was often

found writing or reading the letters he and Gavin were exchanging daily.

Footsteps approached and he looked up to see Blaine coming towards them. His stomach squirmed and he sat up straighter. This was it, he was going to talk to Blaine if it killed him.

"Hey," he said, "I was actua—what's wrong?" He caught the tears flooding Blaine's face. Leighton looked up in concern as well.

"Kurt," Blaine croaked, a pleading note in his voice. "It's...it's my dad."

"What's wrong?" Kurt said, suddenly anxious.

"He...was attacked," Blaine said, his voice shaking. "That patient...he's in St. Mungo's but...but they don't think he'll make it much longer." His head dropped and he wiped his eyes on his sleeve.

Kurt gaped at him, shock rocking across his brain as he tried to comprehend what Blaine had just said.

Blaine sniffed and looked up, his hazel eyes hollow and scared. "Will you...will you come with me?" he said softly, nervous hope flitting across his features. "To St. Mungo's?"

"Of course," Kurt said without hesitation, nodding and hurrying to pack up his things. He glanced at Leighton, who looked worry and confused.

"Leigh, can you tell the others?" Kurt said, swinging his bag over his shoulder. "I'm guessing Thad is with Flint but Nick and Jeff went to the lake with some other people and I think Wes and David are in the tower."

"Sure," Leighton said readily, nodding. He looked at Blaine apologetically. "Sorry, mate, that's..." He didn't seem to be able to think of a word to express himself but Blaine gave him a muttered thanks nonetheless before turning back to Kurt.

"Are you alright?" Kurt said as they strode from the library, Blaine's eyes fixed on the floor ahead of him. He scolded himself. Of course he wasn't alright.

Blaine shrugged jerkily but didn't reply as his mother and McGonagall approached from the other end of the corridor.

"Hello, dear," Blaine's mother said, embracing Kurt briefly. Her eyes were as red and swollen as Blaine's, her curly, dark hair a little tousled in the hasty bun it was pulled into.

Kurt hugged her back, feeling pang in his chest at her kindness and wondering how much she knew about what had happened.

"Are you sure it's alright if we use your office, Minerva?" she said when she's released him, turning to McGonagall.

"Of course, my dear," McGonagall said in a voice much less stern than usual.

Kurt felt a little lost as they followed her to her office, which he hadn't been in since his first day at Hogwarts. It hadn't changed, the gilded

portraits still full of old Headmasters snoozing in their sun streaming through the windows. He and Blaine left their things in the corner of the room to pick up upon their return.

McGonagall lifted a little pot from the mantle over the dancing fire and held it out to Kurt, who stepped forward and took a pinch of the glittering powder within, tossing it into the fire. The flames leapt and turned emerald green and stepped into them, savoring the feeling like warm breath was dancing across his skin.

He glanced at Blaine, his heart aching at the pain behind his eyes. Blaine had always been the stronger one, the one to hold and comfort Kurt when he was hurting. He found himself wishing he could do the same for Blaine, do anything to get that tortured look out of his eyes. But he was already shouting, "St. Mungo's!" and spinning rapidly as flashes of rooms hit his half-closed eyes. Just when he thought he'd get sick, his feet hit the ground and he stumbled a little. Brushing ash out of his hair and off his clothes, he stepped over the grate into a wide, pristinely clean room.

There were witches and wizards scattered around in chairs as they waited. One man had his hands clenching his jaw shut as every time he released it, his teeth chattered loudly. A middle-aged woman was sitting with a young boy who was marveling at the long, scaly tail poking out of the back of his trousers and complaining to his mother to let him keep it.

Blaine and his mother appeared one after the other, absently brushing themselves clean. Kurt took a moment to look around as they approached the welcome desk, taking in the Healers dressed in lime-green robes, the little golden bubbles floating around the ceiling to light the room, and the printed floor plan hanging on the wall behind the desk. He felt the tiniest thrill of excitement beneath the panic thinking he might be working here in the future.

"Annette Anderson," Blaine's mother said in reply to the Welcome Witch's questioning look. "My husband is in the Dai Llewellyn ward."

The young, red-haired witch pushed the sign-in sheet across the counter towards them and passed Mrs. Anderson a quill. Kurt signed his name mutely when she was done, watching as Blaine's hand shook as he tried to steady the quill.

"Now, darling," Mrs. Anderson said, lowering her voice as they walked past closed doors to other wards. "He's...he's in a bad state, alright? Just...try and remember what he was like b-before, okay?"

Blaine nodded stiffly, his back ruler straight as they climbed the stairs to the first floor. They reached the door labeled "Serious Bites" and Kurt hung back, feeling like going in would be like intruding. But Blaine gave him a pleading look and Kurt returned to his side.

"I need to go talk to the Healers, darling," Blaine's mother said, pulling him into a tight hug and kissing him on the cheek. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

Blaine nodded, his hand resting on the handle of the door as though he wasn't sure if he wanted to see what was on the other side. Kurt laid a hand on his shoulder and gave him a reassuring smile, which seemed to steel Blaine, who pushed the door open. It was a small room, with a single window facing a brick wall at one end.

"Dad," Blaine almost sobbed as his eyes fell on the only occupant in the room and he moved towards the bed.

Kurt's stomach lurched and he had to force himself not to be sick. Thick bandaged covers the entire left side of Blaine's father's face and neck, reaching down under the collar of his hospital gown to his shoulder, though there was no hiding the sunken look of them, which gave Kurt the horrible thought of chunks of flesh being torn away. He looked away, taking a few deep breaths before turning back to Blaine, who was gripping his father's right hand, fresh tears sliding down his face. "Dad, what happened?" he said thickly. He stared at his father and Kurt could tell by the pained look on his face that he was trying to see past the bandages, to remember what his father looked when he'd been whole and healthy.

It was painful to watch, seeing Blaine breaking down like this and not letting himself show any of it but the steady flow of tears down his face as he gazed at the prone figure on the bed.

Kurt didn't know what to say, didn't know how he could even begin to comfort him at this point.

Blaine sniffed, wiping his eyes absently. His fingers brushed against Kurt's as he let his hand fall back to his side. Kurt glanced over at him and tentatively touched his hand. When he didn't pull away, he slipped his fingers against Blaine's palm, clasping his hand tightly.

Blaine returned the pressure, not looking at him but gripping Kurt like he was the last thing keeping him from completely losing himself in the pain of knowing the inevitable loss he was about to face.

Blaine's mother returned after a few minutes and Kurt stepped back into the hall to give them time alone. He slumped down in a chair pushed against the wall, holding his head in his hands and staring at his feet.

He'd been through something like this before he'd met Blaine when his father had his heart attack. But this...this was so much worse because they *knew*, knew that there was nothing they could do, nothing even magic could do to heal the obviously horrific wounds. He couldn't imagine how Blaine felt, didn't want to think about what it would be like knowing you were waiting for your father to die.

Tears fell onto his shoes steadily. Blaine didn't deserve this. Blaine, who was one of the most selfless and caring people he knew. He felt like an idiot for letting himself forget about that Blaine, the Blaine who loved him and would have done anything to be with him, just because he'd been occasionally moody. Well, he thought he would be, too, if he had to deal with everything Blaine had to worry about.

He waited in silence until the door opened and Blaine stepped out alone, eyes red and fresh tear tracks on his cheeks.

"Mum's just talking to him," he said as he sat next to Kurt, sounding as if he had a bad head cold. "I can't...I can't look at him like that anymore right now." He sniffed and scrubbed his eyes with his palms. "Thank you," he said, glancing at Kurt, "for coming. You didn't have to."

"Yes I did," Kurt said softly. "You'd have done the same for me, no matter what the...state of things."

Blaine nodded absently.

"How did your tryout go?" Kurt said, hoping to take his mind off of what he'd just seen.

"Good," Blaine said, coughing as his voice was a little tight. "Yeah, it was...it was good." His eyes filled with tears again and he buried his face in his hands, shaking gently.

Kurt felt completely helpless watching him, the very sight of Blaine falling apart was almost unnatural as it was so rare. He laid his hand on Blaine's back and the other boy quieted a little, leaning back slightly into the touch.

"I'm so sorry, Blaine," he breathed. "For everything."

"Me too," Blaine said, his voice muffled back his hands. "It all seems sort of stupid now, doesn't it?" He lifted his face and fixed Kurt with a steady look. "I'm sorry I didn't trust you, Kurt. I'm sorry I let everything go to hell and treated you the way I did. You didn't deserve any of that."

Kurt didn't even try to stop the tears from coming. "You're not the only one who screwed up," he said softly. "I was selfish. All I cared about was you making time for *me*, you being physical for *me*, hiding things from you because I didn't want you to get mad at *me*. I mean...I thought it was the right thing at the time because I didn't want you to get hurt but I think deep down I was worried you'd be angry at me for it."

"I was," Blaine croaked. "But because you hid it from me and let it all snowball and then when you were with Cross..."

Kurt hung his head, prickling shame creeping up his neck. "I should never have done that."

"No, no, I'm not mad about you being with him," Blaine said. "I mean...he made you happy and well...honestly, I think he's the person who you should have been with at the time. He helped you, he was there for you when I wasn't. You were right...we weren't working the way things were with me jealous and you lonely and...dammit, Kurt, what the hell happened?"

"Things changed," Kurt said. "We changed and neither of us were willing to accept it. I think we both just wanted things to be the way they were but that's not going to happen because...well, things *aren't* the way they were."

"Are you saying you never want to be with me again?" Blaine said, sounding like he was choking on his own emotion.

Kurt sighed. "No, I'm saying...we can't expect it to be the way it was before. We're not kids anymore, Blaine. We might have talked about the future but that doesn't mean either of us were ready for it to happen."

"And now?" Blaine said in a low voice.

Kurt smiled faintly. "Now?" he said. "Yeah...yeah, I'm...I'm feeling better about it all now."

He moved his hand down to grip Blaine's firmly where it was sitting on the armrest. Blaine smiled and returned the pressure, leaning against Kurt's shoulder. Kurt rested his head on top of Blaine's, savoring the momentary peace.

"Kurt?" Blaine said after a few minutes, his voice no longer shaking with tears.

"Yeah?" Kurt said, squeezing his hand gently.

"I'm sorry I told you to leave," Blaine said softly.

Kurt brushed his thumb over Blaine's hand. "I'm sorry I left."

---

Smiling faintly, Thad trailed his fingers down Flint's arm, eyes darkening a little as Flint flexed his bicep. He'd been noticing that Thad seemed to have a certain fascination with his arms and admittedly was starting to take advantage of this new-found information.

When they were in the library the day before, he'd taken off his black robes and casually rolled up the sleeves of his uniform shirt, stretching out his arms and grinning as he caught Thad eyeing him, his quill frozen over his Herbology homework. Not long after, Thad hadn't written anything else and was shoving his books in his bag, grabbing Flint's arm and dragging him to the Room of Requirement.

Not that he was forcing Thad into anything when he really needed to do homework or was busy talking about wedding plans with Kurt, just every now and then, he tested something new to see Thad's reaction. He'd been pleasantly surprised so far.

Thad's hand roamed over his chest as he leaned forward and trailed gentle kisses across Flint's shoulder and upper arm. Flint smiled as Thad released a little whine of longing and swung one leg over him to straddle his hips, grazing both hands down Flint's arms as he mouthed a little more hungrily at his neck.

"Mmm," Flint said, closing his eyes and rubbing his hands lightly down Thad's thighs. "That's nice, pet." Thad nipped at his earlobe, blowing gently and giggling as Flint shivered.

"You know, something funny happened to me today," Flint said, smiling as Thad traced patterns along his neck with the tip of his tongue.

"What?" Thad mumbled, breathing a little heavily now.

"Apparently the Captain of the squad fancies me," Flint said, chuckling a little at the idea of it.

"What?" Thad said sharply, sitting up straight and looking suddenly furious.

"Yeah," Flint said, shrugging. "It's no big deal, pet, she didn't even say anything and well, she's a *she* first of all..." he trailed off at the look on Thad's face, his tightened jaw and narrowed eyes. "Pet?"

"I'm so sick," Thad snarled, balling his fists. "Of those damn...damn...*bitches* who try to get all over you. Every other day I see one of them making eyes at you and it just...it-it *infuriates* me." Flint raised his eyebrows as Thad grumbled angrily. He caught the words "we're *engaged*" and "get the hint".

"Pet, it's fine," Flint said, propping himself up on his elbows and brushing his fingers down Thad's arm.

"It's not fine!" Thad said loudly. "What don't they understand about the fact that you're in love with *me* and that you like having sex with *me*? I hate it." There were furious tears in his eyes at this point.

"Aw, pet, no," Flint said, sitting up and wrapping his arms around him. "It's okay. I don't care about them, you shouldn't either."

"I just wish they'd back off," Thad said, head resting on the crook of Flint's neck. "Everyone knows *I'm* taken because of my ring. Not that anyone else would want me anyway."

"Thad," Flint said sternly. "You're perfect, stop thinking that because you don't get random women flirting with you that you're not. I love you and you're my sexy little wildcat and who gives a *damn* what they think?"

Thad slumped back in his lap, sniffing and looking abashed and chastened.

"I'm not mad at you," Flint soothed, lifting his chin gently to meet his eyes. "I just wish you'd stop thinking you're anything less than everything to me. I love you, Thad."

Thad chewed his bottom lip. "You know it's going to get worse if you get on the team," he said softly, twisting his hands in his lap. "If you're uncomfortable with it, I'll drop out of the trials," Flint said. Thad looked up at him with an expression of touched surprise. "You'd do that for me?" he said in a small voice.

"If you wanted," Flint said, smiling and brushing his fingers through Thad's dark hair, fiddling with the soft curls at the base of his neck. Thad closed his eyes at the touch. "No," he said, shaking his head and leaning into Flint's hand. "No, I want you to do it. I know how much you love it. And I know you love me. I just wish everyone else would realize it."

Flint kissed his forehead, wishing Thad wasn't still holding onto the same insecurities he'd had for so long. He was perfect and still didn't believe it no matter how many times Flint said it.

"Thad, I love every last inch of you," he whispered, kissing his ear gently. "I don't think you understand how much."

"I do," Thad mumbled, staring at his hands.

"No, you don't," Flint said, tilting his head to catch Thad's dark eyes.

"Let me...let me show you, okay?"

Thad frowned, cocking his head to the side. "What do you mean?"

"Just...lay down, okay?" Flint said. "Wait...first..." He took the hem of Thad's shirt in his fingers and hiked it up his stomach. Thad lifted his arms obediently so he could slip it over his head. "Okay. *Now* lay down."

Thad looked vaguely confused but did as he asked, lying down on his back with his head resting on the pillows of the bed the room always provided for them. Flint moved down to tug off Thad's socks, lifting his feet and kissing them gently from the heel and across the arc to Thad's toes.

Thad giggled. "Flint, that tickles," he said, wiggling his toes.

Flint smiled and moved to unzip Thad's jeans. There was a sharp intake of breath and Flint stroked Thad's thigh reassuringly. "Just trust me, pet."

Thad nodded, the love and trust clear in his eyes as Flint pulled his jeans down his legs and set them aside. He moved back on the bed and pressed soft pecks up Thad's left ankle and shin, repeating the motion on his other leg before brushing his lips over his knees and across his thighs.

Thad gasped lightly when Flint sucked gently on his inner thigh before laving the faint mark with his tongue, doing the same to the other leg as well. He glanced up to see Thad's head pressed back in the pillow, his lips parted and his eyes closed. He moved a little further up Thad's



legs, purposefully avoiding the tented front of his briefs and biting lightly on his left hipbone.

Thad's hips twitch beneath him as he traced his tongue along the sensitive skin just above the waistband of his briefs before biting on his right hipbone. Thad whimpered, his legs squirming and toes curling as he dug his fingers into the sheets.

Flint smiled and began lavishing the lower half of his stomach with feather-light kisses, teasing his bellybutton with his tongue. Thad let out a sound somewhere between a giggle and a moan, his whole body shaking at the touch. Flint scraped his teeth along the soft skin, feeling the muscle flutter and contract at the contact.

"*Flint*," Thad groaned faintly.

"Is this alright?" Flint murmured, lapping gently up the center of Thad's chest before blowing on the damp streak.

"Yes!" Thad said, blushing faintly at the fact that he'd nearly shouted it.

"It's alright, pet," Flint said. "No one's going to hear you, remember?" Thad nodded and relaxed again, allowing Flint to continue running his lips across his chest. He flicked his tongue experimentally across one of Thad's nipples and was rewarded with a soft cry of pleasure. He swirled his tongue around the spot before teasing it lightly between his teeth. Thad writhed and mewled beneath him as he moved to pay the same attention to the other side of his chest, which rose and fell with each shallow breath.

He planted wet kisses across Thad's collarbones before nibbling up his neck and over his jaw. Thad lifted his head a little, licking his lips and swallowing hard. Flint ghosted his lips over Thad's, not quite kissing him as hot air passed between them.

"Not yet," he breathed, sliding his tongue across Thad's lower lip for a split second before pulling away and moving back down Thad's torso, barely brushing his lips over the soft skin. Thad whined, squirming beneath him, his fingers white from clutching the blankets so hard. Flint kissed the spot wet with pre-come on Thad's briefs and Thad bucked his hips off the bed with a loud shout. He pressed his lips to the spot again and hummed, smiling when Thad swore softly in Runes, his legs trembling.

Flint slid his fingers along the waistband of Thad's briefs and pulled them down slowly, glancing up to see Thad watching him with a wrecked look, his eyes blown and his hair tousled from thrashing his head against the pillow. He forced himself to look away. This was about Thad, not him.

He gripped the base of Thad's cock with his hand and swiped his tongue along the tip, gathering up the pre-come leaking from him.

Thad let out a dry sob of impatience and Flint ran his tongue down the length of his cock, closing his eyes to try and block out the soft "ah"s Thad was releasing at a steadily increasing volume with each glide of his tongue.

Flint wrapped his mouth around the head of Thad's cock, sucking gently and watching Thad roll his shoulders back, his fingers grabbing at nothing on the bed. Flint reached his free hand up to grab Thad's fingers and move them to his hair. Thad looked a little surprised but ran his fingertips along Flint's scalp, rubbing gently.

Flint groaned around him and pulled him a little further into his mouth, hollowing out his cheeks as Thad's other hand settled in his hair, tugging and massaging and scraping in turn.

"Oh god, Flint," he groaned, tightening his fingers in his hair. The breathy sighs and moans passing over his lips were enough to make Flint ache in his jeans. And when Thad forced his head down a little further, Flint hummed in the back of his throat.

"Flint!" Thad shouted. "Oh...ah, I think...mmm, that's s-so good, I-I—" He moaned loudly, his fingernails dragging across Flint's scalp as he came down the back of his throat.

Flint swallowed around him, moaning gently at the look on Thad's face. He pulled away gently, slipping Thad's briefs back up and kissing the top of his thigh before sliding up the bed to lie next to him.

Thad smiled contentedly, his hair ruffled and his lips pink and swollen from biting them so hard. "You really love me," he mumbled. Flint smiled and leaned forward to kiss him softly, sucking lightly on his lower lip. "I told you, you're perfect," he whispered, brushing his fingers along Thad's hairline and ear. "I love you. And I'm marrying you, got it?"

Thad bit his lip and nodded, ducking his head a little.

"Now, why don't we go to lunch?" Flint said, nuzzling against his neck and nibbling.

Thad nodded again, sitting up and giggling as he fell over sideways onto the bed, sated and lightheaded from his orgasm.

"You're adorable," Flint said, leaning forward to kiss his shoulder blade as he got up and slipped his clothes back on, stumbling a little as he did.

Thad was still a little flushed as he took Flint's hand and walked out of the Room of Requirement with him into the seventh floor corridor. Flint smiled over at him, squeezing his hand and brushing his thumb over his ring.

"There you are!"

They both turned to see Nick, Jeff, Wes, David, and Cross running towards them looking haggard and worried.

"What's wrong?" Thad said, blushing a little as they all took in his pink cheeks and mussed hair.

"Blaine's dad is in St. Mungo's," Jeff said, glancing between them.

"What?" Thad said, eyes widening.

"Cross said something about him being attacked," Nick said, glancing at the Slytherin, who nodded.

"I was studying with Kurt and Blaine showed up saying something about his father and then took Kurt with him," he said. "Kurt asked me to hunt you all down. I'm guessing they've been at St. Mungo's for a good hour now."

Thad looked appalled and Flint knew he felt guilty that they'd been messing around in the Room of Requirement while Blaine and Kurt were in the hospital.

"Pet, it's okay, we didn't know," Flint said softly when tears welled in Thad's eyes.

"Are we going?" Thad said, sniffing. "To St. Mungo's I mean? Will McGonagall let us?"

"I don't know," Wes said, glancing at the others.

"You think she would?" David said. "I mean...Blaine's Head Boy and it's not like we have classes."

"Well, there's only one way to find out, isn't there?" Jeff said with a determined air.

"Stand outside her office and yell until she lets us in?" Nick said, cocking an eyebrow.

"You read my mind," Jeff said, turning on his heel and walking off in the opposite direction, Nick at his side and Wes and David close behind.

"I've got to finish up my homework," Cross said, looking worried.

"Plus, I don't think I'm really close enough with Blaine to go. Let me know though, alright?"

"Sure thing," Flint said, nodding. "Come on, pet." He took Thad's hand again and they both hurried off after the others.

"Do you think they're alright?" Thad said quietly, looking scared.

"I don't know, pet," Flint said, feeling himself a little guilty about the turn of events. "I hope so."

---

Blaine fell into a fitful doze against Kurt's shoulder after an hour or so of sitting in silence. Blaine's mother returned to the hall after some time; she smiled sadly when she saw Blaine, kissing the top of his head and brushing his curls off his forehead.

"I'm going to go get a cup of tea," she said softly. "Would you like me to fetch you one as well, dear?"

"Yes, please," Kurt said, nodding. "Thank you."

She gave him a tight smile, her eyes dry but still red and swollen, her face glazed with tears.

Kurt looked over at Blaine, sighing and wishing he could be as peaceful when he woke up as he looked now, his eyelashes resting against his cheeks and his lips parted. Kurt tightened his fingers around his hand and Blaine shifted a little, mumbling something.

"I love you," Kurt breathed. "I miss you, Blaine. I miss you so much." Blaine didn't respond, snuggling against Kurt's shoulder and scooting closer to him in his sleep.

The door to the stairs flung open and Jeff, Nick, Thad, Flint, Wes, and David burst through it, looking around wildly, ash clinging to their clothes.

Kurt hushed them frantically but Blaine was already sitting up and blinking groggily. "Whozzat?" he mumbled, looking around through red-rimmed eyes. He sniffed and blinked, wiping his eyes hastily as he spotted the others watching him.

"How is he, Blaine?" Jeff said softly, sitting next to him and giving him a worried look.

Blaine rolled his shoulders, yawning and frowning. He seemed to realize what Jeff was talking about and his face fell into misery. Kurt glared at Jeff and took Blaine's hand as tears filled his eyes again. Jeff looked apologetic and laid a hand on Blaine's shoulder.

"Is there anything you need?" Nick said, kneeling beside him and looking concerned.

Blaine shook his head, staring at his lap.

"Your mom went to the Tearoom," Kurt said, brushing his thumb over his hand comfortingly. "Do you want to head up there or just stay here?"

"No, I'll...I'll go," Blaine said, his voice dry and crackly from crying earlier. "I need to stretch my legs, I think."

Nick and Jeff stood, exchanging anxious looks. Kurt let the two of them lead Blaine down the hall towards the stairs, falling back to walk with the others.

"Is it bad?" Flint murmured, glancing up at when Jeff and Nick were talking softly to Blaine.

"Yeah," Kurt said. "It's...it's very bad. They're only giving him a few days at the most."

Thad clapped a hand to his mouth with a faint yelp. Wes and David exchanged a shocked look.

"Is it really that awful?" Thad breathed, lowering his hand and clasping Flint's tightly.

Kurt nodded. "You probably wouldn't want to see it," he said as they climbed the stairs. He shuddered a little at the memory of seeing

Blaine's father, of the hollow look of the bandages around his face and shoulder.

Thad looked like he was on the verge of tears and Flint laid a comforting arm around his shoulders.

They reached the fifth floor, where the Hospital Shop and Tearoom lay. Blaine was seated with his mother, a cup of tea clutched in his hands and a plate of Ginger Newts sitting next to him as his mother gripped his arm gently and Jeff and Nick sat across the table, looking at a loss. Kurt and Thad ordered tea for everyone and they all gathered around the table, sitting in horrible, spiraling silence as they drank and waited. Kurt tried not to think that they were waiting for Mr. Anderson to take a turn for the worse but *knew* that that was exactly why they were there.

He wanted to hold Blaine's hand again, to give him some kind of comfort, but was blocked by Thad and Flint sitting between them. Blaine looked up from staring into his tea and met Kurt's eyes with a silent plea, his eyes darting over to the door to the stairwell.

Kurt gave him the tiniest of nods and stood. "I'll be right back," he said. "Erm, bathroom."

They nodded absently, not really paying him much heed as he pushed his chair in and walked back towards the stairs. He waited for a minute or two, feeling a little anxious. The door pushed open and Blaine stepped into the stairwell with him.

"Hey," Kurt said softly as Blaine leaned against the wall next to him.

"How're you doing?"

Blaine sighed, staring straight ahead with a faint frown. "Better," he said. "I think...I think I'm starting to come to terms with it. I didn't really want to believe it at first but...at least I get a chance to say goodbye, you know?"

Kurt nodded, watching him closely.

Blaine turned to him, eyes finally dry. "I miss you, too," he said.

Kurt blinked, taken aback. "Oh," he said, blushing a little. "You heard me?"

Blaine nodded, the corner of his mouth quirking up. "And I love you," he said. "I told you I always would."

Kurt smiled and leaned back against the wall, their shoulder brushing together.

Blaine's fingers grazed his wrist lightly and Kurt opened his hand to allow him to lace their fingers together.

"Are you sure you're ready for this again?" Blaine said, giving him a steady look.

"Yeah," Kurt said, nodding and looking down at their intertwined fingers. "Yeah, I'm...I'm ready." He look up at Blaine. "What about you?"

"Yeah," Blaine said, trailing his hand down Kurt's arm. "I love you, Kurt."

"I love you, too," Kurt said, smiling as Blaine rested their foreheads together, his hazel eyes digging into him. He could still see the sadness, the vulnerability and loss, but there was a spark of hope and flash of love hidden amongst the pain.

Kurt closed his eyes and angled his head to the side to press their lips together. It was so familiar and yet it had been so long that it was like a brand new sensation, the explosion of fire racing through his veins that set his lips tingling. It wasn't even a long kiss, just a brief, gentle brush of lips, but it still left him breathless, his pulse pounding.

Blaine actually let out a gentle laugh. "Wow," he said, sighing. "I missed that for sure."

Kurt smiled. "Yeah, me too," he gasped, licking his lips absently and shivering as he tasted Blaine. He felt giddy and light-headed and suddenly couldn't wait to start retracing all the steps they'd taken together before. But he knew they would have to take things slowly, rediscovering everything they'd been steadily losing when they were falling apart.

"Ready to head back in?" Blaine said, squeezing his hand gently.

Kurt nodded. "Yeah," he said. "You alright?"

"I will be," Blaine said a little sadly. He pulled open the door and they walked back into the hall together, exchanging a soft smile at Jeff and Nick's excited shout at the site of their clasped hands.

Yes, Kurt thought as he sat back down next to Blaine, holding his hand under the table in the fractionally lighter atmosphere, they'd be alright now. Because they had each other again.

## Chapter Nineteen

Gav,

*Remember when I was nine and we found that mouse in your treehouse? And we kept it and it lived in your bedroom and we got home from the park and thought your mom's cat had eaten him? She felt so bad she got you your owl? But then we found out the mouse was sleeping in your sock drawer? I saw a mouse around during Care of Magical Creatures the other day and just started laughing remembering it. Everyone gave me weird looks and I just told them to guard their socks. It's strange how many memories keep showing back up now that you're here again. I didn't realize how much I miss you.*  
Leigh

---

Leigh,

*I remember that! It chewed through all the toes and I tried to fix them myself so Mam wouldn't know the mouse was still alive. I swear I pricked myself with the needle a few thousand times. You know, I never stopped thinking about you. I had this picture in my mind of what you'd look like after all that time and yoy got a lot taller than I expected in the past four years. I was so mad when you had that growth spurt in your first year because you were taller than me for the first time. Not that I'm upset about it. As long as you know I could still totally dominate you in a fight, you lanky git. (That was a joke. You're not that lanky). Okay, I just realized I wrote 'dominate you' and I snorted so loud the customers are giving me weird looks. I missed you, too. I do now, knowing you're so close but we can only write. How's your friend's dad, by the way?*  
I love you,  
Gav

---

Gav,

*You sewing would be a disaster, I can tell. And don't be jealous of my height, it's a little annoying when everyone has to crane their necks to talk to me. I feel like a giant. Oh, Merlin, I read that bit about you dominating me at breakfast and nearly choked. Thanks for that, Gav, you tosser. Everyone's starting to think I'm completely insane now because of you. I can't wait to see you Saturday. We can finally have that Butterbeer together. Only four years late, right? Blaine's dad is...well, Kurt told me he's alive but it doesn't look good. They spent Saturday at St. Mungo's and just left an hour ago to go back again. On the brighter side, Kurt and Blaine are together again. Now we all just*

*have to deal with their sexual tension because Kurt said they're taking things slow. Not looking forward to that.*  
*Leigh*

---

*Leigh,*  
*You are a giant. Just accept it. And you're also insane. You don't need my help for that. I can't wait either. I refuse to drink another Butterbeer until I see you Saturday. Only six days left! That really is rubbish about his dad. I feel bad knowing I probably wouldn't miss mine. He's an arse though so... He tried to write me when I first moved here, looking for money. I had fun using the letter for target practice with my wand. And don't complain to me about dealing with sexual tension. Just. Don't. And if you need to ask why, you really have gotten stupid since I left. I bet you're grinning and laughing at me right now. SCREW YOU, LEIGHTON, YOU TOSSER. I hope you get 'T's on all your Potions homework. But you won't because you're brill and I hate you.*  
*I love you,*  
*Gav*

---

*Gav,*  
*I'm getting mixed messages from you now, I feel. And, yes, I was laughing while I read that. You know me so well. I'd never get a 'T' in Potions. I'm brill at it and you know it. Oh, remember when my Mum was brewing Pepper-up Potion and we dumped in that box of pepper because she hadn't added any and assumed she's forgotten? My dad nearly puked when he got a cold a few months later. Kurt's just gotten back from St. Mungo's and is studying with me waiting for Blaine to get back. He just said he thinks I should write you suggestive messages about all the things I want to do on Saturdays but I don't know how drinking Butterbeer together is suggestive.*  
*Gavin, it's Kurt. Leighton told me he can't wait to roll around in the mud—*  
*Sorry. I've confiscated his ink and now he's glaring at me. I didn't say that, by the way.*  
*Leigh*

---

*Leigh,*  
*I think I like this Kurt guy already. I'm not opposed to getting a little dirty.*  
*I love you,*  
*Gav*

---



*And you say I'm crazy.*  
*Leigh*

---

*Did I make you blush? Are you blushing, Leighton? Do you want me to cover you in chocolate and clean it off with my tongue?*  
*Love you,*  
*Gav*

---

*You're mental.*  
*Leigh*

---

*CHOCOLATE COVERED LEIGHTON.*  
*Love you*

---

*I'm not writing you back anymore.*  
*Leigh*

---

*Yeah, okay, Leigh.*  
*Gav*

---

*I hate you. Your owl is giving me dirty looks now. And what, no 'I love you'?*  
*Leigh*

---

*I love you. Better?*  
*Gav*

---

*Yes. I'll see you Saturday.*  
*Leigh*

---

The days following the attack were an emotional rollercoaster for Blaine. He stayed at the hospital all day Saturday and Sunday, the others keeping him occupied with chess and Exploding Snap in the Tearoom as he waited. He didn't think it had sunk in yet, that he was losing his father, though it came in short bursts when he thought of certain memories of the two of them and his mother. Like when his father taught him to ride a broom or the visits they made to the zoo when Blaine got off the train at the end of the school year. At these moments, he'd have to leave the room so he could cry. He didn't want the others seeing him breaking down. Kurt always followed him and held him until he calmed down.

It was nice, having Kurt hold him like that, and he finally understood why Kurt had always asked for it. It was almost as nice as the fact that

he could now kiss Kurt and hold his hand again. He was beyond happy that they'd talked things through and were finally together again. It gave him a shred of hope that things may one day return to normal. Well, as normal as they ever were at Hogwarts.

Sunday evening after Kurt and the others had left to allow Blaine some time alone with his family, he was sitting with his mother beside his father's bed, wishing a little that Kurt was still there.

"How are you feeling, darling?" his mother said, laying a hand on his forearm as they sat next to each other beside his father's bed.

"Alright," Blaine said, shrugging and shifting in his seat.

"You know you don't have to hide it from me," she said with a sad look. "Showing you're hurting doesn't make you weak, dear."

Blaine blinked rapidly, swallowing back the lump in his throat.

"Your friends really love you," his mother said, smiling faintly as she took his father's hand. "And so does Kurt. They're not going to judge you for acting like you're human."

Tears stung his eyes. "But dad was always strong," he said, his voice cracking. "Dad never...he never broke down."

"Trust me," she said with a sad smile, brushing her fingers over the undamaged side of his father's face. "He did. The day you were born he couldn't stop crying. And in your fifth year, when he found out about what they'd been doing to you." Her voice broke a little and a tear slipped down her cheek. "He loves you so much, Blaine. I hope you know that."

Blaine sniffed, nodding at his lap as his vision blurred. "I do," he said quietly.

"And he was so upset when you and Kurt broke up," she continued.

"We both were. We saw how happy you were together, how much you loved each other. I know he'd be smiling if he knew you'd worked it out."

Blaine exhaled shakily, tears falling free again. His mother took his hand, her other one still gripping his father's.

"You've grown so much over the past few years," she said, smiling through her tears. "We're both so proud of the man you're becoming, Blaine. I love you."

"Love you too, Mum," Blaine said, smiling and gripping her hand back. She wiped her eyes, brushing her dark hair back. She picked up her bag off the floor and started rooting through it. "We were going to wait until graduation to give you this but...but I think you should have it now while...while both of us can give it to you."

Blaine frowned in confusion as she pulled an envelope from her bag and placed it in his hand with a gentle smile.

Blaine opened the envelope and pulled out a small silver key, turning it over in his hand. "Mum, what is this?" he said, looking up at her.

"The key to your flat," she said, taking his hand again. "We found you a nice little place here in the city. It's not far from here, near Diagon Alley. We knew you wanted to live in London. We were a little worried when you and Kurt broke up because we'd tried to get you somewhere near St. Mungo's but now that you're back together...well, I think you should have it now."

Blaine stared at the little silver key, which was etched with 'H12' across the face. "Mum," he choked. "You...you bought me a flat?" She nodded, smiling at his shock. "We knew you wouldn't be able to afford it right away but we wanted you to have a place of your own. We're so proud of you."

Blaine pulled her into a tight hug, unable to believe what she and his father had done for him. They'd always been nothing but supportive of him, of his choices and who he was. He thought that was when it really started to hit him. She'd given it to him now because his father wasn't going to be at his graduation, was never going to see him play Quidditch if he made the Tornados, never visit him and Kurt in London for Sunday dinner or be there if he and Kurt got married or—any of it.

Before he knew it, he was sobbing into his mother's shoulder as she rubbed his back gently and soothed him, tears still running down her own face.

When he'd calmed himself down a little, he moved his chair closer to her and rested his head on her shoulder, his arm warm and reassuring around his back.

"Would you like to see it?" she said after a minute or two of silence filled with an occasional sniff or rustle of clothes as they shifted.

Blaine lifted his head to look at her. "Can we?" he said, the key still in his hand.

She nodded. "Of course," she said, gently wiping his tears away with her sleeve. "It's yours."

"Yeah," Blaine said slowly. "Yeah, I'd...I'd like that. I want to thank dad properly then."

She gave him a watery smile. Blaine stood and waited as she kissed his father's cheek, brushing his hair back and whispering, "We'll be back dear," before turning back to Blaine.

Blaine took one last look at his father before sighing heavily as he followed his mother out of the ward into the hall. The hospital was relatively empty, the occasional Healer or visitor passing them as they made their way back down to the ground floor and out onto the street.

He glanced back at the false façade of the old department store before following his mother down the sidewalk, stuffing his hands in his coat pockets to ward off the evening chill. The sounds of traffic filled the air, the occasional honk of horns and low rumble of cars as they passed through the scattered crowd.

They walked along, savoring the calm, passing a small park where a young couple was playing with their daughter. His mother stopped at the entrance of a tall building at an intersection.

"It's just there," his other said, pointing up at the wall of glass and craning her neck. "Fourth one in from the left on the eighth floor and then the next four panels over."

"Mum, that's huge!" Blaine said, gaping at her as she pushed through the revolving front door into the brightly light lobby.

"It's not all that big," she said, smiling as she pressed the button for the lift, which slide open after a moment. "It's got two bedrooms in case you ever have houseguests, which I'm sure you will if Jeff and Nick have anything to say about it. And it's got all the Muggle...trimmings, I suppose." She hit the button for the eighth floor and the lift moved smoothly upward, music playing through the speaker in the wall.

"We'll have to figure out how you want to decorate it but I'm sure Kurt will have plenty of plans." She smiled, squeezing his hand briefly at the doors slid open to a hallway with gleaming wood floors.

Their footsteps echoed lightly off the dark green walls as they walked past a few doors, stopping at one with a silver 'H12' on it. Blaine's hand shook a little as he turned the key in the lock and pushed the door in. They stepped into the dark hallway, his mother shutting the door softly behind them.

"Here's a washcloset," she said, opening the door across the hall to a small bathroom with a sink and toilet. "But you have to see the view, Biscuit, you'll love it."

Blaine smiled at her excitement. She only called him by his childhood nickname when she was happy. He followed her down the hall, which opened out to a kitchen with cabinets of light wood and gleaming appliances, something he knew Kurt would appreciate. A half-wall separated the kitchen from the combination living and dining room, two doors leaning to what he assumed were the bedrooms. There was a fireplace against the wall opposite the doors.

He stopped when he eyes felt to the other side of the room, where the wall of glass rose from floor to ceiling, making it feel like the room opened straight out into the city.

"Mum," he breathed, staring across the sea of lights in the gathering dark.

She beamed. "Isn't it lovely?" she said, watching him taking in the spectacular view.

He could see the London Eye in the distance, its lights reflecting off the River Thames, where a few boats drifted across the water lazily. The sight made Blaine think about when he and Kurt had gone out for his birthday in August. He smiled at the memory. That, that was what he wanted their relationship to be like again. Now that they'd both matured, he thought the time the future they'd naively talked about might be closer than ever before.

"You have to see the bedrooms," his mother said, leading him into the room closest to the windows. One wall was glass in this room as well, the rest painted a calming shade of grey-blue that remind him of a particular shade of Kurt's eyes.

"There's a nice, big closet," his mother said, showing him the walk-in closet against the wall opposite the windows. Across the room from the entry was the door to the bath, which was warmly decorated in rich golds and dark reds to compliment the tilework on the floor, shower, and sunken tub.

The second bedroom was smaller was smaller, with cream colored walls and no windows.

"Mum," Blaine said, turning to her. "This...this is too much."

"Don't be silly," she said as they walked back into the living room.

"Your father and I have been saving up to get you this for years. What else would the money be spent on?"

Blaine hugged her tightly, tearing up again as he did. "Thanks, Mum," he muttered. "I love you."

"Love you, Biscuit," she said, smiling and squeezing his cheek affectionately. "And we can bring Kurt here sometime. I'm sure he'll be excited."

"He'll flip his top," Blaine said, grinning at the thought. "But I'm going to wait, I think, until I can show him, I mean. If he knows about it, he won't be happy until he can see it?"

She smiled. "You really love him, don't you?" she said.

Blaine nodded. "Yeah," he said. "I really do."

She slipped her arm around his waist and he draped his own around her shoulders as they left the flat.

"Good," she said, tears glittering in her eyes. "Just make sure you never forget that."

"I won't," Blaine said, smiling. "Never again."

---

Kurt waited up for Blaine in the dormitory, stretched across Thad's bed with half a dozen catalogs open between them.

"How's this?" Kurt said, holding out a catalog across the bed. "Are you wearing dress robes or suits or what? Did you decide?"

Thad shrugged. "Doesn't matter," he muttered, not looking at him.

"Of course it matters," Kurt said in disbelief. "It's not like you get married every day, Thad! Personally, I'd go with suits. Dress robes are so old-fashioned. Not to mention, they weigh about thirty pounds." He shrugged, scratching something across the page with the quill he'd borrowed from Thad.

"I really don't need anything fancy," Thad mumbled, fiddling with the corner of the bedspread. "It's...I mean, there's no reason to make a fuss over me."

Kurt frowned, looking up from the swatch-book he'd been putting together. "What's that supposed to mean?" he said.

Thad shrugged. "I'm nothing special," he said, barely audible.

Kurt sighed and pushed himself up into a sitting position. "Thad, you need to stop being so insecure," he said kindly, crossing his legs and leaning against the headboard. "You know Flint loves you and you know he wants to do this. Why do you keep beating yourself up?"

Thad gnawed his lower lip for a moment before answering. "I just...I just feel like he's the one who does everything," he said, staring at his hands. "I don't understand *why* he wants to marry me. I feel like there are people who are much more interesting than I am." He frowned, sighing heavily.

"Thad," Kurt said, laying his hand on Thad's knee. "Don't do this to yourself. If you keep thinking about this stuff, you're never going to be happy. Have you talked to Flint about this?" he added after a moment. "Sort of," Thad mumbled. "I mean...I told him how much I hate it that women are always flirting with him and stuff and he said I shouldn't care about it."

"You shouldn't," Kurt said firmly. "Thad, none of them matter. Flint loves *you*. There's a reason he gave you that ring, you know."

Thad nodded, smiling and rolling the little band over his finger. "I just feel like I don't deserve him sometimes," he said softly. "He does so much for me."

Kurt grinned and nudged him with his elbow. "And you repay him, from what I can tell," he said.

Thad blushed faintly.

The door opened and they both looked up to see Blaine slip into the room. Thad gathered up his magazines and left, patting Blaine gently on the arm as he did.

"Hey," Kurt said, smiling and sliding off Thad's bed to move towards him. "How's he doing?"

"About the same," Blaine said with a sigh, allowing Kurt to take his coat and drape it over his trunk.

"Sorry," Kurt said, wrapping his arms around him and holding him close. Blaine relaxed at the touch, resting his head on Kurt's shoulder and sniffing.

Blaine hugged him a little tighter for a moment before pulling back and kissing him gently. "Can we lay down?" he murmured, the bags under his eyes apparent now that he was so close.

"Yeah," Kurt said, smiling and taking his hand. Blaine slipped off his shoes and they lay down on Kurt's bed together, Kurt allowing him to lie against his chest, resting in the crook of his arm.

"Kurt, can I ask you something?" Blaine said after a moment.

"Anything," Kurt said, resting his head against Blaine's gently.

Blaine cleared his throat, sounding apprehensive. "What...what was it like when you lost your mom?" he said at last.

Kurt considered the question for a moment before answering. "Well, it was a long time ago that it happened," he said. "I was only eight. But...it was hard. For the longest time I'd wake up in the morning expecting to go downstairs to see her making breakfast or working in her garden and then when I remembered she wasn't going to be there, I'd just sit in my room in the dark for hours.

"I had my dad, though. We helped each other through it, I think. But I still miss her. She had this music box that she kept her jewelry in and sometimes when I couldn't fall asleep, I'd just open it up next to my bed."

Blaine was silent for a moment and Kurt looked down to see tears sliding down his face onto Kurt's shirt. Kurt squeezed him gently, brushing a hand through his dark curls. Blaine closed his eyes at the touch.

"I'm scared, Kurt," he whispered brokenly. "I'm scared I won't be able to deal with it when he's gone. Or that I'll never get over it. I don't want to feel like this for the rest of my life. I...I'm just terrified of what's going to happen and I feel like I shouldn't be when there are people who need me."

"It's okay to be scared, Blaine," Kurt said, stroking his back reassuringly. "And you're allowed to need someone too, you know. No one expects you to deal with this on your own."

Blaine looked conflicted. He'd always expected himself to be the stronger one, the one who was there for Kurt to support him since he'd come to Hogwarts. He couldn't believe how resilient he was to everything he'd been through.

"You don't have to be strong all the time," Kurt said softly. "I'm here for *you*. Don't worry about what other people need, you do that too

often. I love you, Blaine, and I hate seeing you think that you're weak by letting yourself be...well, human."

Blaine hiccupped and twisted his head to wipe his cheek against his shoulder. "I just...I hate feeling like this," he mumbled. "I hate feeling helpless. It makes me think about...about what *he* did."

Kurt felt a surge of anger towards Jeremiah and what he'd done to Blaine, the long-term damage he'd caused. Blaine had forced himself to deal with what had happened alone and Kurt knew he'd never be truly comfortable with showing himself completely again.

"I'm sorry," Kurt said. "I swear, Blaine, if there's anything I can do or say, I will in a heartbeat. You know that right?"

Blaine nodded. "I know," he said. "Just...just this is nice." He slid his arm over Kurt's stomach, gripping his waist gently.

"I love you," Kurt said, pressing a tender kiss to his temple.

"I love you too," Blaine murmured, eyelids drooping.

Kurt watched him fall into a restless sleep, Blaine occasionally shifting or whimpering brokenly against him. It killed him to see Blaine hurting so much when he knew there was absolutely nothing he, or any of them, could do to stop what was coming. If he could, he would have gladly bore the brunt of his pain, have done anything to heal the deadened and empty look behind Blaine's eyes if only to see him smiling again.

---

The common room was nearly empty in the late hours of the evening. Flint sat alone with Dan in front of the roaring fire, feeling frustrated as he frowned at the chessboard between them.

"Why did I ever agree to do this?" he mumbled, raking his fingers through his hair. "I'm so horrible at this game."

"Don't ask me," Dan said with a smirk, his green eyes flashing. "I never forced you to play."

Flint grumbled in reply and sat back in his chair, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

"So," Dan said, seeing Flint had given up and waving his wand to pack away the chessboard. "Ready to be a married man?"

Flint grinned, nodding. "Completely," he said, sitting up a little. He glanced over at Dan. "So...I, um, I never really asked you properly and I'm sure you already knew I'd pick you but, you'll be my best man right?"

Dan beamed at him. "Of course I will, you prat," he said, punching Flint's arm lightly.

"Brilliant," Flint said. "I think we're both just having one since it's going to be a small ceremony. I have no idea what any of it's going to be, since Kurt's pretty much taken over planning it. Not that I mind. I



can't even go Christmas shopping without help, I'd be awful at planning a wedding."

"As long as you show up on the right day," Dan said sternly.

"Somehow, I feel Thad would get upset if you forgot about that."

"It's not Thad I'd be worried about," Flint muttered. "Kurt would literally murder me in my sleep."

Dan laughed, shaking his head. "I take it Kurt is Thad's?"

"Obviously," Flint said, rolling his shoulders. He smiled, his mind drifting to Thad as it always did when they were apart.

As if on cue, the portrait hole opened and Thad stepped inside, looking a timid and withdrawn as he looked around. His eyes fell on Flint, who grinned, though Thad didn't return the gesture, his eyes dropping to his feet.

"What's wrong, pet?" Flint said, standing up in concern.

"Can we talk?" Thad said in a small voice, not looking up.

"Sure," Flint said, feeling vaguely worried as he glanced at Dan.

"Say no more," Dan said, standing. "I'll get out of your hair." He gave Flint a pointed look, half-glancing at Thad and Flint shrugged. Dan swept his hand through his shaggy blonde hair, shoving his hands into his pockets as he disappeared up the spiral staircase towards the dorms.

"What did you need to talk about?" Flint said, ushering Thad towards the couch and sitting next to him. Thad wrapped his arms around himself, staring at his knees and looking anxious.

"Kurt said I should talk to you," he mumbled, eyes darting everywhere but Flint's questioning gaze.

"Alright," Flint said slowly, wondering if he was allowed to touch him, his hand hovering tentatively over Thad's shoulder.

Thad sniffed and Flint was shocked to see tears welling up in his dark eyes.

"What's wrong, Thad?" Flint said, letting his hand settle on Thad's arm at last.

Thad looked up at the touch. "Why do you want to marry me?" he said in a small voice.

Flint frowned. "Because I love you," he said.

Thad gnawed at his lower lip. "But...but *why*?" he said, sounding as though he couldn't quite comprehend the thought.

"Thad, why are you asking me this?" Flint said, moving closer to him.

"I...I don't deserve you," Thad said, his voice thick with emotion.

"What?" Flint said, aghast. "Why on earth would you say that?"

Thad returned to squinting at his lap, his face twisted into a picture of distress. "I just...don't," he said in a voice so small Flint had to lean closer to him. "You've done so much for me and I'm...I'm so..." he

sighed, the breath coming out shakily over his lips as tears dripped onto his thighs.

A lump rose in Flint's throat. He could see the insecurities he'd been working so hard to quash rising in Thad's eyes.

"Thad," he said softly, brushing away Thad's tears with the back of his fingers. "Why do you keep feeling like this?"

Thad sniffed, shaking a little and looking away. "I just never thought anyone would ever want me," he said. "And I'd like you for so long and then you were so nice to me when you d-didn't have to be and...I feel like you were just doing it to...I dunno, *humor* me or something. I know you love me, Flint, but sometimes I think that I'd have just spent the rest of my life completely invisible to you and everyone else if I hadn't, you know...*forced* a kiss you on." He blushed scarlet and tightened his arms around his own chest.

"Thad," Flint said, gently disentangling Thad's arms so he could take his hand. "I *love* you. It shouldn't matter *how* things got to this point, just that they did. I don't regret the way things played out, not for a second."

"But I'm so...messed up," Thad said, tears falling steadily onto his legs now. "I can't even stop myself from feeling like this and you're *perfect*. You don't have these p-problems like me."

"Thad, of *course* I do," Flint said, his voice cracking as Thad swam before him. He blinked to let the tears pooling in his eyes fall. "Before we were together, I was petrified that I was never going to be able to love someone without being judged by the rest of the world, that I wouldn't be able to hold and kiss someone without facing some kind of...repercussion for it. I never thought I'd find someone like you who'd accept me for everything I'd done and been through."

"For the longest time, I was afraid you were going to see that there was something wrong with me, what I'd almost done to myself when I was losing it."

Thad looked at him at last, frowning curiously. "What do you mean?" he said quietly.

Flint took a steadying breath, trying not to let the rush of horrible emotions he'd been drowning in the year before overtake him. It was better Thad knew, better that they got these things out in the open now that they were starting.

"Thad," he said, choosing to look at their clasped hands rather than Thad's face, afraid he'd see disapproval or anger there. "Last year...when everything was just...falling apart, I didn't think I could take it anymore. I didn't *want* to take it anymore. I'd dug myself into such a deep hole I didn't think I'd ever climb back out again. I was...I was in a very dark place last year, Thad."

"What are you saying?" Thad whispered, anxiety evident in my voice. Flint lifted his eyes to him at last. "Thad, last year, before I came to talk to you all, I was...well, I almost...I was going to hurt myself." Thad's eyes widened and his breath caught in the back of his throat. Flint quickly lowered his eyes again. "If not for Dan, I...well, I might have, no, I *would* have done something very stupid. I was...weak, Thad. I was willing to just give it all up to stop dealing with the pain. I couldn't stand it anymore. And then you came along and you didn't care about any of what I'd done, you were willing to see past it all and willing to love me like no one else had. I was...drowning, Thad. I was about to fall over the edge but you...you saved me."

The silence stretched between them and Flint cautiously looked up to see Thad staring at him, lips parted and tears shining in his eyes. "Flint," he breathed, looking completely at a loss for words. "Why...why didn't you say anything before? I n-never knew it was that bad. Oh gosh, I feel like such an idiot for being upset about *my* problems. They're completely pointless."

"Thad, don't say that," Flint said, shaking his head.

"They're *not* pointless. I'm just trying to make you see that everyone has fear. I'm not perfect and I don't try to be. I know I've screwed up and almost made some very big mistakes but the point is that I accept that I messed up and that I'm flawed. I don't like it, I wish I wasn't, but I'm not about to pretend I'm not and I'm not going to dwell on it either because that will just make it worse.

"I know you used to think no one would love you, Thad, but *I* love you now. I hate that you went through all those years alone and let yourself pull inside and suffer through it but that's over now. It's there, we can't change that, but we can move past it. I know it's hard to do, Thad, trust me, but you can't keep clinging to that feeling that you'd never be loved and just let *me* love you. That's all I ever wanted, Thad."

Thad leaned against his chest and wrapped his arms around him tightly. "I just got so used to being alone," he murmured against him. "I guess I'm still getting used to the fact that I don't ever have to be alone again."

"As long as you know that I'm always going to be here," Flint said.

"I'm never going to let you feel like that again, Thad."

Thad sniffed and smiled. "And I won't let you feel the way you did, either," he said, scooting over to sit on Flint's lap and snuggle against him. "It hurts just thinking about it. I don't...I don't want you hurting yourself. Please...don't. Ever." He blinked rapidly, kissing Flint's neck gently.

"I won't," Flint said. "I promise." He paused, allowing Thad to glide his fingers over the skin just about the collar of his shirt. "Can you promise me something, too?"

"What?" Thad said, lifting his head to look at him.

"Promise me that you won't think you don't deserve me," Flint said, giving him a steady look. "Because you do. You deserve every last bit of love I have to give and more. And if you ever start to feel like this again, even the tiniest bit, you come tell me. Okay?"

Thad nodded, fiddling with the hem of his shirt. "Flint...d'you think...maybe, if you get through to the third trial, could I come with you if McGonagall lets me? I-I just want to be there for you. You're always there for me and...well, I'd like to go, if I can? Plus...then people will know you're all mine, right?"

Flint smiled. "Of course, pet," he said, kissing Thad's hair. "Let's see if I hear back and then we'll check with McGonagall. The last trials aren't until around Easter so we've got a month."

Thad nodded absently. He suddenly wrapped his arms around Flint again and squeezed surprisingly tight.

"Ooph, what was that for?" Flint said, rubbing his ribcage and smiling.

"I just don't like the idea of you hurting yourself," Thad said, his dark eyes filling with tears again.

"I know," Flint said. "I'm sorry, pet."

"But I'm glad you told me," Thad said hastily. "I love you and I'll...I'll accept you, no matter what."

Flint smiled even as his vision blurred with tears. Just the thought of everything he'd been feeling the year before, in what might as well have been another life, the one without Thad, brought a painful lump to his throat.

Thad kissed him on the cheek, catching the tears sliding down his face. He snuggled against Flint's chest, his arms clasped around him, the warm weight gentle and secure on his back.

---

Going to class was like physical torture for Blaine. He went through the motions automatically for the most part. He knew he had to go—though his teachers had excused him and Kurt was practically begging him to return to be with his family at St. Mungo's—because it gave him *something* to think about other than spending all of his time worrying.

It was the worst feeling, knowing what was going to happen and having to sit by and just let it play out. His father's condition didn't change much over the next few days; he'd Floo to St. Mungo's after class and spend the evenings with his mother, gripping his father's hand in the silence as they both cried themselves dry and reminisced.

It had been the worst on Monday when they were changing his bandages and trying to apply dittany to the wounds. Blaine had tried to stay, to be there with his mother, but the sight had sent him running to the bathroom.

Wednesday, he asked Kurt to come along, unable to take being there without him anymore. Kurt, of course, agreed without hesitation.

They'd just signed in at the front desk and were climbing the stairs to the first floor when hurried footsteps made them turn to see a pair of Healers clad in lime green running up the stairs. They stepped aside and allowed them to rush pass, exchanging a confused look as they pushed through the still swinging door to the hall.

Blaine's mother was standing outside of his father's room, looking anxious and crying softly. She looked relieved when she saw him. Blaine hurried towards her glancing into the war to see the Healer's that had passed them in the stairwell, as well as the one who usually watched after his father, crowded around his father's bed, blocking him from view.

"What's wrong?" Blaine said the moment they'd reached his mother.

"He's..." her voice cracked and broke and she shook her head.

Something cold and heavy dropped in Blaine's gut, his chest suddenly full of his racing heart. He could hear the Healers saying something in the ward and he was dragging his mother and Kurt into the room.

"Move," he choked to the Healers bending over his father, muttering spells, one of them pouring a Potion into his open mouth. He could see the dead lack of hope in their eyes, though.

"Son, there's nothing you can do," one of them said, glancing at him.

"There's nothing you can do, either, is there?" Blaine said, still clutching Kurt and his mother's hands tightly. "Please, just let me be with my father when he dies."

Kurt's fingers tightened around his own as he inhaled sharply.

The Healers exchanged nervous, doubtful looks but then the eldest one sighed and nodded. "Alright," she said, looking defeated. "I...I'm sorry there's nothing else we can do."

Blaine moved forward as they left, releasing Kurt and his mother's hand and taking his father's.

"Dad," he choked, tears coming hot and fast to his eyes as his mother wept beside him, her fingers closing over Blaine's around his father's.

"I love you. Thank you...for everything. I'm...I'm going to miss you so much...." He sniffed, shaking as he cried quietly.

The fingers tightened for the briefest moment, barely a fraction of a second, around Blaine's hand before going limp. Blaine stopped breathing, his mother sobbing brokenly beside him, as she had felt it, too.

"D-dad?"

No response. No gentle rise and fall of his chest. No slip of breath from his mouth. No...nothing.

Blaine closed his eyes, squeezing his father's hand and reaching out for Kurt with his other. Kurt moved to wrap his arms around him. "I'm sorry," he breathed, his voice thick with tears. "I'm so sorry, Blaine. I love you."

It hit Blaine what had happened and he was suddenly crying into Kurt's shoulder, one arm holding him against his side. He felt sick, dizzy and disbelieving, his throat aching from all the crying he'd been doing since Saturday. He stared at his father, hating the world for taking him from him, for making him suffer over and over again. His mother tried to pry his fingers gently away from his father's lifeless ones but Blaine merely gripped tighter.

"Sweetie, you have to let him go," his mother said softly, her own face shining with tears.

"No," Blaine croaked. "No, I can't. Please don't make me." Letting go would be admitting he was gone and he couldn't....

"Blaine," Kurt said, lifting his hand to brush Blaine's tears away. Blaine turned his head to meet his currently slate-grey eyes. "It's alright," he said, laying his hand on top of Blaine's.

Blaine's fingers relaxed and he released his father's still warm hand, taking Kurt's instead. Kurt clutched him tightly.

"I'm here," he said as Blaine sobbed into his shoulder, his mother leaning over beside him to press a gently kiss to his father's forehead and murmuring, "I love you, dear."

Kurt was crying silently, rubbing one hand reassuringly down the line of Blaine's spine as Blaine's body wracked with sobs.

He felt like someone had just ripped a piece of his soul away, stolen a chunk of his life and left him alone to suffer. Well, no, he wasn't alone. He had his mother—though he thought she needed him more than anything now—and, above all, he had Kurt. Kurt, who had been his support system these past few days, who'd made him sit down and tell him his fondest memories with his father, claiming focusing on the good would help make it easier when the bad came, the remembered happiness fresh in his mind. It had helped, but he still felt like he might never be able to smile again.

"I love you," he said in Kurt's ear. "I love you so much. I don't know what I'd do if I lost you."

"I know," Kurt soothed, nodding. "I know, I love you too, Blaine."

"Please don't...don't ever leave again," Blaine pleaded.

"I won't," Kurt said, his voice quaking a little. "Never. I swear. I love you."

"I love you," Blaine said, loosening his grip and pulling back so he could pull his mother, who was crying softly, into a hug. The Healers, who had been waiting at the door, returned to the room. One of them placed his fingers against the undamaged side of his father's neck, sighing sadly as he pulled the blanket up and over his mangled face.

"Darling," Blaine's mother said, pulling back and giving him the smallest of reassuring smiles. "Why don't you and Kurt go get a cup of tea? I need to discuss...t-things with the Healers."

Blaine nodded mutely. He felt numb, inside and out, could barely even feel Kurt's hand on his arm or his mother's kiss on the cheek as she told him she loved him.

Kurt very gently pulled at his hand and Blaine gave into the pressure without protest. Even if he hadn't wanted, hadn't *needed* to get out of that room, he'd have gone. There was no resistance left in him anymore.

Kurt watched him carefully as they walked in silence up to the fifth floor. Tears had stopped coming to Blaine's eyes for the timebeing. He simply couldn't...*feel* anymore, didn't *want* to. It was like he'd brken, the part of him that needed to grieve had pulled away and he'd locked it away in a part of him he never wanted to touch again.

Kurt sat him down at a table in the Tearoom, kissing his cheek and moving to get them both cups of tea. Blaine stared at his cup when Kurt set it down in front of him and sat down, moving his chair close.

"Blaine?" he said softly, reaching out to take Blaine's hand on the table. "Is there anything I can do?"

Blaine wrapped his free hand around his tea, savoring the warmth and thankful he was feeling *something*. "Just stay with me," he said, glancing at Kurt. "Please."

"Of course I will," Kurt said. "I'm not leaving you ever again, Blaine."

Blaine leaned into him, sipping his tea and closing his eyes as heat flooded his numb body. They sat for a few minutes in silence, tears flowing steadily down Blaine's face. He didn't even feel like he was crying as the tears returned, his body seemed to be working on instinct at this point. Kurt rubbed his back gently as they sipped their tea.

His mother joined them half an hour later, eyes red and swollen, though she looked fractionally better than before as she sat next to them.

"At least he's not in pain anymore," she said heavily, laying her hand on Blaine's arm. "How are you, darling?"

Blaine shrugged. He didn't even know at this point. He felt...lost, empty, like he'd just been the victim of the Dementor's kiss. He just couldn't feel anything at all.

His mother looked a little broken seeing him so deadened.

"We're...I've owed your grandparents to come Saturday for...for the—" she cleared her throat, closing her eyes for a moment.

Blaine gripped her arm. "I get it," he said in a hollow voice. His father's parents had both passed away when Blaine was younger, though his mother's were still living in the Philippines, where they'd moved back to soon after Blaine's mother had left Hogwarts.

She sniffed, nodding. He didn't know how long they sat there in silence. It felt like days though it might have only been minutes. Time didn't really seem to make sense to him right now. Kurt went down to the front desk after some time to turn in the application he'd completed Sunday for his Potioneer Training, returning with dinner he'd fetched from the Healer's dining hall.

Blaine didn't want to eat, thought he might be sick if he tried, but Kurt took his fork and fed him, insisting he was already losing weight since Saturday. Blaine chewed and swallowed mechanically. It felt like he was eating paper.

Somehow, he ended up back at the Castle with Kurt and his mother, the clock in McGonagall's office chiming midnight as he stared out across the grounds, not taking in anything McGonagall was saying about him being allowed to go home for the remainder of the week.

"Blaine?" Kurt said softly, placing a hand on his arm. "Blaine, do you want me to pack for you?"

Blaine shook his head. "I can do it," he said tonelessly. He exhaled slowly, looking up at Kurt. "Are you coming? I-I don't want to go if you're not coming."

Kurt nodded. "Your mom convinced McGonagall to let me come along. They're going to let the others Floo to your house on Friday after classes."

Blaine nodded absently.

"Why don't you come with me back to the tower?" Kurt said, giving him a sad look. "I'll take care of all your packing, I just need to know what all you need, okay?"

Blaine nodded again and allowed his mother to hug him before following Kurt down the revolving spiral staircase and through the empty halls. His feet, like everything else, were working involuntarily to carry him to the Ravenclaw tower.

The dormitory was quiet and dark when they reached it and Blaine immediately collapsed onto his bed, thinking he might just like to stay here if only to block out reality in the merciful hours of sleep. But even



his dreams had been haunted and full of images of not just his father lying in St. Mungo's, but of Kurt or his mother in the same situation. He curled into a ball, crying against his pillow as Kurt moved around, packing things into his bag, occasionally questioning him softly. Kurt wrote out a short letter and set it on Thad's bedside table so that he and the others would know what had happened before crawling onto the bed behind Blaine and draping his arm around him. Blaine leaned into the touch, clutching at his hand and shaking as Kurt kissed the back of his neck and whispered softly in his ear.

When Blaine had calmed down, he followed Kurt back up to McGonagall's office, Kurt holding both of their bags and gripping Blaine's hand comfortingly. His mother was waiting for them, her face streaked in fresh tears, though she smiled when they entered.

"Blaine, darling, why don't you go first?" she said, holding out the jar of Floo Powder. "Then Kurt will be along. I have a few more things to discuss with the Headmistress."

Blaine silently took a pinch of the powder and tossed it into the flames, stepping across the grate and half-heartedly saying, "Cherry Grove." He kept his arms at his sides and his eyes closed as he spun, the sensation doing nothing to help the feeling of nausea that had been hanging over him since Saturday.

His feet hit brick after a minute and he stumbled into the familiar den of his family's cottage just outside of Plymouth. Glancing vaguely through the bay window, he caught the moonlight dancing off the rolling waves of The Sound in the distance, ships swaying a little in the ebb and flow at the marina on the other side, where the city was still emanating a warm glow.

The fire flashed emerald and Kurt stepped out of the fireplace next to him, swiping ash from his shoulders. He looked around with a faintly approving look, taking in the airy cottage with its driftwood sculptures and bowls of sea glass decorating the mantle.

"It's lovely here," he said in a small voice.

"Thanks," Blaine mumbled, collapsing onto the couch and laying on his side. Kurt let their bags fall onto the floor, peering through the window at the view.

"Do you want to talk?" Kurt said, sitting next to him and pulling off his shoes for him, rubbing his aching feet.

Blaine shook his head, his throat tightening painfully at the sight of the family photos on the mantle. "I just want to sleep," he said in a choked voice.

"Alright," Kurt said, patting his leg. "Do you want to stay here or go to your bedroom?"

"Bedroom," Blaine mumbled, struggling to gather up the strength to stand up.

Kurt wrapped an arm around his waist, hoisting their bags on his other shoulder. Blaine led him upstairs to his loft bedroom, where a wide skylight opened up to the starry sky directly over his bed. He struggled for a moment with the buttons on his shirt but gave up after a moment with a frustrated sob.

"Here," Kurt said sympathetically. He looked almost as broken as Blaine felt as he helped him get changed.

Blaine curled up under his blankets, staring at the wall as Kurt got changed before crawling in next to him.

"You're sure your mom won't mind?" he said as he brushed his fingers over Blaine's ear.

"She won't care," Blaine said, his throat painfully tight as fresh tears sprang to his eyes. He turned his head to look at Kurt, whose eyes glittered in the moonlight shining from overhead. "I love you."

"I love you, too," Kurt whispered, cupping his face and kissing him tenderly. "Get some sleep, okay?"

Blaine nodded, pushing back against him and sighing as Kurt ran his fingertips gently over his side, caressing his hipbone with his thumb. It was calming and loving and Kurt's lips were pressing soft kisses across the nape of his neck. Within minutes, he'd fallen asleep. And for the first time since Saturday, he didn't have nightmares, Kurt's arms curled snugly around him and the distant sound of waves hitting the shoreline.

---

*Gav,*

*Sorry I didn't write earlier. I just found out that Blaine's dad passed away last night in St. Mungo's. The whole school is pretty shocked about it right now. He and Kurt left from the school last night and it looks like they'll be gone until Monday. I just can't believe it. I don't understand why stuff like this happens to people like Blaine. He seems like a really great guy and Kurt's mad about him. I dunno...*

*On another note, at least it's only two more days until I see you. I'm so excited. With everything that's happened, it's nice to have something to look forward to like seeing you. I've got to get to Charms but I'll write you again as soon as I get your letter.*

*Leigh*

---

*Leigh,*

*That's awful about Blaine's dad! I'm so sorry for him right now. It was bad enough thinking I'd lost you but I can't imagine if I'd lost my Mam.*

*I can't wait until Saturday. I think my boss is seriously concerned I'm obsessed with the amount I talk about you. Not that I'm actually obsessed. I just...you know, missed you. No, miss you. I'm giving you fair warning. You might not want anything else right now but I'm going to hug you Saturday. Prepare yourself.*

*I love you,  
Gav*

---

*Prepare myself? Should I be scared? I feel like I should be scared.*  
*Leigh*

---

*Probably.*  
*I love you,  
Gav*

---

*I'll keep that in mind.*  
*Leigh*  
*P.S. Your owl officially hates me. He just bit my finger and now I'm bleeding.*

---

*I could kiss it.*  
*Love you,  
Gav*

---

*I'll say it again. You're insane.*  
*Leigh*

---

The sun hit Kurt's eyelids as he rolled over and he groaned faintly, squinting against the unusually bright light. He opened his eyes and it took him a moment to remember where he was. Then the memories of the previous day sank in and he turned to Blaine, who was still sleeping next to him.

Kurt bit back tears and brushed the dark curls off of Blaine's face, kissing his temple and tucking the blankets back around him before sliding onto the floor. He rooted for his wand in his back and flicked it to Conjure a shutter over the skylight, hoping it would help Blaine stay asleep longer. He certainly needed it. He'd barely slept in the past five nights, and eaten just as little.

"Love you," he whispered before climbing down the stairs to the den, which opened into a small breakfast nook where Blaine's mother sat with a mug of tea and the latest issue of the *Daily Prophet*. She smiled sadly as he approached.

"He's still sleeping," Kurt said with a yawn, sitting down next to her and glancing out through the grove of cherry trees in the back yard, their branches still bare in the chill.

"Good," she said with a sigh, flicking her wand to produce a mug of tea, which she pushed across the table to Kurt, who thanked her quietly. "He needs it."

She sighed, setting down the paper and rubbing her tired eyes.

"I'm sorry," Kurt said, fiddling with the handle of his mug.

"You have nothing to be sorry for, dear," she said, taking his hand and squeezing it gently. "If anything I should thank you for being there for him these past few days. I don't know what he'd be like if the two of you hadn't gotten back together. He really loves you."

"I know," Kurt said, smiling and picking up a Ginger Newt from the plate in the center of the table. "I love him, too. We just...we had some kinks to work out."

"Everyone does," she said with a sigh. She smiled, a faraway look in her eyes. "I remember when Howard and I were at Hogwarts. He was two years older than me and in Gryffindor. I, of course, was in Ravenclaw. Where do you think Blaine got his brains?"

Kurt smiled.

"Well, Howard thought he'd be clever and sneak into the Ravenclaw tower," she continued. "But he couldn't figure out the answer to the question and ended up sleeping in front of the door only to get knocked down the stairs the next morning when someone tried to leave." She laughed lightly. "But we had our spats, as well." She sighed, staring into her tea, tears pooling in her eyes. "He was a good man. A good father."

"If Blaine is any indication, I can tell," Kurt said.

She smiled, wiping her eyes. "I'm just glad he found you, Kurt," she said. "It might be hard sometimes but, don't give up on each other if you really are in love. And don't let the little things get in the way. You...you never know how long it will last." She stared across the yard, tears sliding down her face.

Kurt gripped her hand hesitantly and she smiled, returning the pressure, though her eyes remained fixed across the clear March morning.

Kurt spent most of the morning working on unfinished homework, hoping he wouldn't be too far behind when they went back to school on Monday. Thankfully, Blaine slept for much of the day, not appearing until mid-afternoon with his hair tousled and his appetite returning full force. Kurt kept a close eye on him as he ate, knowing full well that food and sleep were the first things Blaine rejected when he was upset.

Blaine didn't talk much, replying in short, one or two word answers, though he was affectionate at every chance, holding Kurt's hand or leaning against him when they sat next to each other. Kurt made sure to return every nervous touch or look reassuringly, keeping Blaine close whenever possible so as not to give him a chance to draw back into himself again.

Pavarotti showed up late that evening with a letter from Thad. Well, the first half was in Thad's hand writing but it had gotten so shaky after just a few sentences that Flint had taken over, even his untidy scrawl more legible than the tear-stained words from Thad. The six of them—Thad, Flint, Nick, Jeff, Wes, and David—were planning on Flooding over as soon as classes were over the next day.

"It'll be crowded," Blaine's mother said as she dug blankets and pillows from the closet. "But I think everyone will be able to cram in. And I don't know how many of you boys want to stay here after the...the funeral. You're welcome to until you have to go back Sunday night, of course."

She paused, fiddling with the hem of the blanket and Kurt took them from her to set them on the couch. She smiled gratefully.

"I'd just hoped that the first time you came to visit us would be for, well...better reasons," she said with another sigh.

"Me too," Kurt said quietly, staring at his hands. Blaine had already gone back to bed after his mother had given him a dose of potion for dreamless sleep and he was currently curled up under the blankets again, sleeping soundly.

He stayed up for a few more hours, not really tired himself, while Blaine's mother showed him old photo albums of the three of them, laughing and telling stories about when Blaine was younger and, apparently, incredibly shy. Half of the pictures of him until he was around eleven or twelve, he wasn't looking at the camera or had his head ducked towards his shoes.

"It wasn't until he started hanging around Nick and Jeff a lot that he really came out of his shell," his mother said fondly, running her fingers over a picture of the three of them laughing in their backyard, Jeff and Nick hanging upside down from a tree covered in pink blossoms and Blaine sitting beneath them with a shy grin.

"The three of them were inseparable in third and fourth year," she said, turning the page and smiling at a picture of Blaine, who was no more than five, being thrown into the air by his father, giggling madly.

"And then in his fifth year...well, you know what happened. He drew back into himself for a long time after that. It wasn't until you came along that he started opening up again." She smiled over at him.

"You've have quite the effect on him, Kurt."

Kurt smiled, sipping his tea as she turned the page to a picture of a younger Blaine zooming around on a miniature broomstick, his tongue sticking out of the corner of his mouth in concentration as his dark curls flew back around his face. She launched into another story and Kurt sat back, listening and knowing that this was therapy for her, allowing her to recollect all the memories she had of when their family was whole and happy.

Twin shrieks and loud bangs and thumps woke Kurt up the next day, the mid-day sun streaming over him as he and Blaine both sat up, blinking and staring around at Thad and Flint, who were standing next to the bed, Thad shaking his head and rolling his eyes.

"Sorry," he mumbled, jerking his head towards the stairs. "Nick and Jeff fell down the stairs."

Sure enough, a few seconds later, a blonde and brunette head appeared at the bottom of the banister. They climbed the rest of the stairs, Jeff rubbing his ribs and Nick massaging his rear-end ruefully.

"What did I tell you about racing up stairs?" Thad said, cocking an eyebrow.

"It's a bad idea," they grumbled in unison.

"Where are Wes and David?" Blaine said, yawning.

"Downstairs," Thad said, perching on the edge of the bed next to Kurt's feet. "They'll be up in a bit."

"Aren't you early?" Kurt said, glancing at his watch to see that it was only ten.

"McGonagall told us we could leave after morning classes," Jeff said, picking up the old Quaffle sitting on Blaine's desk and turning it over in his hands.

"It's only Care of Magical Creatures after lunch and Professor Hagrid said it's nothing important," Nick said, stealing the Quaffle from Jeff as Wes and David appeared on the stairs, making the room feel thoroughly crowded.

"Hey," Wes said, sitting down at Blaine's desk as David leaned against it beside him. "How're you doing, Blaine?"

Blaine shrugged. "Alright, I suppose," he said with a yawn. "Better, I think, no I'm not having nightmares."

They all exchanged distressed looks and Jeff and Nick moved to sit on the bed, Jeff beside Blaine and Nick next to his knees.

"There are far too many men in this bed," Kurt muttered.

Blaine actually smiled at this, shaking his head. He shook with silent laughter for a moment before laughing aloud, falling back on the pillow with a faint groan of amusement. Jeff and Nick exchanged pleased looks at his momentarily uplifted mood.

"Anyone up for Quidditch?" Jeff suggested hopefully, Nick holding up the Quaffle next to him.

Blaine said up, stretching his arms over his head. "Yeah," he said, nodding. "Yeah, I could play. You in, Flint?"

Flint nodded. "Of course," he said. "I didn't bring my broom, though."

"We've got some out back," Blaine said. "Da—" He stopped, his face freezing at his own mention of his father. Everyone watched him carefully. "I'm fine," he said in a clipped tone. "Quidditch."

Kurt watched him stand and move to his closet, pulling out clothes as the rest of them exchanged concerned looks.

"Just don't bring it up, guys," he said as Blaine disappeared down the stairs to go to the bathroom. "He's been a mess since Wednesday. Just let him enjoy Quidditch, okay?" They nodded silently and followed after Blaine downstairs to allow Kurt to change.

When he went down to the den, Jeff and Nick were clutching their own brooms while Blaine and Flint had older ones from Blaine's father's collection.

"I'll call you boys in for lunch, okay?" Blaine's mother said, smiling as they all went out into the backyard together. Kurt thought that having all of them to care for was a welcome distraction for her.

He sat between Thad and Wes in the cool grass, watching the others play two-a-side Quidditch, Blaine and Flint soundly beating Jeff and Nick, who Kurt thought were purposefully losing to try and cheer Blaine up. Then again, they *were* Beaters on the House team.

They went back into the house an hour later when Blaine's mother called them in for lunch and they sprawled across the floor and couch, laughing and eating as Jeff and Nick flicked food at each other from across the room.

It was nice seeing Blaine laugh again, though Kurt was sure he'd fall straight back into misery the next day when they went to the funeral. But it gave him hope, seeing Blaine smiling as Thad smacked Jeff and Nick around the head for turning his pumpkin juice into wine, which resulted in Thad spitting a mouthful all over Flint, who'd disappeared into the bathroom to clean up as Wes and David howled with laughter. It gave him hope that one day Blaine would heal from all of this.

---

Leighton's eyes snapped open as suddenly as if something had shouted in his ear. He grinned as he realized what day it was. Saturday. He was finally going to get to see Gavin again. He didn't even know what was going to happen between them yet, but they'd been writing letters for the past month and he missed him so much after only getting to see him for the brief stint around Valentine's Day,

where they'd done little more than sit in shock that they were finally seeing each other again.

He dressed carefully, thankful that Kurt had given him tips on how to dress. He felt saddened thinking of Kurt, of the fact that today was Blaine's father's funeral. At the same time, he thought it probably helped them both, Kurt and Blaine, to be together again, knowing that Kurt would at least be able to help Blaine through everything.

The others were just started to stir when he slipped out of the dormitory and went down into the common room, where a few people were getting ready to head to breakfast. He considered skipping and going straight to the village but thought he should probably eat something to help settle his backflipping stomach.

He drummed his fingers against the tabletop as he ate, forcing himself to talk to his fellow Quidditch team members. When he'd finally swallowed the last of his toast, he practically jumped up, receiving a few odd looks from the other Slytherins, which he ignored, picking up a brisk pace and walking out into the sunny morning, grinning so hard it almost hurt.

Forcing himself not to run, he turned onto the High Street, passing Honeydukes and Zonkos before stopping outside of the little cottage two doors down from Scrivenshaft's. He knocked lightly on the door, shoving his hands in his pockets.

The door opened and Gavin grinned at him from inside, leaning against the door frame. His shirtsleeves were rolled up to his elbows, his hair a little rumpled and his blue eyes as piercing as always.

"Well are you just going to stand and gawk all day?" he said, smirking. Leighton glared at him, pushing him lightly as he walking past him into the front room of the cottage. Before he had a chance to do more than take a sweeping glance at the room, Gavin had shut the door and was pulling him into a hug.

Leighton grinned and hugged him back, taking in the scent of cherries in combination with the faint smell of fresh parchment and ink he thought probably always hung around him working at the paper shop.

"Missed you," Gavin said, grinning as he released him. "Tosser."

"You too, Gav," Leighton said, rolling his eyes. "So, where's the Butterbeer you promised me?"

"All you bloody care about," Gavin mumbled, popping a candy into this mouth and rolling his sleeves down.

"Well, we both know all *you* care about," Leighton said, smirking as they walked back onto the street and towards the Three Broomsticks.

"That's not *all* I care about," Gavin said, giving him a steady look. "You know it's not. I really do love you, Leigh. I'm not just trying to...hook-up or whatever. I would never do that to you."



"I know," Leighton said, smiling. "I know, Gav."

Gavin opened the door to the pub, the bell ringing overhead. A few people hailed them, a group of seventh year Hufflepuffs assailing Gavin with questions about what he'd been doing since he'd left Hogwarts. Leighton took the opportunity to order their drinks.

He sat down at a booth towards the back, sipping his drink and waiting for Gavin to escape from the people talking to him. He finally managed to get free and walked back towards Leighton, shaking his head.

"Honestly, you're gone for four years and people just freak out for some reason," he grumbled, taking a gulp of his drink.

Leighton grinned. They sat in silence for a moment, just savoring each other's presence.

"Are you going to come watch me play next match?" Leighton said after a minute.

Gavin smirked. "Well, that's Slytherin-Hufflepuff isn't it?" he said. "In May? I suppose I could but I don't know if I could cheer for you."

Leighton scowled and Gavin laughed.

"Of course I'll come see you play," Gavin said, kicking him lightly under the table. "If I remember, you're pretty good on a broom."

Leighton inhaled a mouthful of Butterbeer and Gavin laughed.

"You're supposed to drink it, Leigh," he said, shaking his head and taking a sip of his own drink as if to show him how it was done.

"I hate you," Leighton mumbled.

"You don't," Gavin said. "You know you don't."

Leighton sighed in resignation of the fact that he was completely correct.

They spent the next few hours simply talking about anything and everything. He loved that they never ran out of things to say to each other, that they had a full four years to relive with each other and who knew how long in the future to share. He smiled at the thought.

"I'm glad you came back, Gav," Leighton said after they'd finished off their third Butterbeer each and he was starting to feel faintly tipsy.

"Me too," Gavin said, grinning a little crookedly. He drained his glass, setting it down with almost unnecessary force and laughing at the fact.

"When're you going back to the Castle?"

Leighton shrugged, frowning into his glass and wishing it wasn't quite so empty. "Not til dinner, I s'pose."

Gavin grinned. "So, come see my place," he said.

Leighton set down his glass and gave him a steady look. "You're not going to like, try and..." he trailed off, not really sure where he'd been going with the statement.

Gavin snorted. "Really, Leigh? What, you think I'm going to tied you to my bed and ravish you?" He shook his head. "You're mental."

Leighton grinned. "Alright, then, sure," he said, standing up and stumbling a little.

Gavin laughed, equally drunk as he got up and walked with him towards the door, their steps a little askew and both of them laughing unnecessarily. Gavin struggled with the keys to his door, swearing as he dropped them and glaring as Leighton laughed.

He pushed the door open and Leighton followed him in, kicking the door shut and stumbling into the living room, which was bright and warm, with a leather couch up against the wall between to tall bookshelves, both completely full, mostly with books on Wizarding history.

"Still into this stuff?" Leighton said, picking up one book and frowning at it.

"There's a lot of it to learn," Gavin said, plopping down on the couch and closing his eyes, looking faintly dizzy.

Leighton flopped down next to him, grinning as he read. "*The Goblin Riots of 1789 are perhaps the most well-known in Wizarding history, as they resulted in over two dozen deaths in just a three week span.*

Gav, this is a snore," he said, setting the book aside and laughing. He turned to Gavin, who was watching him with a steady gaze, his blue eyes piercing him with such a look that it sent shivers down his spine. Gavin reached a shaking hand up and brushed it over his cheek, closing his eyes at the contact.

Leighton swallowed anxiously but didn't pull away as Gavin's fingers explored his jawline and neck before tracing over his lips and up across his cheekbones. They were both breathing a little heavily now, leaning closer together without even realizing it.

"Leighton," Gavin whispered, looking like it was taking all of his self-control not to do anything more than what he was doing.

Leighton licked his lips nervously. It was just Gavin. Why was he so damn scared about *Gavin*? This was nothing, he'd done more than this with Kurt. But Kurt had never made him feel quite this...intense and Gavin's eyes were making him feel completely bare.

Before he knew it, he was leaning forward further and kissing him, tasting cherries and Butterbeer and the pure fire that he had the last time they'd kissed. It was intoxicating and Gavin was groaning and clutching at his collar to pull him closer. The Butterbeer's effects were starting to combine with the heady sense of need and he opened his mouth in reply to Gavin's tongue, gasping as Gavin sucked on his lower lip, his fingers gliding down Leighton's chest and ghosting over the waistband over his jeans.

"Wait," Leighton gasped, pulling back. "Gav, I-I can't."

Gavin sat back, frowning. "Okay," he said. "Did I do something wrong?"

"No," Leighton said, shaking his head. "No, it's not that, it's just...I've never, erm, done any of that stuff...with another bloke, I mean. It's still...a little strange to me."

Gavin nodded slowly. "Alright," he said. "So, you want to take things slow? I can do that. I told you, Leigh, I'm in love with you. I have been for years. If you're uncomfortable with this stuff, I can wait a little bit." Leighton gave him a grateful smile. "Thanks."

Gavin shrugged, his hand resting on Leighton's arm gently. "Do you want to go?" he said, watching him closely. "If you don't want to be around me, I get it."

"No!" Leighton said hastily. "I-I'm okay with, like...kissing and stuff. That doesn't, um, bother me."

Gavin grinned. "Yeah?" he said, leaning towards him again. "Brill." Leighton chuckled as Gavin pressed his lips against him again. "Brill," he mumbled in agreement.

---

Saturday was another glorious, clear day, with a bright blue sky full of fluffy white clouds drifting across it in the cool air. Blaine stared at his reflection in the mirror, at his grey-tinged skin and the dark bags under his eyes. He sighed. He'd been doing so much better yesterday, but last night he'd woken up after a horrible nightmare about someone telling him Kurt was in St. Mungo's but he hadn't made it in time. Kurt had died without him.

He shuddered at the memory, taking a deep breath and splashing cold water on his face.

There was a gentle knock at the door.

"Blaine?" Kurt's voice came softly from the other side. "Are you almost ready to go?"

"One moment, love," Blaine said, drying his face and straightening his shirt. He stepped out of the bathroom into the hall, forcing a smile towards Kurt, who took one look at him and was immediately blinking back tears.

"You look sick," he said softly, brushing his hand over Blaine's cheek.

"I...didn't sleep well," he said, avoiding Kurt's eye.

"You had another nightmare, didn't you?" Kurt said, taking his hand.

Blaine nodded. "It was...you," he said. "It was awful. I couldn't save you in time." He swallowed back the lump in his throat.

"I'm right here," Kurt said, smiling. "I'm not leaving. I promise."

"I know," Blaine said. He sighed, running his hand through his hair.

"I'm sorry you have to deal with this on your birthday. It's not fair to

you. And I feel even worse because I didn't have a chance to get you anything with...with everything that happened."

"Blaine," Kurt said, lifting his chin to force him to meet his gaze. "It's alright. We've only been back together for a few days. I don't expect anything. I don't *need* anything. It's just another birthday. Besides, I got my new quills from Thad, and my books, and that new cauldron my dad sent. I'm set, okay? As long as you're here, with me, that's the best birthday present I could ask for."

Blaine smiled. "Thanks, love," he said. He kissed him softly, winding his fingers in the soft hair at the nape of Kurt's neck. "I missed you," he said after a few second, touching their foreheads together and glancing at Kurt's slightly reddened lips. "I missed this. Being close and...we don't even have to do anything else right away. Not that I don't miss that, too, but I'm fine with restarting this slowly. I think it's for the best, anyway. So much of our relationship was, well...sex."

"I agree," Kurt said. "That we should go slowly, I mean."

Blaine rested his hand on Kurt's waist. "Whenever...whenever we *do* get back up to that point again," he said, meeting Kurt's eyes, which were only a few inches away in their current position. "I want *you* to be the one who...um, you know." He felt extremely awkward talking about it, as usually their relationship just happened almost naturally. But he wanted Kurt to know this now, to make sure he was comfortable with it.

Kurt frowned for a moment before he caught on and his cheeks dusted with pink as well.

"You don't have to if you don't want to," Blaine said hastily. "I just...I want you to know that I *do* trust you, Kurt. I...I had issues with it before but now I trust you. Completely, and I'm willing to do anything to prove that to you."

Kurt swallowed nervously. "I-I guess we can try," he said in a small voice. "When the time comes."

"I just want you to know that...after everything...I will *never* doubt you again," Blaine said firmly. "I love you. You trusted me with everything, it's only fair I do the same."

Kurt smiled. "I love you," he said, angling his head to kiss him gently. He was a little bright-eyed when he pulled away. "Ready?"

"Not really," Blaine said as they walked into the den, where the others were already waiting, dressed in Muggle clothes and looking anxious. His mother pulled him into a hug, kissing the top of his head and whispering, "love you, darling."

"You too, Mum," Blaine mumbled back, hugging her briefly. He took Kurt's hand again, loving the way their fingers fit so perfectly together.

They walked out into the front garden together, gentle birdsong filling the air. It was almost like the weather was mocking him, the bright sun and soft breeze so different from the surge of emotions that had been filling him since Saturday.

The grove of cherry trees blocking the house from view of the nearby village swayed and rustled gently as they all made their way down the lane in silence. Blaine had had plenty of times in the hours between waking from his dream and when everyone else woke, to think about today. Though there were a few other wizarding households nearby, the cemetery they'd chosen was run by Muggles, so they had to have a Muggle ceremony. Blaine didn't think it was important either way. They were still burying him. He was still gone. The type of ceremony they had wasn't going to change anything.

There were already others gathered outside of the little church when they reached it and Blaine and his mother were immediately assailed with people he didn't even know apologizing and forcing hugs on him when all he wanted to do was be with Kurt. They'd decided not to be affectionate as they didn't know how any of the guests would act. Kurt stood to the side with the others, talking quietly to Thad, who was looking longing at Flint's hand hanging at his side. They'd all had enough experiences with people bullying them for who they were that they didn't want to take any chances, not now, not at...not at his father's funeral.

Blaine sat in the front pew of the church with his mother, wishing Kurt was beside him when he saw his father's casket, which was closed for obvious reasons, sitting at the front of the church. Tears slid down his face and his mother held his hand tightly as an old man got up and started talking about how his father had 'gone on to a better place'. Blaine tuned him out, staring through the window at the graveyard, where he could see the freshly dug grave where his father would be for the rest of his life. He struggled not to make any noise as he dropped his chin to his chest and cried.

He couldn't believe he was gone. Couldn't accept that he was going to come home and never see his father grinning and holding up their old Quaffle and asking Blaine if he wanted to play Quidditch, that new pictures on the mantle would only have two faces in them from now on, and most of all that his mother, who was the kindest woman he knew, would be alone, especially now that Blaine was leaving. His mother stood and Blaine automatically joined her, looking over at Kurt, who was sitting a few seats back and mouthed, 'I love you,' before he was jostled by a few people moving towards the back of the church.

Blaine followed his mother, who walked behind the casket carried by a few men who had worked with his father at the Ministry. It was surreal, thinking that his father was there, just there, a few feet away, about to be lowered into the ground.

He stood next to his mother, barely able to watch the casket disappearing, the roses his mother had placed on it resting where his father's head would be. He looked across the grave at Kurt, who gave him a small, watery smile.

His mother held his hand through another short speech, the grass and trees rustling around them. It would have all been very peaceful if not for the fact that his world felt like it was shredding apart in front of his eyes.

People approached them again with condolences and Blaine waited a little impatiently for them to disperse so he could hunt down Kurt, who was standing under an old oak tree at the front of the church with the others.

Kurt hugged him tightly when he approached. Waiting as the others did the same before taking Blaine's hand.

"I've got something I'd like to show you," Blaine said, looking up into Kurt's tear-stained face.

"What is it?" Kurt said.

"It's...sort of a surprise," Blaine replied, lightly touching where the key to his, no, *their* future home rested in his pocket.

"Okay," Kurt said, frowning faintly.

Blaine glanced at his mother, who had followed him over to the others, and she nodded.

"Why don't the rest of you boys come back to the house with me?" she said kindly. "I'll make you some lunch."

Jeff and Nick looked vaguely cheered up by the thought of food and trailed after her with the rest of them, Thad glancing around before taking Flint's hand, relaxing immediately at the touch.

"So, where are we going?" Kurt said as they set off down the path towards a secluded grove of trees that he knew would be a good place to Disapparate.

"You'll see," Blaine said with a smile. "Now, I don't have my Apparition License yet, so I'll just kind of show you where to go, but you'll have to take me there, okay?"

Kurt nodded, looking nonplussed and suspicious.

"Ready?" Blaine said, smiling.

Kurt nodded again and Blaine closed his eyes, focusing on the flat his mother had shown him Sunday.

"And keep your eyes closed when we get there," Blaine said.

"Alright," Kurt said slowly.

Blaine smiled and squeezed his hand as Kurt turned on the spot, allowing Blaine to steer them to where they needed to go. His feet hit the ground and he opened his eyes tentatively, sighing as he looked around the living room of the flat and out at the amazing view.

"Keep 'em closed," he said, taking Kurt by the shoulders and leading him to the middle of the room so that he could take in the full view. Kurt sighed but smiled.

"Alright, open," Blaine whispered in his ear.

Kurt complied, blinking in confusion as he took in the view and the room itself. "Blaine," he said, turning to look at him over his shoulder.

"Where are we?"

"Our flat," Blaine said, wrapping his arm around his waist and resting his head on his shoulder.

"Our—what?" Kurt said, still looking confused.

"My parents got it for me...for us," Blaine said. "They were going to wait until graduation but...my mom gave it early. She wanted my dad to...to be alive when I saw it." He sniffed, trying to focus his mind on the good that was happening between him and Kurt instead of letting himself get pulled back into the sea of depression threatening to suffocate him.

"Blaine, are you serious?" Kurt breathed, eyes widening as he stared around the room, taking in the kitchen and doors to the bedrooms. Blaine nodded. "As soon as we graduate, it's all ours," he said. "If you want to live together, of course."

"Of course I do," Kurt said, still looking awestruck as he looked around. "It's *gorgeous*."

"Wait til you see the rest of it," Blaine said, taking his hand and showing him to the front hall and second bedroom before taking him into the master suite. Kurt almost squealed when he saw, face alight with excitement.

"I can't believe we're really going to get to do this!" he said, turning to Blaine with a broad grin. "I couldn't ask for a better birthday present. I love you."

"I love you, too," Blaine said, walking across the room to him and kissing him softly.

He'd known for a long time that he'd wanted a future with Kurt, they'd both known, they'd just been naïve in thinking everything would be perfect. He knew it wouldn't be. They'd have spats and make-up and there would always be problems but they had been through more together than they'd been through with anyone else and they'd still made it through with one thing solidly the same. They were together and they were in love. And even with the crushing weight of pain from

the loss of his father that Blaine knew would take time for him to get over, that gave him hope.



## Chapter Twenty

It made him giddy and light-headed knowing they had a place to live after Hogwarts. He couldn't wait to tell his father or Mercedes and Tina; even Thad and the others didn't know yet. And Blaine. Blaine was actually smiling just because of his excitement.

He didn't want to leave the apartment, wished they could move in immediately. But then he thought of Hogwarts and how much he'd miss it and decide he could wait for a few months.

They Apparated back to the trees near the church and exchanging gentle smiles. The path to Blaine's house was empty, the soft rattle and rustle of branches mingled with birdsong the only sound in the cool mid-day air.

"You should be hearing back about your try-outs today shouldn't you?" Kurt said, glancing at him.

"I hope," Blaine said with an air of anxiety.

"You're getting called back," Kurt said firmly. "I'm sure of it."

Blaine smiled. He stopped and Kurt pulled up next to him.

"What's wrong?" Kurt said, smiling as Blaine brushed his fingers over his cheek.

"I was just wondering it...would you wear this again?" Blaine said, reaching into his pocket and pulling out the diamond necklace he'd given Kurt so many months ago.

Kurt smiled. "Of course," he said, "I've missed it."

Blaine kissed the back of his neck as he latched the necklace on. Kurt touched the pendant lightly, rolling it between his fingers. Blaine took his hand again and kissed his cheek as they continued towards the house.

They stepped up the garden path, frowning as the sound of shouting, obviously from inside, reached their ears.

"—in the same house as this...*indecent*!"

"Then get out! Get out of my house now!"

The shouting suddenly stopped and the front door banged outward before Blaine could pull it open. An older man with short gray hair and a thick beard, a pair of dark-rimmed glasses perched over his hard gray eyes, barged out of the house, looking furious.

His eyes fell on Blaine and his gaze hardened even more.

"Blaine," he grunted, his voice like venom.

"Granddad," Blaine said with just as much acid, his back ramrod straight.

The man's eyes fell on his and Kurt's intertwined hands and a look of utmost disgust twisted his face.

"I see you're still suffering from your problem then?" he spat.

"I'm still gay, if that's what you mean," Blaine said, his fingers tightening in Kurt's and his hazel eyes alight with dislike.

The man glared at Kurt, who shrank away, feeling confused and faintly frightened by the look of repulsion he was receiving.

"Leave Kurt alone," Blaine snapped, taking a step in front of him.

The man huffed and strode past them down the path. Kurt gaped as he Disapparated with a faint pop. Kurt stared at the spot for a moment, Blaine breathing a little heavily next to him.

"*That's* your grandfather?" he said in disbelief, looking back at Blaine.

Blaine took a calming breath, sighed and opened the front door.

"Yeah," he said, still looking annoyed.

Kurt looked around the den when they entered. Blaine's mother was sitting at the breakfast table, fresh tear tracks on her face as an older woman with black hair liberally streaked with gray patted her back. Nick and Jeff looked furious, Wes and David simply shaking their heads and muttering about something being unfair.

Thad however, was clutching to Flint and crying silently.

"What the hell just happened?" Blaine said to the room at large. "Oh, hey, Gran."

The old woman stood to hug Blaine briefly.

"I'm sorry we were late, dear," she said with a sigh. "I tried."

"What's gotten him so worked up this time?" Blaine said, looking to his mother.

She sniffed, wiping her eyes and standing stiffly. "Thad's ring," she said. She went to the kitchen and pulled a Calming Draught from the cupboard, handing a dose of it to Thad.

"I'm sorry, dear," she said as Thad drained the cup and sank onto the couch with Flint, who wrapped an arm around his shoulders. "He's..." she trailed off, anger clear on her face as she looked out the window. She shook her head and moved to the kitchen to set the cup in the sink.

Kurt turned to Blaine. "You grandfather is..."

"A bit of a git, yeah," Blaine said, nodding. "He has been since I came out after third year. He's...old-fashioned."

"But I thought you visited them during the holidays and stuff.

Don't...doesn't it make you want to, I dunno, punch him in the face?"

Blaine smiled, tight and more like a grimace than anything. "Yeah," he said. "But he usually avoids me when we're there or just...pretends I'm just going through a phase or something."

"I'm sorry," Kurt mumbled, watching Jeff and Nick attempting to cheer Thad up.

Blaine shrugged. "I'm used to it by now," he said as his mother passed Thad a steaming mug of tea. "We've reached a silent agreement. I don't do anything too 'gay' in front of him and he keeps his mouth shut." He rubbed his eyes in a tired sort of way. Kurt squeezed his hand reassuringly and smiled.

He moved to sit next to Thad, giving Flint, who looked on the verge of tears himself, a nervous look. "Are you alright?" Kurt asked, laying a hand on Thad's knee as the other boy sipped his tea.

Thad shrugged. He sniffed and turned to Kurt. "He said it was wrong," he said in a small voice. "Said that he didn't care what the Ministry said, two...um, of us shouldn't be allowed to get married."

Kurt gripped his leg. "That's not true and you know it," he said.

"You're in love and deserve the same right as anyone else to be happy. Don't listen to him. Please."

Flint nodded, his arm tightening around Thad's shoulders.

"We love you, Thad," Jeff said timidly.

"He's just a big prat," Nick added, equally tentative. "No offense, Blaine."

"You can call him whatever the hell you'd like," Blaine said with a sigh as he sat next to Kurt. "I really don't give a damn."

"Blaine. Language," his mother said sternly from the kitchen where she was making lunch with Blaine's grandmother.

Blaine mumbled an apology.

"It's true though," he said, lowering his voice. "He's an idiot. Don't listen to him, Thad."

Thad sniffed and smiled thankfully. Flint kissed him on the cheek and he cheered up a bit more.

"If I can ask, why does your grandmother put up with him?" Kurt said, frowning. "She seems...normal, I guess."

Blaine shrugged. "He was fine until I came out," he said. "I guess...I mean, she loves him still, I suppose and if you love someone you can see past them being a god damn—"

"Blaine!" his mother said sharply.

Blaine sighed. "Well, Mum's pretty fed up with him," he muttered.

"She only deals with him for Gran. Luckily, when we visit them, he usually just works or stays in his study. It's easier to just pretend he doesn't exist, to be honest, or put up with him acting like I'm not gay. You wouldn't believe how many girls he's tried to set me up with."

"That's awful," Kurt said in a low voice.

Blaine shrugged again. "Like I said, I'm used to it."

"We shouldn't *have* to be, though," Kurt said, leaning against him.

"Especially from family."

"I know, love," Blaine said.

"Why didn't you tell me about it?" Kurt said, lowering his voice further as Jeff attempted to cheer Thad up by lighting Nick's pants on fire.

"Because it's not important. *He's* not important," Blaine insisted. "He's not a big part of my life and I don't plan on him being a part of *our* lives so...well, we'll just do our best to ignore him."

Kurt smiled. "I love you," he murmured. "I don't understand how you can deal with everything you deal with...and that includes me."

"I'll deal with you over the rest of it any day," Blaine said with a smile, absently watching Jeff howl with laughter as Nick sprayed water from his wand onto his pants, grinning as Thad giggled.

His mother and grandmother called them for lunch and they crowded around the living room with plates of shepherd's pie.

"Wow," Kurt said after taking a bite. "You were right back in London. This *is* the best."

"Never doubt my Mum's cooking," Blaine said with a wink as Nick smacked Jeff around the head when Jeff tried to steal his plate, his own already empty.

Kurt was grateful that the others were there as they kept Blaine busy and talking about school and Quidditch.

They were just discussing the possibility of walking down to the shore when two screech owls landed outside the bay window, tapping on the glass and clutching envelopes emblazoned with double, dark blue 'T's. Acorn, who'd been lurking under the couch most of the time since Friday, leapt onto the sill and pawed at the glass, meowing.

Blaine gave Kurt a nervous look as David, who was closest to the window, shooed Acorn and opened the window to allow the birds in. They swooped into the den, dropped their letters—one onto Blaine's lap and the other in Flint's—before zooming back out through the window.

Acorn jumped onto Thad's lap, glaring haughtily at David and purring as Thad scratched behind his ears.

"That cat's so weird," David muttered as Flint and Blaine tore open their letters.

"He's not weird," Thad said defensively as Acorn licked his hand.

"He's...unique."

"Well, he'd better stop leaving 'unique' hairballs on my pillow," Wes grumbled.

Jeff and Nick sniggered.

"Well?" Kurt said, watching Blaine expectantly as he scanned his letter. Blaine glanced at Flint, who grinned.

"You too?" Flint said.

Blaine nodded. "Mum!" he shouted, leaning back on the couch as Thad squealed and threw his arms around Flint in a tight hug. "I got called back!"

"Biscuit, that's wonderful!" his mother hurried in from the kitchen as she said it and hugged Blaine over the back of the couch.

Blaine beamed as she released him, glancing at Kurt, who smiled fondly and gripped his hand. "Now I just have to wait until April." He dragged his fingers through his hair, staring at his letter. "I don't know if I'll be able to last a month and a half until the trial."

His mother smiled and squeezed his shoulders. "It will just give you plenty of time to prepare," she said. "You and Flint will be able to practice at school together!"

Kurt watched as she went on excitedly about the possibility of the two of them joining the Tornadoes and he knew she was latching onto the good news to try and block out the pain of her husband's death. He'd noticed she was as strong and resilient as Blaine, focusing on the good rather than letting herself get pulled into the depression threatening to overtake both of them.

Wes and David decided to return to the Castle early as they both had long History of Magic essays to finish for the next day. They hugged Blaine and his mother before being vanishing with a flash of emerald flame in the fireplace.

The rest of them went down to the shore not long after, shivering a little in the chill breeze coming off the Sound and watching the boats drift across the water, bobbing on the waves.

Jeff and Nick were debating on whether or not they wanted to try swimming, standing in the sand and dithering on the spot.

"It's freezing," Kurt said, raising his voice over the sound of the waves hitting the shore. "You'll both be sick."

"But, Kurtsie," Jeff whined, jumping and down. "It's much warmer than the lake!"

"Well, if you want to kill yourselves, go right ahead," Kurt mumbled. They both stared at the water for a moment before Jeff yelled, "Screw it!" and stripped off his sweater, shoes, socks, and jeans, Nick doing the same beside him, and ran full tilt into the tide.

Thad fell about laughing as they squealed at the cold. Jeff flailed his arms and tried to run back to the shore only to slip and fall straight back into the water with a splash, attempting to grab Nick as he fell and only succeeding in pulling him down with him.

"Idiots," Kurt muttered, shaking his head as Blaine smiled faintly.

The two Beaters emerged dripping and shivering violently from the water, pulling their clothes on with pale fingers.

"K-K-Kurtsie, how did you m-m-manage not to die in the l-lake last year?" Jeff said, his teeth chattering loudly.

"Alcohol tends to warm one through," Kurt said, remembering the incident the year before when he'd jumped into the lake at Hogwarts while tipsy off of Color Change Cocktails.

Nick huddled against Jeff and Thad rolled his eyes, pulling out his wand and flicking it to dry them off, though they continued to shiver as they walked back towards the house, where Blaine's mother immediately started fretting over Jeff and Nick, wrapping them in thick blankets and Conjurung up mugs of hot chocolate.

"You both *deserve* hypothermia, you know," Kurt said as they sat around the den, sipping hot chocolate while Jeff and Nick sat two feet from the fireplace, leaning dangerously close as they tried to warm themselves through.

"We were just testing our awesomeness," Jeff said, sticking his tongue out at him.

"And it still continues to be, erm...there," Nick said, frowning a for a moment and looking as though he cold had given him an inability to articulate himself better.

"Well, that explains everything," Kurt muttered, rolling his eyes and moving a little closer to Blaine, whose arm he was curled under on the couch.

The front door opened and Blaine's grandfather strode in. The atmosphere changed immediately and the air around them seemed to tauten and chill as he looked over them with a stern gaze, his hard grey eyes taking in Blaine and Kurt and Thad and Flint, who were seated on the floor, Flint leaning against the couch with Thad between his legs, back pressed against Flint's chest.

For a moment it looked like he was going to speak, it seemed to take all of his willpower not to, but he simply scoffed and walked past them into the kitchen. The sound of Blaine's mother talking in a sharp voice drifted towards them, though they couldn't make out what she was saying.

Blaine's arm tightened around Kurt's shoulders as the word 'offensive' reached their ears from his grandfather.

"That's it," Jeff said, setting down his hot chocolate and throwing off his blanket like he was about to charge into battle, Nick looking equally annoyed next to him.

"We're tired of this," Nick said, Jeff nodding in agreement.

"Guys, stop," Blaine mumbled. "Seriously, he's calmed down a bit, just give it a few minutes and he'll either ignore us or leave. It's not a big deal."

The Beaters looked conflicted but sighed after a moment and sat back down, grumbling and moving so close to the fire they were at risk of falling in. Kurt thought that Blaine was probably the only one they would ever *really* listen to when it came to something like this.

They sat in a rather tense silence, exchanging concerned glances and nervous looks as low voices continued from the kitchen. After a few more minutes, Blaine's mother appeared, sighing and looking harried.

"Is he staying?" Blaine said, looking over at her.

"Yes," she said in a mildly annoyed voice. "Gran won't stay without him."

"Doesn't he realize he's making things a thousand times worse?"

Blaine said. "He doesn't even care that...that Dad is..." he trailed off, staring into his mug and shaking his head as tears pooled in his eyes.

"He cares," his mother said, her own voice shaking. "He just...he doesn't show it well."

"You can say that again," Jeff muttered.

"I think a chimera would be more sympathetic," Nick grumbled next to him.

"You only have to deal with him until tomorrow," Blaine's mother said, leaning over the back of the couch to kiss him on the top of the head.

"Just try and ignore him. I've told him that if he doesn't keep quiet about you boys, I want him out and I don't want him back. Ever. You've put up with enough from everyone else Blaine, you should never have to put up with it from him."

Blaine sniffed and blinked a few times, eyes fixed on his mug.

"Why don't you boys go upstairs?" his mother said kindly. "There's chessboard in the closet and I'll bring you up dinner in a little while. It might just be easier to avoid him until he calms down."

"Should I stop wearing this?" Thad said in a small voice, holding up his hand to display his ring.

"No," Blaine's mother said firmly. "Don't you take that off for him. You have every right to wear it."

Thad smiled and blushed faintly, pushing his ring around his finger with his thumb. "Thank you," he mumbled.

She smiled, giving Blaine's shoulders a brief squeeze before returning to the kitchen.

They moved upstairs, crowded around Blaine's room, Kurt curled on the bed with Blaine against the pillows, Jeff and Nick sitting at their feet with the chessboard between them and Thad and Flint sitting together in the chair in the corner.

"I'm not looking forward to going back to school Monday," Blaine sighed, leaning back against the wall and closing his eyes.

"McGonagall would probably give you a few more days," Kurt said, , glancing up from where his head was resting in the crook of Blaine's neck. "If you need it."

"I'll be alright," Blaine said, stifling a yawn. "It's just going to be odd starting everything back up again, knowing I won't...won't be getting any more letters from him, you know?" He opened his eyes, which were overbright and fixed straight ahead. "And Mum is going to be all alone when Gran leaves."

"I know," Kurt sighed, snuggling closer to him and trying to instill some comfort with the touch. "It took a long time for it to sink in that my mom was gone. Thad said he was the same when his dad died. Sometimes when I would wake up after dreaming about her I'd just lie in bed with my eyes closed to try and hold on to as much of the memory as I could but...it's not healthy. It was so hard but...once I actually tried to move passed it rather than spending all my time wishing it hadn't happened, I started to feel like things could be normal again some day."

"And as for your mom," he continued, shifted a little as Jeff egged on one of his knights at his feet. "We'll write her all the time."

"We?" Blaine said, looking surprised.

"Of course," Kurt said, smiling. "If you think she wouldn't mind."

"She'd love it," Blaine said honestly. "I'm pretty sure she'd adopt you if it wouldn't make our relationship, um...well, you know."

Kurt laughed lightly. "Yeah, being romantically involved with my own brother would be strange." He paused, thinking of when he'd had a crush on Finn and biting back a laugh.

They hung around Blaine's room for the rest of the day, only chancing going downstairs when they had to use the bathroom. They'd found it easiest just to pretend Blaine's grandfather didn't exist, and he'd been doing the same with them, though the silence was always tense when they passed through the den to the bathroom.

After Blaine's mother brought them up a wonderful dinner of lamp chops, smiling though Kurt was starting to her wearing a little thin by everything, they all felt sleepy and sated. Thad and Flint fell asleep in Blaine's chair, Thad huddled in Flint's arms with the smallest of smiles on his face; Jeff and Nick were snoring loudly where they were stretched across the foot of Blaine's bed—well, Nick was on the bed, Jeff was half on, half off the mattress, his limbs sprawled in all directions and one arm flung across Nick's face.

Kurt rested against Blaine in the silence, looking up through the skylight at the twinkling stars and silver moon.

"Can you see it?" Blaine said softly, eyes fixed on the sky as well.



"Yeah," Kurt said, smiling and lifting his arm to point out one of the stars, the one that Blaine had bought him for his birthday the year before. "Right there."

Blaine squinted as his gaze followed where he was pointing. He smiled as he spotted it and kissed Kurt on the temple. "I love you," he whispered. "I missed you so much when you were gone. Sometimes I would just look out the window and find your star. I...I don't know what I would do if you hadn't come back, Kurt." He hung his head, tears sliding down his face as he closed his eyes.

Kurt wrapped his arms around him and held him tightly. "I'm sorry," he breathed as Blaine turned his head and cried silently into his shoulder. "Blaine, I'm so sorry I put you through that. I don't deserve everything you do. You put up with so much from...everyone. The last person you should be suffering over is me."

"No, it's alright," Blaine said, lifting his head and wiping his eyes. "I was an arse to you. You didn't...you shouldn't have had to deal with me treating you like that and abandoning you when you really needed me, even if it was just as a friend.... I'm just glad you came back. I...I need you, Kurt."

The words echoed in his head, dredged up from months before when Blaine had said them to him in the Three Broomsticks so long ago in the same broken, pleading voice.

"Blaine," Kurt said, finding his hand under the blanket and holding it tightly. "I love you. I'm not leaving you, alright?"

Blaine nodded, still tear-eyed, though he smiled and angled his head to kiss him, resting the hand that wasn't curled around his back on his jaw and stroking his thumb along his cheek. His fingers tightened as Kurt opened his mouth a little Blaine repeated the motion, their tongues slipping against each other hesitantly. The touch caught his breath in his throat, thankful his mouth was working of its own accord because he could barely think straight.

Blaine groaned very faintly and slid his hand around to splay his fingers on the back of Kurt's head and neck. Kurt shivered as Blaine tugged on his bottom lip for a moment before kissing along his jaw, gently pulling on his hair to tilt his head back and pressing his mouth against Kurt's neck.

Kurt bit his lips hard to keep quiet as Blaine nipped his neck and sucked at the marks his teeth had left. It was careful and slow, cautious as the first time they'd kissed over a year ago but giving him the same sense of being punch-drunk and breathless.

"Blaine," he breathed as Blaine's lips grazed over his Adam's apple to the other side of his neck. "Oh my god."

"Shh," Blaine said against him, his hot breath ghosting over Kurt's ear and making it even more difficult to stay silent.

Kurt closed his eyes, reminding himself that four of their friends were literally a few feet away, sleeping soundly.

"Blaine," he gasped as Blaine nuzzled under his ear and scraped his teeth gently across the soft skin. "We have to stop. We can't. Not here. Not...now."

Blaine stilled his movements, sighing across his neck. "You're right," he murmured. "I just...you look so good right now with the moonlight on you. It's like you're...glowing or something."

Kurt blushed at the compliment, his heart still beating rapidly in his chest.

Blaine smiled and brushed the backs of his fingers along his cheek and neck. "You're so beautiful," he said softly. "Veela would be jealous of you, I think."

Kurt made a small noise of amusement. "So you're turning back into a sap again?" he said, moving closer to him and kissing his neck lightly.

"Maybe," Blaine said. He yawned hugely and rested his head on top of Kurt's. "'Night, love."

"I love you," Kurt said, squeezing his leg gently under the blankets.

He felt Blaine's jaw shift against him as he smiled. "I love you, too."

Blaine was silent for a moment, Kurt closing his eyes and snuggling a little further down his chest.

"Thank you," Blaine murmured drowsily. "For being here with me.

Everything seems a lot let...hopeless with you around."

Kurt took his hand under the blanket and Blaine squeezed briefly. "I'll always be here for you," he said, feeling sleep starting to wash over him.

"I know," Blaine said, scooting down the pillows next to him. "That's why I love you."

---

*Leigh,*

*I know you probably just got back to the Castle but I just wanted to say that I already miss you. I know, I sound like a big tosser saying it but it's true. I can't believe I'll have to wait until your Easter break to see you again. It's driving me crazy thinking about it but, I guess we'll have a full week together then, at least.*

*I'm trying to decide what I miss the most. It's either your eyes or your lips. Stop laughing. I know you're laughing right now. It's true, though. I thought I loved you before, well, I have a whole new appreciation for you now that I know you have such a talented pair of lips. What did I say? Stop laughing.*

*My house smells like you now. Especially my couch but I guess that's to be expected given the amount of time you were lying on it. Oh, and did I mention I like your hands, too? Add them to the list of 'Things I Miss Most About Leighton.' I think you're trying to kill me, honestly, with the things you were doing. And then you just leave me alone with my history books to stew for a month. Not cool, Leigh. Not cool. But maybe you're suffering, too. That would make it a little better if you were. I wouldn't want to be the only one.*

*I think I'll just live on my couch now until you come back just so I can smell you. Okay, that sounded really creepy. And you're laughing again.*

*You do smell good though. It reminds me of the cedar trees that grew behind a house Mam and I stayed at for a few months right after we left. I'd go back and sit there and read your letters when you were still writing. Sometimes I would just cry and hate myself for not writing you back. I wanted to so badly. I missed you so much it was like someone had cut me in half, and half of me was still with you in Kenessey. Please don't laugh. I'm serious. I kept every single letter you sent me. I still have them with me in my closet. Sometimes I'd get them out and read them when I really missed you but then I'd get towards the end where you kept asking me why I wasn't writing back and then in the last one you said, 'I guess this means we're not friends anymore' and it always kills me to read that, to know how much I was hurting you and not being able to say why I was doing it.*

*I'm getting too sentimental now, aren't I? I'm sorry. I just really missed you. I'm so glad you found me because I don't think I'd ever be properly happy again if you hadn't.*

*Anyway, I just wanted to say I missed you and I can't wait to see you again. Also, I'm sorry about your neck. I didn't mean to bite that hard. I love you,*

*Gavin*

---

*Gav,*

*What am I supposed to say to all that? One second I'm laughing about the idea of you smelling your couch and the next I'm practically turning into a weepy mess in the middle of the dorm and the others are giving me weird looks.*

*I missed you, too. I miss you now. I'm not looking forward to not seeing you again for a whole month. And yes, by the way, I'm suffering, too. You'd just about destroyed all my self control when you started doing that thing to my ear. How did you even do that, anyway? If I made a list of 'Things I Miss Most About Gavin' it would be this:*

*Your tongue*

*Your tongue*

*Your tongue*

*Did I mention your tongue?*

*It's very talented, is what I'm saying. And my neck is fine. I Charmed the mark away. Though not before Grant and Scott saw it. They didn't stop laughing for twenty minutes and then when Bri found out he offered to Disillusion me so I could sneak down and finish what we started. I swear, I hate them all.*

*Leigh*

---

*Leigh,*

*Was I really that close to breaking your resolve? Damn, I should have kept going. And you like my tongue, huh? Well, I'm sure I could continue to show you what I can do with it. I'd like to kiss you until you start groaning like you were earlier and then I'd run my tongue along your ear like I was before. Then I'd lick across your neck and down your chest. You'd be sweating by now but I wouldn't mind. You taste as good as you smell (and as good as you look). And I'd probably just spend hours exploring every inch (and I mean every inch) of you with my tongue.*

*I'm definitely doing this at Easter. I don't care what you say.*

*Gav*

---

*Gav,*

*...Oh.*

*Well, I wasn't expecting that when you owl brought your letter. Are you trying to cause problems? Because now I'm sitting here on my bed with a pillow in my lap and it's your fault, you tosser.*

*Leigh*

---

*Did I really do that do you? Well, you deserve it anyway. That's what you get for making me deal with it. You know what? I'm having fun with this.*

*So where was I? Oh, right, so, after I've finished up with my tongue—which you apparently love—I'm going to push you back on the couch and suck on that spot on your neck. You know what I'm talking about. You just about stopped breathing when I did it earlier. And I'll run my fingers through your hair and pull your head back and kiss across the underside of your jaw and then—*

---

*And then what?*

---

*You'll have to wait until Easter to find out.*  
Gav

---

*You're cruel, you know that? Seriously cruel.*  
Leigh

---

*I know.*  
*I love you,*  
Gav

---

The gentle sound of rain hitting glass pulled Flint slowly from sleep. He blinked, rolling his shoulders and looking around in confusion. It took him a moment before he remembered that he was at Blaine's house. He glanced down at Thad, who was curled up in a ball, Acorn tucked beneath his arm and purring loudly.

Smiling, Flint kissed the top of his head and glanced through the skylight at the dreary morning sky. The others were still asleep, Kurt and Blaine resting against each other and Jeff and Nick sprawled in all directions at the end of the bed. Jeff snuffled in his sleep and his foot collided with Nick's arm. Nick smacked him soundly before rolling over and scooting away, all while still asleep. Honestly, they might as well have been married.

Shaking his head, Flint shifted carefully from under Thad, who mumbled something in Runes, smiled and curled a little more tightly around himself.

"I love you," Flint whispered, brushing his dark hair back and kissing his forehead.

Acorn slid from under Thad's arm and trotted after Flint down the stairs, looking expectant and meowing loudly.

"Hungry, are you?" Flint said with a smile. He bent over and picked up the cat, who purred and rubbed against him happily. "Alright, calm down. Give me a minute."

The house was quiet as he walked through it, gasping as his bare feet hit the cold tile of the kitchen. He set Acorn down and retrieved his wand from where he'd left it next to the couch the night before, flicking it to Conjure the cat his breakfast.

"Here," he grunted, setting the bowl in front of Acorn, who sniffed it experimentally before eating. "You're so picky. Thad has spoiled you." He sat down on the couch, rubbing his eyes and yawning. Rain pattered on the roof and through the branches of the trees outside. It was soft and lulling and he was just feeling himself drifting off again when a door closed somewhere in the house. He looked around at the

sound of footsteps and found himself face to face with Blaine's grandfather.

"Oh," the man grunted. "It's you." He turned back and went into the kitchen, muttering something that sounded an awful lot like 'disgusting.'

Flint shook with sudden resentment, pushing himself off the couch and following the man into the kitchen.

"I don't know what your problem is, Mr. Baradi" he said, trying to keep his voice level. "But you need to back off. Of all of us."

"Excuse me?" the man said, rounding on him with a sudden glint of anger.

"I get that you don't like the idea of two guys or *whatever*," Flint said, balling his fists to keep from hitting him, "but I love him! I love Thad and who are you to say that I'm not allowed to?"

"It's *revolting*," Mr. Baradi hissed, given Flint a look of repulsion.

"Me loving someone is revolting?" Flint said incredulously. "You're an ignorant old fool and I feel sorry for Blaine and the rest of your family for having to deal with you."

The man whipped out his wand. "You hold your tongue, young man," he snapped. "You need to learn to respect your elders."

"I'll give you my respect when you earn it," Flint said with just as much bite.

Mr. Baradi snarled and raised his wand a fraction of an inch.

"Flint, what's going on?"

They both turned to see Thad standing in the doorway, wearing one of Flint's t-shirts, which fell over one shoulder, and looking confused and sleepy. Acorn curled around his ankles, fixing Blaine's grandfather with a haughty look through his yellow eyes.

"Nothing, pet," Flint said, forcing himself to calm down. "Don't worry about it."

Thad yawned and shuffled towards him, rocking up on his toes and kissing him on the cheek. He snuggled under Flint's arm and turned to Blaine's grandfather.

"I got 'Outstandings' on all ten of my O.W.L.s," he said offhandedly. "I turned a classmate into a donkey last year. I'd leave us alone."

Flint gaped at him, half-smiling as Blaine's grandfather gave Thad a disgusted look before striding back down the hall towards the guest room. He heard the door slam and turned to Thad with a disbelieving look.

"Pet," he said, almost laughing. "That was—I love you."

Thad smiled, looking pleased, and blushed faintly. "Love you, too," he mumbled.

"You're so...unpredictable, you know that?" Flint said, wrapping his arms around him and kissing the top of his head. "Things are never boring with you."

Chewing his bottom lip, Thad ran his hand down his chest absently. "I didn't like waking up without you there," he said softly.

"Sorry, pet," Flint said, running a hand through Thad's tousled hair.

"Can I get you some tea or something?"

Thad looked down at his chest, sliding his hands around his neck and standing on Flint's toes to reach his ear. "Or something," he said softly, his tongue tracing the shell of his ear.

Flint shivered and closed his eyes. "What did you have in mind?" he murmured, fisting his fingers in Thad's shirt as the other boy sucked on his earlobe, whining and sighing longingly.

"Bathroom," Thad keened, fingers scraping across the back of his neck.

Flint slid his hands down to grab his thighs and hoist him up around his waist. Thad didn't pause in his gentle sucking and nipping of Flint's neck, his breath coming a little harshly as Flint walked towards the bathroom, which was mercifully close.

He set Thad down on the counter, reluctantly stepping back to close and look the door before casting *Muffliato*. He tossed his wand on the counter and turned back to Thad, groaning at the sight of his now bare chest and legs, only his dark briefs covering his hips and upper thighs. Thad smiled and gestured for him, leaning back against the wall and spreading his legs as Flint peeled his shirt over his head.

"Why do we always do this in friends' bathrooms?" he said thoughtfully as he yanked down his sweats and moved to stand between Thad's knees.

Thad giggled and snaked his arms around Flint's neck and his legs around his hips, pulling him close. "We can stop if you'd like," he said even as one hand slid flat down Flint's chest and snapped the waistband of his boxers.

"Never," Flint mumbled, grinning and gripping his hips to pull him flush against his chest, sighing at the contact of skin on skin.

"So warm," Thad murmured, his fingernails scraping down Flint's back across taut muscle and hot skin.

"Mm, well *you're* hot," Flint said, nibbling at the crook of Thad's neck. Thad giggled again, though it turned into a gasp as Flint hit the soft spot at the hollow his head neck and he threw his head back, hissing in pain when he hit the wall.

"Are you okay?" Flint said, hastily straightening up as Thad rubbed the back of his head.

"Mhmm," he said. He blushed. "Sorry."

"It's fine," Flint said, smiling as he ducked his head and continued pressing soft kisses along Thad's neck.

Thad groaned, pushing his hips up into him and digging into his back.

"Flint, ah, yes, oh god." His legs curled around Flint's waist, his erection pressing against Flint's stomach as he pulled their bodies together.

"Merlin, pet, the sounds you make," Flint breathed, savoring the short mewling whines finding their way from the back of Thad's throat to mingle with his breathy sighs. It sent his pulse shooting skyward.

"Want do you want?"

"Flint," Thad whimpered. "I just want *you*. Please. Now."

Flint hiked Thad up off the counter to slide an arm under his legs, propping him up and ghosting the fingers of his other hand across Thad's lips. Thad immediately opened his mouth and pulled three of his fingers in, sucking and lapping at them gently. He opened his eyes and gave Flint a faintly nervous look, his already flushed cheeks turning a deeper shade of pink.

Flint bit back a groan at the anxious desire in Thad's dark eyes as his tongue slid over his fingers for a few more seconds before pulling away with a faint *pop*. Flint kissed him the moment his reddened lips were free, needing to taste him and run his tongue along the inside of his mouth.

Thad kissed him back reading, shifty as Flint reached around him to slip his wet fingers down his briefs. He rubbed gently at the ring of muscle, eliciting a strangled moan from Thad, before pushing one finger inside the tight heat.

"God yes," Thad groaned, wetting his lips and tossing his head back.

"Flint, more, *please*."

Flint kissed across his shoulder as he pressed a second finger inside him, scissoring them carefully as Thad panted heavily, his shoulders rising and falling with each shallow gasp. Flint slid a third finger in and Thad whined in pain but slid one hand down to graze under the waistband of Flint's boxers.

"Flint, *please*," he groaned, squirming against him as he moved his fingers gently. "Just...now."

Flint grinned and pulled his fingers free, giving Thad's ass a brief squeeze before stepping back from the counter, taking a moment to appreciate Thad's flushed skin, the sheen of sweat across his faintly toned arms and chest, the tented front of his briefs, and the way his head was tilted back to expose his neck, currently covered in faint red marks from Flint's mouth. He gave Flint a needy, almost pleading look, twitching his hips forward off the countertop.



Flint glanced at the door before pulling his boxers down, watching Thad's eyes flick briefly downward, darkening further. Thad slipped down onto the floor, wriggling out of his briefs. The necklace Flint had given him for his birthday hung against his chest and he fiddled with the pendant for a moment before beckoning Flint with a crook of his finger, biting his lip and flushing at the gesture. Flint slid one arm around Thad's waist and pulled him flush against him, groaning at the touch as Thad's bare skin pressed against his own, sweat-slicked and searing hot, Thad's erection rubbed against his thigh and Thad whined needily, lifting one leg to wrap around the back of Flint's thigh.

Flint glanced around the bathroom, eyes falling on the stool in the corner. "C'mere, pet," he said, keeping Thad against him as he moved towards the stool. He grabbed a towel from the rack and threw it across the cushion before sitting down, Thad standing between his legs.

Thad ducked his head and kissed him, a little messy and full of teeth, tongue, and hot breath, as he grabbed onto Flint's shoulders to keep steadily and wrapped his legs around his waist, sitting in his lap and draping his arms around Flint's neck.

Flint reached between them to wrap his fingers around Thad's cock, rubbing his thumb along the slit to spread pre-come across the head as Thad let out a shout of pleasure.

"Flint, *now*," he said, sounding a little impatient as he dropped his head to Flint's shoulder.

Flint shifted and lifted him a little from his lap. Thad tightened his legs around him and pulled himself up enough for Flint to position himself and push inside him slowly, closing his eyes as pleasure raced through him.

Thad groaned, leaning back in his lap to make the position less uncomfortable. Flint stared at him for a moment, his tanned and glistening skin moving as the muscles shifted beneath it.

"You're perfect," Flint said, leaning forward to kiss his chest before pushing upward into him.

Thad's eyes rolled back as a keening whine passed across his parted lips. "Oh god, Flint, more," he gasped, his fingers digging into Flint's shoulders as he rolled his hips into him.

Flint pulled him down and thrust his hips up at once and Thad cried out at the movement, his legs twitching around Flint's middle.

"I love you," Flint said, continuing to hold Thad down in his lap as he rocked upward against him. "I love you so much and I love you like this, when we're so close and you make those sounds and give me those looks. I can't believe I get this forever."

Thad lowered his head to look at him, looking a complete wreck with his pink lips and slightly sweaty hair clinging to his forehead. Flint groaned at the sight of him.

"Love you, too," Thad choked in between gasps.

Flint shifted his arms so he could reach between them again and pump gently at Thad's cock. Thad bit hard on his lower lip, squeezing his eyes shut as his body shook.

Flint closed his eyes, focusing on the gentle mewling cries Thad was making in combination with the incredible pressure and heat around him as Thad rolled his hips down against him.

"Flint, iuwiz naudis, laibhjanah, please, oh god, yes, hardusor, yey, *more*."

Flint swallowed hard, the heat building inside him with every word Thad said as sweat beaded and rolled down his chest. Thad fingers trembled against his shoulders, clutching so hard Flint was sure he was going to draw blood.

"Oh...Flint, god, I'm—*dammit*, ah—" He threw back his head, his back arching as his came across Flint's hand and his own stomach with a loud shout, still rocking his hips into Flint's.

Flint swore as Thad clenched around him and leaned his head forward to give him a sated look, licking his pink lips and smiling as he pushed his damp hair back off his forehead. The look sent Flint over the edge and his toes curled against the tile as he shook with his own orgasm. He leaned back against the wall, gasping and wetting his lips. He winced as Thad stood up to pull off him before sitting back down on his knees and kissing his neck sloppily.

"Love you," Flint said, rubbing his back absently.

"You too," Thad murmured, nuzzling his neck happily.

"And don't listen to what anyone says," Flint said as he remembered what had triggered what had just happened. "They don't deserve your time or attention. I love you and if they don't understand, I don't care, it's not going to change that."

Thad lifted his head from his shoulder and smiled, kissing him on the cheek gently. "I love you too. And we're getting married and if they don't like it they can pitch themselves off the Astronomy tower."

Flint laughed and squeezed him around the waist.

Thad slipped off his lap, wincing faintly and looking a little dazed as he walked towards where his wand had rolled onto the floor. He cleaned himself and Flint off before tugging his close back on, looking positively adorable with his mussed hair, pink lips, and over-large clothes.

"Mmm, look at you," Flint said once he'd gotten dressed. "I can't believe I get to wake up to this every morning. Well...to you, at least, not the sex. But I wouldn't mind that either," he added thoughtfully. Thad giggled and snuggled against his side as they walked out of the bathroom together, Flint shoving his wand in the waistband of his sweats.

Kurt and Blaine were sitting at the breakfast table sipping mugs of tea, Jeff and Nick watching Blaine's mother make breakfast excitedly.

"Morning," Kurt said, looking them over with a faint smirk.

"Morning," Thad said, not meeting his eye and blushing as he poured himself a cup of tea and sat next to him.

"Is your granddad here still?" Flint said, glancing around and trying not to let his anger get to him.

"They left a few minutes ago," Blaine said as Flint sat next to him. "He looked pissed—"

"*Blaine*," his mother warned him, looking up from the eggs she was frying.

"Sorry, he looked *angry* about something," Blaine said, dipping a Ginger Newt into his tea and popping it into his mouth when it was soaked through.

"Well, it's a good thing he left," Thad muttered so only those at the table could hear him. "If he doesn't like the idea of gay marriage, I can't imagine what he'd think about all the sex we just had."

Kurt spat out a mouthful of tea across the table, coughing and spluttering as Blaine patted him on the back, Flint shook with silent laughter, and Thad smirked faintly into his tea.

---

The rain pattered against the windowpanes for much of the day, leaving a chill breeze sweeping around the cottage. Kurt spent most of the day curled on the couch with Blaine, working on the remaining homework Thad had delivered for them on Friday. Jeff and Nick were reluctantly doing their own homework, a bowl of Every Flavor Beans sitting between them. Occasionally they'd flick a bean at one of them, receiving a scowl in return, until Thad, who was helping Flint finish his Runes essay, threatened to take the sweets away.

They stopped and contented themselves with throwing the beans at each other until Acorn, who'd been watching the shifting beans every time one of them stuck their hands in the bowl, decided to take a flying leap from the mantle into the bowl, sending beans everywhere as Jeff let out a high-pitched scream and dove for cover behind the couch.

Thad fell about with laughter as Kurt rolled his eyes and flicked his wand to gather the beans back in the bowl, which Nick clutched to him, glaring at Acorn as Jeff peeked cautiously around the couch. After dinner, they all gather around the fireplace with their bags as Blaine's mother hugged each of them in turn.

"Be good," she said, looking pointedly at Jeff and Nick, who gave her looks of confused—and completely unconvincing—innocence.

She hugged Kurt next to last, squeezing him tightly. "Thank you," she said in his ear. "For taking care of him. If either of you need anything, let me know. Don't let him bottle it up like he always does."

"I won't," Kurt said, smiling as she pulled back, tucking her dark hair behind her ear. "I'll keep an eye on him, I promise."

"Thank you," she mouthed as Blaine approached her. They hugged for a few minutes, talking quietly. Tears came to both their eyes, though they never broke.

Blaine sniffed as he released his mother, who gave him a watery smile and lifted the jar of Floo powder from the mantle, holding it out to them. Flint went first, clutching his bag and Tornadoes letter, followed by Thad, who struggled a little with Acorn's basket. Jeff and Nick went next, waving goodbye to Blaine's mother as they disappeared in a whoosh of emerald.

Kurt went next, giving Blaine's mother a small smile.

"Thank you for everything," he said, pulling her into another brief hug. He took a pinch of Floo Powder and tossed it over the grate, stepping into the emerald flames with his bag. He turned to Blaine, who was staring around the den with a look of sad nostalgia.

"Hogwarts!" Kurt said firmly.

There was a rush of sound and color and he kept his arms tight to his sides as he was whisked off towards the Castle. His feet hit stone hard and he threw out his arms to keep from falling forward.

"Mr. Hummel," McGonagall said, looking up from her desk and giving him a very small smile. "How are you doing?"

"Alright, ma'am, thank you," Kurt said, brushing ash from his clothes and looking to the others, who were waiting to the side for him and Blaine, who appeared spinning in the fireplace a moment later.

He looked faintly woozy and shook his head to clear it as he stepped out next to Kurt.

"Anderson," McGonagall said, her usually stern gaze softening. "If there's anything I or any of the staff can do, don't hesitate to come to us."

"Thank you," Blaine mumbled, looking a little nervous for some reason. "Could I...I mean, may I speak with you alone, Professor?"

She looked vaguely surprised but nodded. "Of course," she said, standing and opening the door for the others to leave. "Back to your towers then, boys. Campbell, Hamilton, don't forget you have detention Friday for your little stunt with those bowtruckles." Jeff and Nick scowled but gave a muttered, "Yes, ma'am," as they left with Thad and Flint.

"I'll be down in a minute," Blaine said, giving Kurt a reassuring smile. "Alright," Kurt said, a little confused as he stepped onto the revolving spiral staircase. He waited beside the stone gargoyle for a few minutes, watching the occupants of the portraits flit around and talk with each other.

When the gargoyle leapt aside, Kurt turned to see Blaine stepping into the corridor, looking a little worn but happy nonetheless.

"So what's up?" Kurt said, taking Blaine's hand as they set off down the hall together.

"I resigned," Blaine said. "As Head Boy."

"W-what?" Kurt said, gaping at him. "Why?"

Blaine sighed. "It was...too much. I was trying to juggle being Captain and homework and Head Boy duties and you were suffering. I wasn't paying you any attention and before you start apologizing, I'm doing this for both of us. I was killing myself and...frankly, I need a break and I need time with you. I'll just be a Prefect now. McGonagall's giving the position to the Gryffindor Prefect, Robert Larkin."

Kurt could barely believe what he was hearing. He had to stop staring at Blaine when he nearly fell down a flight of stairs. "B-but you *like* being Head Boy, don't you?" he said.

"Yeah, I did," Blaine said, shrugging. "But I love *you*."

"I love you, too," Kurt said in a small voice.

Blaine smiled over at him and squeezed his hand. "Things will be easier now. And I needed...time, anyway...to get over what-what happened...." He took a steadying breath and Kurt walked a little closer to him.

"Please don't let it all build up," Kurt said. "If you want to talk about it, *please* talk about it. I hate seeing you hurting because you think you have to deal with it on your own."

Blaine blinked back the tears forming in his eyes. "I...I'll try." He sniffed, not looking at him.

"Why don't we get unpacked and we'll just lie on your bed together," Kurt suggested.

Blaine smiled faintly. "I'd like that," he said softly. He looked over at Kurt, the hurt and vulnerability strong in his eyes, though he could see the love shining through as well. "I love you, Kurt."

"I love you too, Blaine," he said, leaning over to kiss him gently on the cheek as they climbed the stairs to the Ravenclaw tower together.

## Chapter Twenty-One

It was dark and cold. He could hear the screams drifting through his ears and he struggled desperately to get free, throat sore and scratchy from calling out.

"Stop it, please!" he shouted as another strangled sob of pain found him. "Stop hurting him!"

But there was no one. No one to listen. No one to *care* that he was bound and Kurt was in pain and he couldn't do anything to stop it. But he couldn't lose Kurt. He *couldn't*. If Kurt was gone he wouldn't have anything left. He needed Kurt.

Another scream, louder than the other, pierced the black and he thrashed against the thick rope around his waist...

---

"*Blaine!*"

Blaine's eyes snapped open and he sat bolt upright, staring around the darkened dormitory and panting like he'd just run a marathon. He blinked, allowing himself to realize that everything he'd heard and seen was just another awful nightmare.

They'd been getting worse and more frequent in the week and a half since his father's death. He was having them almost every night now. There was a hand on his arm and he turned to see Kurt watching him closely, his blue-grey eyes washed out in the moonlight peeking through the part in the hangings where Kurt had slipped through onto his bed.

"Another nightmare?" he said in a small voice.

Blaine nodded, struggling to disentangle himself from the blankets wrapped around his middle. His face was damp and he turned away from Kurt as he realized he was crying.

"Blaine?" Kurt said softly.

The sound of him, of the tender tone of his voice when he'd *just* been hearing him scream in pain in his dream, broke him. He released an involuntary, dry sob into his hand and Kurt's arms were suddenly around him, holding him close.

"Shh," Kurt soothed gently as Blaine clutched him, gripping his arms and chest just to make sure he was there, that he was real and whole and unharmed.

"I keep telling them not to hurt you," Blaine said, leaning into Kurt's touch. "I tried...I tried to stop them, Kurt."

"Blaine, it's okay, I'm right here," Kurt said, his voice shaking a little.

"No one's hurting me."

"Will you sleep here?" Blaine said hopefully. "I don't have them so much when I sleep with you."

Kurt nodded, his eyes glittering with unshed tears. "Of course," he said."

There was the faint creak of bedsprings followed by soft footsteps on the other side of the curtains, which parted after a moment, a blonde and brunette head peeking through.

"Are you okay, Blaine?" Jeff said, looking like a kicked puppy. He and Nick clamored onto the bed with anxious looks as Blaine curled his knees up to his chest to give them room.

"Are you having bad dreams?" Nick said quietly.

Blaine shrugged, not meeting their eyes. He felt weak and vulnerable and he hated it. He'd always managed to handle things on his own, been able to face his own demons without others needing to help him.

"Is there anything we can do?" Jeff said.

"We can break into the hospital wing and steal some of that sleep potion," Nick offered.

Blaine shook his head. "M'fine" he mumbled, staring at his lap.

The Beaters exchanged lost looks with Kurt and Blaine felt even more exposed with their eyes on him.

"I just want to sleep," he said, fiddling with the corner of his sheet.

"Seriously, I'm fine, guys."

Jeff and Nick looked reluctant to go but sighed at a nod from Kurt before patting Blaine on the knee and slipping back through the hangings. Blaine heard their mattresses shifting as they lay back down and he thought he could make out soft whispers as well.

Prickling shame bubbled up to burn his face and neck. They were talking about *him*, about *his* problems, and he hated it, hated how everyone was treated him like he was fragile and broken when he wanted so badly not to be.

Lying down, he rolled onto his side away from Kurt as tears stung his eyes again. Kurt lay down next to him and wrapped his arm around his chest to hold him close.

"I love you," he said, kissing Blaine's neck softly. "I'm right here, okay?"

Blaine nodded, biting his tongue hard to keep from crying.

Kurt brushed his fingers over his chest, his heartbeat a gentle thump against Blaine's back and his breath warm on his neck. Blaine waited, pretending to sleep until Kurt drifted off behind him, his chest rising and falling steadily.

Silent tears slid down his face as he struggled not to shake. He pulled the blanket more tightly around himself, his hand finding Kurt's, which tightened instinctively around his fingers.



There were days when things were fine, when he could laugh and talk with Kurt and the others and felt almost normal. But there were also the bad days, when something triggered the feeling of helplessness, like when he got letters from his mother, who was keeping herself busy at work and spending time with her friends, and they were signed 'Mum' instead of 'Mum and Dad'. Or when Kurt was discussing wedding plans with Thad and occasionally Flint as they tried to decide how they wanted the parents seated at the reception.

He tried not to let them see how much it was wearing on him.

Admittedly, things were much better with just Prefect duties rather than those of Head Boy, but he was still losing sleep. Half the time he'd wake up in a cold sweat, tears streaming down his face.

He'd taken to closing his hangings in the hopes that Kurt, who slept in his own bed for the most part as they still hadn't moved back into the sexual side of their relationship, wouldn't see him twisting and turning in his bed. He didn't like asking Kurt to stay with him either for the fact that it made him feel needy. But sometimes he couldn't stop himself from crying out in his sleep.

Once he'd woken up, he'd often just lay awake, dreading sleep and forcing himself not to drift off. Kurt was starting to notice though, he could tell. No matter how hard he struggled to hide it, to insist he was just tired from readjusting after everything, he could tell Kurt saw how bad the nightmares were getting.

He was sitting in the library the day after the incident, trying to focus on his Arithmancy essay as Wes and David worked on their Care of Magical Creatures homework next to him, occasionally flashing him a concerned look. He was exhausted, barely having slept more than a few hours each night in the past week. His head rested on his hand as he stared through bleary eyes at the number chart he'd been trying to interpret.

"Blaine?" David said hesitantly.

"Hmm?" Blaine said, half-glancing at him.

"Are you doing okay?" David said, Wes frowning next to him. "You don't look so good."

"M'fine," Blaine said, stifling a yawn and rubbing his eyes to try and force them to stay open.

"Blaine, we know what you did with...Jeremiah after everything he put you through," Wes said, shifting in his chair and setting his quill down.

"If you're doing what you did then, holing up inside yourself, you need to stop before you hurt yourself."

"Please, Blaine," David said insistently. "I don't pretend to understand what you're going through, but we can all see what this is doing to you."

"You need to talk to *someone*," Wes said, "If not to us or McGonagall or Flitwick, then *at least* to Kurt. We know he's tried asking you about it."

Blaine gripped his face in his hands, pressing his palms hard against his eyes until white lights popped in front of his lids.

"Kurt really loves you, Blaine," David said kindly, setting a hand on Blaine's arm. "Let him care. Let all of us care, please. Before you self-destruct."

Wes nodded next to him, the two of them exchanging a worried look as Blaine shook with sudden tears. It irritated him, made him hate himself, feeling like this, like there was nothing he could do to stop the situation that was spiraling out of control.

"Here," David said, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a bar of Honeydukes chocolate, which he passed to Blaine. "It helps. It really does," he said.

Blaine stared at the chocolate for a moment, sniffing, before taking a piece with a muttered thanks.

"You and your weird Defense facts," Wes murmured, taking a piece of chocolate himself.

David chuckled and Blaine gave a weak smile as he chewed and felt a warmth seeping through him from the chocolate.

"Il a dit qu'il a fait assez de pennes pour durer eux cinq ans. Il est sur le point d'exploser."

Blaine looked up at the voice, which was followed by a tinkling laugh. Kurt appeared through the shelves with Cross, who was grinning broadly as Kurt laughed. Blaine felt the faintest lurch of jealousy. He thought he'd probably always be wary around the Slytherin after what had happened, though he completely trusted Kurt.

Kurt's face lit up when his eyes fell on Blaine, though his smile faltered when he saw the reddened state of Blaine's eyes and the fresh tears on his cheeks.

"Hey, I'll talk to you later, Leigh, okay?" Kurt said, looking at Cross, who looked faintly concerned. "Make sure you write Simone about singing if you think she would. Now, go write Gavin back like you know you're dying to do."

Cross grinned and walked off, clutching a letter in his hand.

"We'll leave you to it," Wes said, packing up his things as David did the same next to him.

"See you, Blaine, Kurt," David said with a faint smile.

"Bye, guys," Kurt said absently as he took David's vacated seat.

They sat in momentary silence, Blaine trying to discreetly wipe his eye on his sleeve.

"Stop," Kurt said softly, taking his wrist. "Blaine, you need to stop doing this and talk to me."

"I'm fine, Kurt," Blaine said, not looking at him.

"You're not," Kurt said, his voice cracking. "You're not fine and you refuse to let me help you. You said you weren't going to do this, Blaine."

"I said I'd try," Blaine corrected him, staring at his hands.

"And you're not," Kurt said. "Blaine, I *hate* seeing you like this. It kills me and all I want to do is help you and you won't let me."

Blaine sniffed and hastily lowered his head, shielding his eyes with his hand as they stung again and his vision blurred.

"I'm worried about you," Kurt said, taking his other hand on the table. The touch made Blaine's eyes well even more with tears. "We all are. Your mother writes me almost every day to see how you are and I hate having to tell her you're suffering when I said I'd take care of you. I feel like a failure."

Blaine looked up to see his grey-blue eyes shining with tears, face screwed up with a pained expression.

"You're not a failure," Blaine said quietly. "I love you."

"Then let me help you," Kurt choked, voice thick with emotion.

"Please, Blaine. I love you so much and I can't stand seeing you this way."

Blaine squeezed his eyes shut and tears slipped down his cheeks.

"I hate feeling like this," he said, opening his eyes to look at Kurt. "I hate feeling helpless. Like I have no control over any of it."

"I know," Kurt said, nodding as tears slid down his own face. "I know, Blaine, but you *can't* control everything. You're killing yourself trying." Blaine raked his fingers through his hair. "I just want things to be normal again," he said.

Kurt brushed his thumb over his cheek gently. "I know," he said, moving closer to him. "I know, Blaine, me too. I swear one day it's going to be better."

"When?" Blaine said, half-pleading.

Kurt looked completely torn by the tone of his voice and slid his chair against his own to wrap an arm around him and pull him close.

He felt like a child, sitting in the middle of the library sobbing into Kurt's shoulder. He'd been that person when he was younger, scared and nervous, and he'd gotten over it after he'd come out at the end of third year, promised himself he'd never be that person again. But his life felt like it was crashing down around him.

"I don't know when it's going to get better, but I swear, I'll be right here, okay?" Kurt said, stroking his hair slowly. It was calming and he stopped crying long enough to nod against Kurt's shoulder.

He lifted his head and saw Kurt struggling not to cry at the sight of him, swollen, red-rimmed and tired eyes, flushed and tear-stained cheeks and unkempt hair.

"Blaine," he said, sounding broken as he cupped Blaine's cheek in his hand. "Blaine, you need to get some sleep."

"But...class," Blaine said, glancing at the clock. The free period was over in ten minutes, when they had Potions.

"No," Kurt said firmly. "We're going upstairs and you're sleeping."

Blaine watched in silence as Kurt carefully packed away his things for him and swung both their bags onto his shoulder, holding a hand out for Blaine, who took it and stood to follow him out of the library. His feet felt like lead at this point, heavy and clumsy and he stumbled a few times from sheer exhaustion.

Kurt gave the eagle knocker the answer to its question about boggarts when they reached it a few minutes later and Blaine trudged up to the dormitory with him, eyes drooping and arching at the lack of sleep. The room was dark, the curtains still closed over the windows from the night before.

"Lie down," Kurt said, in a firm voice, though Blaine could hear the love and concern behind it.

Blaine complied, slipping off his shoes and black robes before collapsing onto his bed, sighing at the relief of the soft mattress and sea of blankets and pillows. He loosened his tie as Kurt locked the door and pulled off his own shoes and robes and sat down at his feet, holding his hand out expectantly.

Blaine shifted and stretched his legs across Kurt's lap, groaning faintly as Kurt started rubbing his foot, his thumbs working across the arch and down to the heel.

"Is that alright?" Kurt said, kissing his toe through his socks.

Blaine nodded, closing his eyes and leaning back into the pillows.

"Brilliant," he murmured. "Thank you, love."

"Anything you want," Kurt said, moving to his other foot and working the sore muscle and tendon.

Blaine lifted his head from the pillow to look at him. "Kurt, could we...I mean...it's been three months and...I just want to feel *something* other than...miserable."

Kurt stilled his hands and gave him a steady look. "Blaine, I don't think that's really a healthy way of dealing with it, do you?"

"Please," Blaine said. "We don't have to, you know...have sex or anything I just...I want to be close to you. Being around you is the only time I don't feel completely lost."

Kurt watched him closely for a moment before nodding. "Alright," he said. "Whatever you want. I love you."

"I love you, too," Blaine said, closing his eyes as Kurt continued gently rubbing his feet and ankles, pushing up the leg of his slacks to kiss his shin.

Blaine sighed and focused on the touch, which he'd been missing for so long, the gentle caress of Kurt's long fingers on his skin. Kurt moved up the bed and stretched out beside him, his fingers trailing up the inside of Blaine's thigh.

Something stirred in his gut, his very blood suddenly heating through as Kurt's lips grazed over his jaw and he tugged Blaine's tie loose before tossing it on the floor. Blaine placed one hand on Kurt's waist, pulling him closer and into a slow kiss.

Kurt worked at the buttons on Blaine's shirt, his tongue dancing around Blaine's mouth as he moaned gently, his hips pressing against the side of Blaine's thigh. Blaine tightened his fingers in Kurt's shirt at the feel of Kurt reacting to their touch just as much as he was. This was what he needed. He needed closeness, needed intimacy, needed the pure love and desire between the touch of trembling fingers and catch of breath in throats.

Kurt's leg slid over him and Blaine held his hips to pull him on top of him, tilting his head back as Kurt mouthed at his neck, not the heated and rough kisses that had become the majority of their relationship towards the end before, but a soft, careful brush of lips on skin.

"I love you," Blaine whispered as Kurt tugged at his earlobe with his teeth, his hands gliding down Blaine's now bare chest.

"I love you, too," Kurt breathed, warm and low in his ear.

Kurt sat up to unbutton his shirt and Blaine couldn't stop himself from running his fingers down his smooth, pale chest as he did. He groaned at the touch, the feel of his skin that he hadn't had for so long.

He skimmed his hands over Kurt's shoulders to push his shirt back.

Kurt shrugged it off and tossed it to the side before leaning back down and pressing his lips against Blaine's, hot breath and barely there sighs passing between them as Blaine slid his hands down Kurt's back, feeling the curve of his spine and the twitch of muscle beneath his fingertips.

He thought he could do this for hours, simply rediscovering Kurt's body inch by inch, testing the way each stretch of moonbright skin reacted to his touch until they were both breathless and drunk of each other's taste.

Kurt teased his lower lip between his teeth for a moment before sitting up and scooting back Blaine's legs to sit on his thighs, Blaine's hands resting on his knees as he flicked open the button of Blaine's tented slacks.

Blaine groaned and pressed his head back in the pillow as Kurt palmed him through his pants before tugging down the zipper and peeling his boxers down over his hips. Blaine sighed in relief as Kurt freed his now aching erection.

"Kurt," he groaned, pushing his hips up into him and wetting his lips. Kurt leaned forward, pushing up on his knees to kiss him, just a few careful pecks. Blaine took one of Kurt's hands in his own and kissed his palm, Kurt shaking a little as he kept himself propped up on one arm. Blaine moved his other hand down to rub Kurt through his slacks as he ran his tongue across Kurt's palm and fingers. Kurt whined in the back of his throat, his lips quivering and the tip of his tongue flicking out across them.

Blaine pulled him back down into another kiss, running his tongue across the back of his teeth and over his palette, the sweet taste of him making his head spin. Kurt sat back a little reluctantly, Blaine releasing a whine of protest which melded into a low groan as Kurt sat on his thighs and wrapped his slick palm and fingers around his cock and pumped gently.

"Oh my god," he gasped, his voice taut with desire. He swallowed hard, gritting his teeth as Kurt moved his thumb across the slit of his cock and smeared saliva and pre-come across him, still moving his hand carefully, the fingers of his other hand moving to rub along the base in small circles.

He bit his lip, his breath coming hard and fast and faltering through his nose. "Kurt," he moaned. "I love you...you're so gorgeous, you know that? *Ah*, the way your eyes change color. They're so blue right now it's...they're like stars or something, the way they, ugh, they shine like that."

Kurt smiled. He did look amazing, with his slightly mussed hair falling loose over his forehead, his cheeks flushed pink and the faintest sheen of sweat on his pale skin. He pushed his hips down a little against Blaine's legs and his head dropped back, his throat bobbing and the tendons in his neck twitching as he swallowed.

"Gorgeous," Blaine breathed, barely audible over the sound of Kurt's heavy panting, his hand still working around Blaine's cock, the other digging into his hip bone.

Kurt rolled his hips forward again, his hand moving a little faster around Blaine's cock even as Blaine could see him straining at his own slacks.

"*Blaine*," he moaned, his pink lips parted and glistening. His eyes shone in the darkness, vivid and clear and digging into Blaine's with such a mix of love and lust that he could barely breathe.

The heat crept up to swirl in his gut, coiling and contracting as Kurt flicked his wrist and pumped his hand even as he rocked his hips against Blaine's legs to try and gain his own friction.

"Kurt, *ah*, god, love, that's...I'm—oh my god—" He dug his fingers into Kurt's knees as he came across Kurt's hand and stomach with a low moan, wave after wave of pleasure rocking through him. White flashed across his vision for a split second as his eyes rolled back and he arched off the bed.

Struggling to catch his breath, he slumped against the bed, limp and pliant. He groaned as Kurt unfastened his own slacks and reached into his briefs to wrap his fingers around himself, throwing his head back and sighing at the touch.

"No, love, let me," Blaine murmured, gripping Kurt's hips to pull him up closer to him.

Kurt pulled his own hand free from his briefs, whimpering as Blaine replaced it with his own, working at Kurt's cock as the other boy twitched his hips and dragged his fingers down Blaine's arms and chest, shoulders rising and falling with each harsh, shallow gasp.

"Oh god, Blaine, I'm so close," he groaned, eyes fluttering closed and thighs tightening around Blaine's waist.

Blaine pumped a few more times and Kurt let out a shout of pleasure and warmth and wet spread over Blaine's fingers. Kurt arched his back and rolled his shoulders back, the muscles in his arms going taut, his soft, supple skin gleaming with sweat.

Really, just watching him like this, falling apart and gasping Blaine's name into the semi-darkness was what he'd missed, knowing he could do this to Kurt sent a surge of self-confidence through him that swelled his mood immensely.

Kurt slumped his shoulders forward after a few more seconds, dropping his head to his chest, and Blaine pulled his hand free and groped for his wand where he'd tossed it on the bed. He cleaned them both off as Kurt caught his breath.

"Come here," Blaine said softly, wrapping his arms around Kurt's shoulders. "I miss holding you."

Kurt obeyed, falling forward to lay half-on, half-off him, their legs tangled together and their slick chests warm and pressed against one another.

"I love you," Blaine said, pressing a tender kiss to the damp fringe of Kurt's hair.

"I love you, too," Kurt murmured, his arm draped across Blaine's chest, one finger tracing the lines of muscle and fiddling with the dusting of dark hair. "I missed this. I missed being close to you."

"Me too," Blaine said, tightening his hold around him. "It...helps. Just knowing I have you here and that we can be so intimate. I want this forever."

Kurt smiled against his side, lifting his head to rest his chin on his chest. "Me too," he said, closing his eyes and tilting his head as Blaine pushed his hair back off his forehead. "And we will. No matter what. I'm never leaving you again."

"Now, you need to sleep," he added with a stern look.

Blaine smiled and kissed the tip of his nose. "Whatever you say, love," he said, struggling to zip his slacks back up and pull the blankets over their lower halves before flicking his wand to unlock the door. He wrapped his arms around Kurt again as Kurt laid his head back down on his chest.

He closed his eyes, relishing the sound of Kurt's steady breaths, the feel of them against his skin, his warm weight comforting and pressed against his side so familiar though they hadn't done this in so long. Slowly, gradually, finally, he drifted off. And for the first time in almost three weeks, he slept peacefully.

---

It was like watching a phoenix being reborn, the transformation Blaine made over the next few days. He was happy and laughing and joking again. He still had his moments, when he'd settle into a temporary depression when things were quiet. Though Kurt found all he needed to do was hold him and brush his dark curls back, giving him a few minutes of affection and closeness, until his hazel eyes lost the momentary deadened look that had hung there for so long.

They were still taking the sexual side of their relationship slowly, but Kurt had come to realize just how much Blaine needed the intimacy. Not for the release, just for the contact, the closeness and connection that they had. The spark had always been there between them, they were just fueling the fire again after it had been left to smolder for months.

The school had all but forgotten about the drama that had occurred between the two of them and Leighton in January. They'd moved back to their regular gossip about Quidditch and classes and who was dating who.

The following Monday, the day before April started, Kurt made his way down to breakfast with Blaine, Wes, and David, chatting about the quickly approaching Easter break, which would start in just under two weeks' time.

As usual, Wes and David would be going home for break and were excited, and relieved, to get to see their girlfriends.



"Charlotte's about to flip her top," Wes grumbled, looking vaguely harried. "Her brother's visiting and he's been driving her mad. It's showing."

"And Janette's been having a fit over the League Finals," David said, looking equally haggard. His girlfriend of two years worked as a writer for the *Daily Prophet* as a junior Quidditch correspondent. "I mean, they're still three months away! Her and her boss are both mental. Must be a thing with red-heads or something."

Blaine chuckled, shaking his head.

"Oh, just because Kurt's perfect, you don't have to rub it in," Wes said, giving him a stern look.

"That's why I don't date women," Kurt said with a sniff. "Besides the fact that I'm not a fan of, well, you know...they're so...particular about everything."

"Says the boy who spends days on end planning weekend outfits," David muttered, earning a smirk from Wes and a cool scowl from Kurt. "Fashion doesn't just *happen*," he said stiffly, ignoring their grins. They sat down at the Ravenclaw table across from Jeff, Nick, and Thad. Jeff was fiddling with his eggs, sighing dramatically every few seconds as Nick rolled his eyes, Hanna giving Jeff a sympathetic look from Nick's other side.

"What's wrong with him?" Kurt said, nodding to Jeff.

"He's in looove," Nick said, making kissy faces at his best friend.

"Am not," Jeff said, glaring at him.

"Well then you've gone completely mental," Nick said, returning to his hash with another roll of his eyes.

"Nick, be nice," Hanna said, giving him a reproving look.

Nick sighed but fell silent reluctantly.

"Who is she?" Wes said as he dolled porridge into his bowl.

"He's not saying," Thad said, licking honey from the back of his spoon with a smirk.

"How come?" Kurt said, now curious.

"Because the team would kill me," Jeff said darkly.

"If I don't do it first," Nick muttered, flashing his best friend a glare.

"Why would we kill you?" Blaine said with a curious frown.

"Because she's on another House team," Nick said, looking thoroughly disapproving.

"No one will be upset, Jeffrey," Hanna said kindly, "It's not your fault she's—"

"Shh!" Jeff said, hushing her frantically, eyes wide. "No one can know! I'll take it to the grave."

Thad giggled and David snorted into his cereal, Wes thumping him on the back as Jeff continued to look nervous at Hanna's near-slip.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" Kurt said, pouring himself a glass of juice and eyeing Jeff closely.

"What do you mean?" Jeff said, frowning.

"Well, have you *talked* to her?" Kurt said, watching him over his goblet.

"A...bit," Jeff mumbled, staring at his plate.

Nick snorted. "And by that, he means he sputtered like he'd just taken a dose of Babbling Brew when she walked past this morning."

Jeff scowled as they all laughed.

"Jeff," Kurt said, barely believing his eyes and ears. "Are you actually *nervous*?"

"No," Jeff said, too quickly and too loudly to be truthful.

Thad giggled again and Nick rolled his eyes, Wes and David smirking.

"Wow," Kurt said, sitting back in stunned disbelief. "The boy who spent half of last year giving us sex talks and trying to get us all laid is nervous about talking to a girl. She must be something."

"A real winner, obviously," Blaine said, nodding and biting into his toast.

"Brilliant," Jeff breathed, looking awestruck, Nick rolling his eyes yet again. "Kurt," Jeff continued, lowering his voice to an amazed whisper and leaning forward conspiratorially, "she shops at *Zonkos*."

Kurt quirked an eyebrow. "And a Quidditch player, too?"

"So, basically, you're dating yourself?" Thad said, waving his spoon absently.

"But with boobs," Wes interjected thoughtfully.

They all snorted, Jeff groaning and dropping his head to the table, loudly lamenting their friendships.

Despite their best efforts to wheedle Jeff's crush out of both him, Nick, and Hanna, none of them were talking, Jeff out of pure embarrassment, Nick out of disapproval, and Hanna because she didn't think it was her place to say.

Kurt left for Transfiguration with Jeff and Nick not long after, giving Blaine a quick kiss as Thad gave Flint, as usual, an enthusiastic "I-won't-see-you-for-two-hours-how-will-I-survive" goodbye beside the marble staircase.

"Flint, you've completely ruined our bunny," Jeff said, shaking his head and clucking his tongue. Once they'd given up on trying to glean information from him, he'd returned to his usual, energetic self.

"Who says *I* ruined *him*?" Flint said with a faint smirk.

Jeff and Nick exchanged horrified glances.

"Can't unhear," Nick said, staring straight ahead with wide eyes.

"The mental images," Jeff said, screwing up his face and shaking his head violently. "Make them stop!"

Kurt rolled his eyes as Flint grinned, perhaps a little smugly, at their suffering as they settled into their usual seats in Transfiguration. There'd been a sudden upswing in the amount of homework they were receiving now that term was nearly over. Jeff and Nick gaped like fish when Professor Aldebrand assigned their homework at the end of the Double period.

"Two rolls of parchment," she said, giving them a faintly stern look.

"On Metamorphmagi and the advantages and disadvantages in comparison to wand-use Human Transfiguration. Due next Monday."

"It's like they're *trying* to kill us," Jeff grumbled as they packed up their things, him, Nick, and Flint preparing to head to Herbology.

"I'll bet Sprout gives us loads, too," Nick said with a scowl, hitching his bag onto his shoulder. "We're working with those Man-Eating Shrubs today, aren't we?"

"Yeah," Jeff said with a sigh as they strode through the corridor.

"Sounds like so much fun," Kurt said sarcastically.

"Well, if you wear dragon-hide gloves, the acid doesn't burn you," Flint said matter-of-factly.

Kurt stared at him. "Have fun with that," he said as they reached the corner where the other three turned left and he turned right to head to the library.

"See you at lunch," he called, waving over his shoulder.

Jeff shouted something about hoping they weren't dead by then and Kurt shook his head, laughing quietly as he made his way down to the library. He saw Leighton sitting at their usual table towards the back where they'd taken to studying and chatting during their duel free periods.

"Hey," Kurt said, smiling as he sat and pulled out his Transfiguration book. "You okay?"

Leighton was staring at the letter in his hands with wide eyes, his jaw slack.

"From Gavin?" Kurt said, smirking. "What's he got to say this time?"

He took the letter from Leighton's limp fingers, picking a random spot halfway down and reading aloud, "*—and make you moan my name and beg me to do things to do. Bad things, Leigh—*well okay, then," Kurt said, hastily shoving the letter back into Leighton's hands. "Why don't you take that back?"

Leighton blushed and stuffed the letter in his bag, avoiding his eyes.

"So, Gavin seems to miss you quite a lot," Kurt said brusquely, dipping his quill into his ink and jotting out a title for his essay.

Leighton made a strangled sort of noise in the back of his throat, coughed, and nodding, still not looking at him.

"So Jeff is afraid to talk, it sounds weird just saying it, Thad and Flint practically have sex every time they're separated for more than eight seconds, and Gavin is sending you sexts via owl," Kurt said, pausing thoughtfully to consider the matter. "Hogwarts is such a wholesome, normal school, don't you think?"

Leighton laughed at this, pushing him playfully before pulling out his own homework. Kurt grinned and leaned over his essay, flipping through his notes from earlier.

"K-Kurt?"

Kurt looked up to see Cole standing nearby, twisting his hands nervously and looking sheepish.

"Oh, um, hi," Kurt said awkwardly. He hadn't talked to Cole since the Valentine's Day incident over a month ago, though he'd noticed the Gryffindor looked mildly happier and had seen him spending time with his classmates much more than before.

"I just wanted to say, er, thanks, I guess," Cole said, squinting at the table and looking as uncomfortable as Kurt felt. Leighton watched the whole thing with raised eyebrows.

"Oh," Kurt said, a little surprised. "You're...welcome."

Cole smiled, though it was more like a pained grimace. "Right," he said, nodding absently. "So...that's all, I suppose."

"Okay," Kurt said, feeling more awkward as the seconds ticked by. Leighton looked like he was holding back laughter with difficulty at this point and Kurt kicked him under the table. He yelped and Cole stared at him.

"Also, um, can you, er, tell Blaine that I'm, erm, sorry...for...giving him a Love Potion?" Cole said, now focusing on his hands.

"I guess," Kurt said slowly, flashing a glare at Leighton as he had a sudden fit of giggles.

Cole blushed and scowled at his laughter. "Bye," he grunted, turning on his heel and walking away looking embarrassed and annoyed.

"Leighton!" Kurt said, smacking him across the shoulder with his roll of parchment. "He was trying to apologize!"

"I'm sorry," Leighton said, struggling to control his laughter. "I wasn't laughing at him. It's just...your face. You looked like he was offering you Cockroach Clusters or something."

"Oh, shut up," Kurt snapped as he fell about laughing again.

Not that he particularly *like* Cole, but he'd definitely had a lot more sympathy towards him after he'd really seen how miserable and, from what it seemed, friendless he was. Still, he thought he'd always feel that twinge of annoyance when he saw him simply for what he'd done to him and Blaine. And as for Penelope, well, he thought she could rot in a ditch for all he cared.

Ignoring Leighton's laughter and dipping his quill in his ink again, he turned back to his essay, at least glad that Cole had backed off him and Blaine and think that, in the long run, the break had actually helped their relationship in a strange way.

---

Cross. Stupid, stupid Cross. Laughing at him when he was trying to be *noble* or whatever it was called by apologizing to Hummel. And Hummel didn't even thank him for apologizing, either. He couldn't believe it. He'd been trying to be nicer to people and, yes, he had more friends. But he was still alone. He didn't have Blaine like Hummel did. Not that he still liked Blaine like that. Not after everything that had happened. He'd finally given up on that.

It bothered him for the rest of the day, the way they'd been so nonchalant about what he'd done. He stewed about it all through dinner, ignoring his new-found friends and returning to the library almost immediately after he'd cleared his plate.

He walked towards the tables in the back where he'd spent a lot of his time studying now that he didn't have patrols to keep him busy. He stopped, scowling as his eyes fell on Wilson and Jenkins, who were intertwined in an armchair in the empty corner of the room, Jenkins straddling Wilson and kissing him enthusiastically. It still made him want to barf seeing them. They had no shame at all.

He turned to leave, freezing when he heard a faint whimper.

"Oh, god, *Flint*."

A shiver ran up his spine at the tone of Jenkins' voice, the sheer need and gentle plea lingering in his words. It wasn't like when he'd overheard Hummel and Blaine, when they were just growling and ripping each other's clothes off like animals.

Cole ducked behind the bookshelves out of sight, his heart suddenly beating very fast and something stirring at the sounds coming from where he'd just left, the barely there gasps and sighs.

"*Pet, someone will hear us.*"

"*Sorry.*"

Cole scowled. He didn't know if he should be annoyed or disgusted with himself for listening in the first place. But there was something about those noises that made him squirm and was suddenly shoving the heel of his hand against the front of his slacks, thankful for his loose robes and blushing scarlet with embarrassment.

"*Pet, I've got to go to practice,*" Wilson said, sounding reluctant. "*And it's Gwen's birthday. She'll kill me if it runs late.*"

"*Just a few more minutes,*" Jenkins mumbled, barely audible. "*Come on...lover.*"

Wilson groaned and Cole bit hard on his knuckles to keep from doing the same. He felt so *wrong* doing what he was doing but while part of his mind was screaming that what they were doing was vulgar and inappropriate and he was just as bad for listening, the other half was sending little ripples of pleasure through him every time Jenkins mewled and whined softly.

Forcing his legs to move, Cole almost ran to another section of the library, almost tripping over his shaking legs. He threw himself down at an empty table, breathing slowly through his nose and gripping his face in his hands.

After a few minutes, he'd calmed himself down and wiped away the film of cold sweat that had been beading on his brow. He looked around and saw Wilson striding towards the exit, looking flushed and smiling faintly.

Cole glanced towards the section he'd been in with Jenkins and saw the dark-haired Ravenclaw boy watching Wilson leave with a dreamy expression, his thumb running over the little ring on his finger. He really wasn't all that bad looking, now that Cole thought about it. He had wide, dark eyes and tanned skin, his arms very faintly muscled. And he didn't make Cole feel like an elf in comparison. He was almost shorter than Blaine, actually.

He tilted his head to the side thoughtfully and frowned as he considered Jenkins. He was smart, too, he knew, he'd always seen him reading, often about Runes, which had always fascinated Cole, though he wasn't *nearly* as good as Jenkins.

Drumming his fingers on the tabletop, he stared absently at nothing in particular, lost in thought.

"Hey, O'Brien."

Cole looked around to see Walter Derricks, the Sixth year he'd seen harassing Hummel after the incident he and Marsh had caused in January. He thought he'd heard something about him forcing a kiss on Jenkins some time before, too. The thought made him ball up his fists in sudden angry and, perhaps, a little jealousy.

"What?" he said, glaring at him.

Derricks smirked and walked towards him. He was much taller than Cole, with thick arms and brown hair that brushed over his eyes, hooding them almost menacingly.

"So, you're gay," he said, leaning against the table and looking down at Cole, who felt tiny in comparison as he towered over him.

"Who told you that?" Cole said, a little nervous. He hadn't *officially* come out but he thought people were pretty sure of his preferences at this point. Still though...he didn't much like the idea of

someone who'd been so...predatory approaching him as boldly as Derricks was.

"You know, you're not all that bad," Derricks said, his eyes raking over Cole in a way that made him feel suddenly dirty and exposed. He wrapped his arms around himself defensively.

"Leave me alone," he said, wishing his voice hadn't come out in a nervous squeak.

Derricks chuckled, low and dark and Cole was suddenly frightened as he moved closer to him.

"Come on," Derricks said, "all the other gay guys are attached and we all know Blaine rejected you like a sack of dragon dung."

"I thought you were bi though?" Cole said, narrowing his eyes. "Just go find some *girl*."

"Just 'cause I don't mind girls doesn't mean I prefer them," Derricks said, eyeing him again. "Besides, girls are a little *too* dainty for my taste."

"Is that why you went for Jenkins and Hummel?" Cole said, both curious and slightly panicky as Derricks' hand brushed dangerously close to his leg as he shifted. "You like *dainty* guys?"

"Well, Jenkins is hot," Derricks said unabashedly. "Hummel's just a slut. He's a little tall for my taste but he seemed to like sucking cock so much..." he trailed off, shrugging, before looking back down at Cole, a hungry glint in his eye. "So, what do you say, O'Brien?"

"No," Cole said firmly. "I'm not going to be your hook-up, you...wanker." He folded his arms across his chest and nodded sharply. Derricks' eyes darkened. "It wasn't really a suggestion," he growled, his fingers suddenly wrapping around Cole's wrist painfully tight.

"*Ouch!* Let go," Cole said, trying to pull his arm free, panic racing through him.

"Jenkins had Wilson," Derricks hissed. "Hummel had Cross. There's no one here to stop me, O'Brien. What are you going to do?"

Cole whimpered and grabbed for his bag, where his wand was, but Derricks kicked it away, his eyes dark and heavy with a lecherous look, his low growl thick with feral rage.

"Let me—"

Derricks clamped a hand tight over his mouth and he sobbed in fear as he was suddenly yanked from his chair and pushed against the bookshelves roughly. His hands shook and tears of panic welled in his eyes. The bile rose in his throat as Derricks' breath was suddenly hot in his ear.

He kicked out but Derricks stomped on his foot, ignoring the cry of pain Cole released against his hand. Everything was fuzzy and pure

terror coursed through him at the sudden turn of events. He tried to turn his head away as Derricks' mouth latched onto his neck...

"*Impedimenta!*"

Derricks was flung back and Cole sobbed in relief, dropping down to his knees and shaking like a leaf.

"I can turn you into a slug, you know," someone said in a low, angry voice.

Cole heard Derricks stumbling away through the bookshelves, cursing Cole's savior angrily.

"Are you alright?"

Cole looked up at Jenkins, who looked concerned, his head tilted to the side and his dark eyes kind and warm as he held his hand out towards Cole. His dark hair was tousled from earlier and Cole felt a little shiver run down his spine behind the relief sweeping through him.

"Y-yes," he said, accepting Jenkins' hand and pulling himself up. He sniffed and wiped his eyes on his sleeve. "Thank you."

"He's mental," Jenkins said, glaring in the direction Derricks had disappeared. "He should be locked up for...lip-rape or something."

Cole giggled and Jenkins smiled.

"Are you sure you're alright? You look pretty shaken up," Jenkins said, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth.

Cole sighed at the concern in his eyes. "I'm alright," he said, nodding.

"Like you said, he's mental."

Jenkins nodded vaguely, tucking his wand behind his ear.

"Thanks," Cole repeated, trying not to blush at the thought of what he'd just been listening to not twenty minutes before.

"No problem," Jenkins said, smiling again. He turned to leave, paused, and glance back at him. "I'm glad you're doing...better. Kurt told me how lonely you were and, well, I was the same way, too, before Flint and I got together. But you'll find someone who loves you. Just be patient." He shrugged a little before walking off through the shelves again.

Cole sighed and stared at the hand Jenkins had held when helping him up. It was still tingling. He leaned back against the shelf, his heart still beating a little rapidly, though he didn't know if it was from what Derricks had done or from Jenkins.

---

*Gav,*

*Well, you've done it. Kurt's seen your letter and what you said about wanting to rip my clothes off and I've just died of embarrassment. I hope you're happy. Maybe I'll rest in peace without you making me sexually frustrated like you have been for the past two weeks.*

*Leigh*



---

Leigh,

*You showed him my letters? Leighton, those were private. Private and special and—no, I really don't care. Everyone should know that I'm completely ready to drive you wild next time I see you. And that I will drive you wild. You'll be a big puddle when I'm finished with you. And then I'll clean you up. With my tongue. No lie.*

Gav

---

Gav,

*No, I didn't show them to him! Are you insane? He was curious because I was speechless for the first time in about ten years. And you really need to stop when these sex messages. They're unfair. Unfair and cruel and I hate you for them. I can't even read your letters at breakfast anymore for fear of having inappropriate problems with my roommates two feet away. They think it's hilarious, by the way. I think they want to move you into our dorm. They all remember you from when you were at Hogwarts, of course. Like when you raided the kitchens in your fourth year and brought us all that food because I was depressed about getting a bad grade in Transfiguration. I think they fell in love with you after that.*

Leigh

---

Leigh,

*I would gladly move into your dorms, but I don't think your friends would enjoy being thrown out all the time. Which they would be. Because I'd be having sex with you, Leigh. In case you hadn't gotten that.*

Gav

---

*Yeah, I got that, thanks.*

Leigh

---

A grey sky hung over the Castle the whole first week of April, a constant, steady rain washing out the grounds and turning them into one big puddle, the lake on the verge of overflowing from what it seemed.

The rain pattered against the glass of the dormitory window as it had been all week as Kurt dressed that Tuesday for Double potions, more than ready for the break that would be starting that Friday. They'd all been worn dog-tired with the amount of homework they'd been dealing with, and Blaine had had to go to the hospital wing for a Pepper-up Potion, along with half of the Ravenclaw Quidditch team,

after they'd spent two hours practicing in the cold rain and returned to the tower soaking wet and sniffing.

"I don't know why you insist on taking this so seriously," Kurt had said as he'd fed Blaine soup where he was bundled in half a dozen blankets.

"I'm fine, Kurt," Blaine said, trying to shrug off the blankets wrapped around him. "Seriously, that's what the Potion was for."

"Well, I'm not taking any chances," Kurt said, tucking the blankets in so his arms were trapped. "You're my patient for the rest of the weekend."

Jeff and Nick, who were working on something on Jeff's bed, sniggered.

Blaine glared at them and reluctantly opened his mouth to allow Kurt to spoon soup in. "Shut it, you two," he said. "What are you doing, anyway? I know it's not homework."

"Research," Jeff replied without looking up, flipping a page in the book he was reading.

"*Music Charms*?" Kurt said, cocking an eyebrow as he caught the title of the section. "What do you need those for?"

"Kurt, everyone knows that if you want a bird, you have to sing to it," Jeff said, giving him a look as though this was obvious. "And we need to borrow your music thing."

"It's called an iPod. And why do I have a feeling this can only end in disaster?" Kurt said, sitting back and flashing Blaine a warning look as he tried to wriggle out of his blankets again.

"Because we'll make sure of it," Nick said, looking up with a sly grin. Kurt smiled a little at the memory as he packed his books into his bag. They'd been doing so much better than before, especially Blaine. His resignation from Head Boy had been, as he said, the best decision he'd ever made, both for himself and for their relationship. Kurt was glad he finally took the time to concentrate on making himself happy for once rather than focusing on everyone else.

"Do you know what Jeff and Nick are up to?" Blaine said, looking up from where he was digging through trunk for a pair of socks.

"No idea," Kurt said, rolling his eyes. "I've given up trying to understand their thought process."

Blaine frowned as he sat down and pulled on his socks. "All I know is Jeff borrowed the jacket you got me for Christmas."

"He borrowed your jacket?" Kurt said, frowning as he pulled on his robes and hooked the clasp deftly.

"Yeah," Blaine said, frowning more deeply as he tied his shoes.

"Something about wooing or...something like that."

"Wooing?" Kurt said, cocking an eyebrow.

"I really don't know," Blaine said, shaking his head. "But Nick said to be prepared for an eventful breakfast."

"Oh god," Kurt said, feeling faintly frightened at the prospect of 'eventful' was in their minds.

"My sentiments exactly," Blaine said as he pushed himself off his bed and moved over towards Kurt. "Mmm, I love you," he said, slipping his arms around his waist and kissing the crook of his neck.

"You too," Kurt said, closing his eyes as Blaine nipped at the soft skin under his jaw. His breath caught as Blaine's fingers slid down his chest to fiddle with the waistband of his slacks. "But...breakfast."

"It can wait for a few minutes," Blaine murmured, unfastening his slacks and dropping down to his knees, kissing Kurt's stomach as he untucked his shirt.

"Blaine," Kurt groaned. "Are you sure you want to do this? I mean...are you ready?"

"Yeah," Blaine said, his voice hoarse and low as he ran his fingers over the front of Kurt's tented slacks and down the sensitive skin on the inside of his thighs. "I'm ready to start taking more steps. I miss the taste of you." He mouthed Kurt through his slacks gently.

Kurt moaned and fisted his hands in the fabric of Blaine's robes.

Blaine looked up at him, grinning as he pulled his slacks and briefs down to the middle of his thighs, his hazel eyes dark and shining with lust.

Kurt held his breath in anticipation as Blaine wrapped his fingers around the base of his cock and flicked the tip of his tongue over the slit. Kurt gasped and threw his head back, biting his lip and closing his eyes.

Blaine's tongue slid along the length of his cock before his mouth suddenly wrapped around him, wet heat engulfing all the way to where Blaine's fingers were pumping gently.

"Oh god, Blaine, *fuck*," Kurt groaned. "That's so good."

Blaine hollowed out his cheeks, his eyes never leaving Kurt's as he bobbed his head and swirled his tongue around the head of his cock.

Kurt dropped his head to his chest, panting and moaning as Blaine sucked even harder, his hands moving to grip Kurt's thighs, rubbing his thumb along the crook his legs.

Kurt licked his lips and shuddered, already feeling himself getting close to his finish. He'd forgotten how good Blaine was at this.

"Blaine," he breathed. "Oh my god, I'm so close."

Blaine sucked harder and hummed around him. The vibrations sent him over the edge and Kurt groaned as he came down the back of Blaine's throat, his fingernails digging into Blaine's shoulders.

Blaine swallowed around him, making a faint noise of satisfaction as he did. Kurt watched him pull away, feeling a little dazed as he tucked him back inside his briefs and zipped up his slacks. He pushed himself up, his hair ruffled and his lips pink and a little swollen.

"I love you," he breathed, nuzzling Kurt's neck and pulling him close. Kurt felt his erection pressing against his thigh. "And don't try and offer to take care of me. I'm fine, love. I love the way you look when you get like this. Your cheeks flush and your eyes are so blue I can't look away."

Kurt smiled and brushed his fingers through Blaine's curls. "I'm so glad you stopped gelling your hair last year," he said, "I love your curls. They're so soft."

"You're skin's perfect," Blaine said, kissing his neck.

"Your hands make it hard to keep mine off you," Kurt said, grinning at the back and forth.

Blaine pulled back, grinning as well. "You're perfect," he said, kissing his nose.

"You too," Kurt said, lacing their fingers together.

"Ready to go see what the terrors have planned?" Blaine said as he picked his bag up and swung it onto his shoulder.

"Not really," Kurt said with a sigh, grabbing his own bag off the bed and walking with him out into the hall.

"I'm sure it'll be a laugh," Blaine said, squeezing his hand.

"Or they'll light something on fire and get expelled," Kurt muttered.

Blaine laughed, kissing him on the cheek as they walked through the corridors together.

Kurt smiled over at him. "I love seeing you happy like this," he said.

"Seeing you laugh and smile again. It's nice."

Blaine smiled. "It's nice to *feel* happy again," he said. "I mean...I still get those times where I feel like I'm...helpless, I guess, but...you make it so much easier to deal with."

"Good," Kurt said as they walked into the Great Hall, where the ceiling overhead displayed the heavy grey sky outside as it had for the past week. "Rain again," he said with a sigh as he sat next to Thad at the Ravenclaw table, who was frowning at a piece of parchment in his hand.

"What's that?" Kurt said, nodding to the parchment.

"A letter," Thad said, looking up at him.

"From whom?" Kurt said, quirked an eyebrow.

"I have no idea," Thad said, wearing a confused expression.

"Can I?" Kurt said, holding out his hand.

Thad nodded and handed him the slip of parchment.

*Thad,*

*I just thought you should know I think you're the best looking boy in the school. I think you deserve better than that Wilson guy. You're smart and nice and I really like you.*

Kurt stared down at the vague letter. "Thad," he said, turning to him. "You have a secret admirer, it seems."

Thad blushed and gnawed at his bottom lip. "There's no way anyone would have a crush on *me*," he muttered. "There must be some kind of mistake."

"Yeah, probably for that *other* Thad dating someone with the last name Wilson," Kurt mumbled, rolling his eyes.

Thad blushed even deeper, stuffing the letter in his pocket.

"Where are Jeff and Nick?" Blaine said, craning his neck to look around the Hall. "I haven't seen them since Jeff took my jacket."

"I have no idea," Thad said, glancing down to where Wes and David were sitting. "Haven't seen them."

There was a faint *wheee!* and Kurt looked up to see a trail of blue and bronze sparks swirling through the air from the entrance hall. The Hall went silent as all eyes turned to watch the sparkler whiz overhead, whistling loudly before exploding in a shower of sparks over the Gryffindor table, where Flint was sitting with Dan, Gwen and a few other members of the Quidditch team.

Kurt frowned, glancing at the entrance to the Hall.

Nick strolled in, grinning with his tie loose and the sleeves of his uniform shirt rolled up to his elbows. He glanced behind him, winking at someone out of sight, lifting his wand and opening his mouth.

***One, two, three, four!***

He flicked his wand and music suddenly filled the hall, electric guitar, drums.

Jeff ran into the hall and slid across the floor smoothly on his sneakers, wearing Blaine's dragon-hide jacket, a pair of dark sunglasses perched on his face and his blonde hair messy. He grinned around the Hall at the hundreds of faces watching him and burst into song.

*Went out with the guys*

*And before my eyes*

*There was this girl*

*She looked so fine*

*And she blew my mind*

He moved across the Hall in front of the House tables, still grinning, and dancing a little. Thad laughed as Jeff popped the collar on his jacket and lowered his glasses to winked at no one in particular. A few girls giggled and whispered to each other, eyeing him appreciatively.

*And I wished that she was mine  
And I said hey wait up  
Cause I might speak to her  
And my friends said*

Nick joined in with him, both of them acting along with the words of the song, Jeff wearing a look of mock annoyance and Nick shaking his head and waving him away.

**Nick/Jeff/Both**

***You'll never get her, never gonna get that girl***

*But I don't care*

***You'll never get her, never gonna get that girl***

*Cause I loved her long dark hair*

***You'll never get her, never gonna get that girl***

*Love was in the air*

*And she looked at me*

***You'll never get her, never gonna get that girl***

*And the rest was history*

***You'll never get her, never gonna get that girl***

***Dude you're being silly 'cause you're never gonna get that girl***

*And you're never gonna get the girl*

Jeff pointed at the Gryffindor table and heads turned to follow his finger to where Gwen was sitting next to Dan. She cocked an eyebrow, pursing her lips as Jeff grinned and winked again.

"Gwen?" Thad said, eyes wide. "She's going to tear him to shreds if she doesn't like this."

Kurt laughed as Nick strode between the Ravenclaw and Slytherin tables, singing and smirking broadly.

***We spoke for hours***

***She took of my trousers***

***Spent the day laughing in the sun***

***And we had fun***

He stopped to swoop down on Hanna and kiss her on the cheek. She laughed and smacked his arm as he winked back at her and continued towards the top of the Hall.

***And my friends they all looked stunned***

***Dude she's amazing and I can't believe you got that girl***

***My friends said***

*She's amazing, I can't believe you got that girl*

***She gave me more street cred***

*She's amazing, I can't believe you got that girl*

***I dug the book she read***

*She's amazing, I can't believe you got that girl*

***How could I forget***

***She rocks my world***

*She's amazing, I can't believe you got that girl*

***More than any other girl***

*She's amazing, I can't believe you got that girl*

***Yeah, Yeah***

***Dude she's amazing and I can't believe you got that girl***

***Can't believe you got the girl***

Gwen smirked faintly as Jeff ran up to the Gryffindor table and jumped up to sit on the edge, shoving plates away to lean forward across his, perching his chin on his fists and singing in her direction with a grin.

*She looked incredible*

*Just turned seventeen*

Nick climbed onto the benches at the end of the Ravenclaw table as they traded off lines, a few of the teachers looking annoyed while others smiled at the two of them.

***I guess my friends were right***

***She's out of my league***

Kurt snorted as Jeff rolled onto his back and stretched his arms back over his head, kicking his legs through the air, ignoring the people who glared at him when his feet swung dangerously close to their heads.

***So what am I to do?***

***She's too good to be true***

*One, two, three, four!*

Thad gasped in shock and Kurt shook his head as Jeff leapt up onto the table and started running down it as Nick played air guitar, nodding his head along with the music still streaming around the Hall. Kurt gaped as Jeff sent plates and bowls and goblets flying, spinning on his heel and laughing as a few teachers let out cries for him to stop. Filch shuffled across the Hall, eyes bugging out in anger.

Jeff back-flipped off the end of the table and landed dramatically, running towards Nick, who leapt onto the floor to meet him at the front of the Hall.

***But three days later***

***Went round to see her***

***But she was with another guy***

***And I said fine***

At this, Jeff turned to the Slytherin table and stuck his tongue out at his ex-girlfriend Melody, who was sitting with her current boyfriend. She huffed in annoyance and folded her arms across her chest.

***But I never asked her why***

***And since then loneliness has been a friend of mine***

The Beaters turned to see Flint shuffling towards them and took off with a shout, Nick down the aisle between the Slytherin and Ravenclaw tables and Jeff between the Gryffindor and Hufflepuff ones.

**My friends said**

*Such a pity, sorry that you lost that girl*

**Sorry you slipped away**

*Such a pity, sorry that you lost that girl*

**They told me every day**

*Such a pity, sorry that you lost that girl*

**That it'll be okay**

Jeff laughed as he jumped onto the Hufflepuff table to avoid Filch, leaping over the heads of squealing students and nearly running into Nick as he leapt up and over the Ravenclaw table onto the floor between it and the Slytherin table.

**She rocks my world**

*Such a pity, sorry that you lost that girl*

**More than any other girl**

*Such a pity, sorry that you lost that girl*

**Dude it's such a pity and I'm sorry that you lost that girl.**

**I'm sorry that you lost that girl.**

They held out the last note for a moment before realizing that Filch was catching up with them and sprinting towards the exit. Jeff slid to a halt and turned back at the doors.

"Gwen!" he shouted, grinning. "Will you go to Hogsmeade with me after break?"

Kurt turned to see Gwen rolling her eyes as Flint and Dan laughed.

"Why the hell not?" she said after a moment, grinning.

"Brilliant!" Jeff shouted, laughing as Nick tugged on his sleeve and they both ran away at full speed, cackling like dervishes as Filch shouted oaths and shook his fist at them.

The silence in the Hall was absolute other than the clatter of plates rolling and settling on the floor. Someone whooped loudly and laughter and cheering erupted around them.

"They'll both be expelled," Kurt muttered, shaking his head as Thad giggled and Blaine chuckled softly.

"At least Gwen liked it," Thad said thoughtfully, looking across the Hall where Gwen was sitting, a few girls giving her envious looks as she returned to talking to Dan, smirking very faintly.

"The two of them will destroy the school from the inside out," Kurt said.

"Probably," Blaine said, smiling.



Since neither Jeff nor Nick took Potions, Kurt assumed they were hiding from Filch, who was livid, storming around the Castle looking for them, his slinky grey cat, Mrs. Norris, winding around his ankles. When Kurt arrived at Transfiguration an hour and a half later and took his usual seat next to Flint, he looked around for the Beaters but they were nowhere to be found.

"Pst, Kurt!"

Kurt turned to see Jeff peering around the corner of the supply cupboard in the corner where Aldebrand kept things to be Transfigured—boxes of buttons and matches and the like. He was still wearing Blaine's jacket and his sunglasses.

"Has Filch given up on finding us yet?" Nick whispered, poking his head around the corner as well and similarly out of uniform.

"Well, last I saw, he was threatening to hang you by your earlobes in the dungeons," Kurt said, not bothering to keep his voice down as the class around him was still chatting before the bell rang.

They both cursed softly and ducked back behind the cupboard.

"They don't think things through much, do they?" Flint said thoughtfully.

"Jeff and Nick?" Kurt said, turning to face forward again. "That's like asking if Blaine likes Quidditch, if I like clothes, and if Thad likes you."

"So no?" Flint said, grinning as Jeff and Nick attempted to casually slip into their seats only to jump and shrink as Aldebrand ordered them to her desk. They slouched up to receive their punishment for the chaos they'd caused, a week's detention cleaning the flooded section of the dungeons with Filch, no magic.

"Worth it," Jeff said as he returned to his seat, shaking his blonde hair back and leaning his chair back on two legs. "Totally worth it. We're awesomeness."

Kurt rolled his eyes.

---

The common room was crowded and louder than usual after the events of that morning, half the Gryffindor girls crowding around Gwen to fawn over Jeff she herself remained calm and sarcastic as always. Flint smiled and turned away from where she was lounging with a few members of the Quidditch team. Thad was curled up on the couch, leaning back against his chest and re-reading the book of poems Flint had given him.

Flint kissed the top of his head and squeezed him around the middle. Thad smiled a little but didn't look up. Flint realized his eyes weren't moving as he stared down at the page.

"You alright, pet?" he said, tilting his head to look at him.

Thad shifted against him and closed his book, turning to look up at him.

"I got a letter this morning," he said quietly.

"Okay," Flint said, "from?"

"I don't know," Thad said, frowning. "It was...anonymous." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a slip of parchment.

Flint scanned it briefly, feeling a surge of annoyance at the bit that claimed Thad was too good for him. He'd always thought the same thing but, seeing someone else say it...well, he didn't like it.

Thad looked nervous as Flint lowered the letter after a full minute of staring at it, though he'd finished it within a few seconds.

"I sorry," Thad said. "I-I'm sorry, Flint, don't be mad."

"Why on earth would I be mad?" Flint said, forcing a smile. "I'm not mad at you at all. You can't help that you're so perfect. I knew someone else was bound to realize it. As long as you don't leave me." He laughed nervously.

"Never," Thad said insistently. "I love you. I love you so much." He angled his head back and kissed him, his tongue probing his mouth and his soft lips moving against his own.

"Mmm," Flint said, smiling as Thad pulled back after a few seconds. "I love the way you taste. And your smell. And the sounds you make. And everything thing else about you."

Thad smiled. "Anything in particular you like?" He said, biting his lip and trailing his fingers down Flint's chest.

"I think you know," Flint murmured in his ear. Thad shivered and his eyes fluttered closed. "You want to go upstairs?" Flint whispered, teasing the shell of his ear between his teeth gently.

Thad nodded and slid off the couch, tucking his book under his arm and giving Flint a beckoning look over his shoulder as he walked towards the spiral staircase leading to the dormitory.

Flint grinned and followed after him. He didn't like the idea of someone else having eyes for Thad, but he knew Thad loved him, he was marrying him after all, so he wasn't too worried. Thad dealt with *women* flirting with Flint all the time and the letter hadn't even said if it was a male or female admirer. Either way, he wasn't about to let Thad slip away from him even a fraction of an inch. Thad was everything to him, and if he knew one thing, it was that *that* would never change.

---

Cole frowned across the common room as Thad—he couldn't call him Jenkins anymore, not after he'd saved him—led Wilson up the stairs to the dorms. He used to think it was disgusting the way they were always staring at each other and running their hands all over one

another, but now he felt fascinated by it, found himself wondering what it would be like to share those looks of love with someone else. Sighing, he turned back to the letter he'd been trying to write. The first had been easy enough, just something to let Thad know that he *did* have other options than Wilson. But he needed to know just how much better someone else would be for him.

Blaine had never really been *nice* to him. He'd been civil, yes, but he'd never really acted like he'd cared. But Thad had saved him from Derricks. Thad *obviously* cared about him to some extent. The only reason he'd ever been annoyed by him before was because he'd gotten in between him and Wilson. But with Wilson out of the way.... He'd figure it out. Now that he was working on his own again without Marsh and her self-centered plans he'd find a way to make things work for him, now that he knew all he had to do was just be a little nicer to people.

He smiled and leaned over his parchment again, dipping his quill in his ink and slowing penning out exactly what he was thinking, about just how much better Thad deserved than someone who had passed him over for so long like Wilson had.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

The remainder of the week seemed to go by at a snail's pace in Kurt's opinion. The final round of tests and assignments before the term ended on Friday completely drained him and it was with a sense of relief that he made his way to breakfast Friday with Blaine and the others.

"Oh my god," Jeff said, stopping suddenly at the doors to the Great Hall, Kurt nearly running into him.

"What?" Kurt said, annoyed.

Jeff turned to them with wide eyes. "This will be our last break before we graduate."

"And?" Thad said, tilting his head curiously.

"And then we'll be leaving Hogwarts in two months! Forever!" Nick said, catching on to what Jeff was talking about.

"Hold me," Jeff said with a sob.

Kurt rolled his eyes and walked around the Beaters as they pretended to cry into each other's shoulders.

"Mental," Thad muttered, shaking his head.

Blaine chuckled as they took their seats, Wes and David bidding them farewell before moving off to sit with the seventh year girls as they often did.

"I'm so ready for classes to end," Kurt groaned, pulling a bowl of fruit towards him and glancing up at the periwinkle blue sky displayed across the ceiling. "And it's *finally* stopped raining."

"The lake is still flooded, though," Thad said as Jeff and Nick, apparently over their bout of distress in favor of food, plopped down across from them and began pulling dishes towards them hungrily.

"We're swimming after classes are over," Jeff said around a mouthful of bread. "Oops, sorry," he added as he sprayed Thad with crumbs.

Thad glared at him and brushed his arm clean as Nick sniggered.

There was the sound of hundreds of wings as the owls flew in through the windows with the morning post. Kurt looked up in surprise as a snowy owl with wide amber eyes landed in front of him and held out its leg. Frowning, he pulled off the thick envelope, which bore the emblem of a cross wand and bone under the letters *St.M.*

Realizing what it was, he tore the envelope open with shaking fingers and scanned the letter.

*Dr. Mr. Hummel,*

*We are pleased to inform you that upon review of your recent application into the Potioneer Training Program dated 12 March, you have been accepted for immediate hire after your graduation form*

*Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry pending the results of your N.E.W.T. examination.*

*Please complete and return the attached form along with a letter of recommendation from Prof. Horace Slughorn before 18 April to confirm your acceptance. We look forward to working with you!*

*Regards,*

*Antony Merkwood*

*Head Potioneer*

*St. Mungo's Hospital*

Kurt squealed in excitement and relief, absently glancing at the form attached to the letter.

"What's up?" Blaine said, glancing at the letter, which Kurt passed him, feeling giddy.

Blaine's face lit up as he scanned the letter. "Love, that's fantastic!" he said, beaming and kissing Kurt on the cheek.

Thad hugged him happily, Jeff and Nick declaring loudly that he would soon be Potion Master Kurtsie. Kurt turned and waved down Leighton, who was sitting not far away at the Slytherin table.

"I got in!" he said, waving his letter.

"Brill!" Leighton said with a laugh. "Maybe you can set me up with a job next year!"

Kurt laughed and rolled his eyes, turning to face forward again as happiness swelled inside him.

"Oh, no, not again," Thad groaned as a tiny owl landed in front of him, clutching a letter in its beak.

"Another letter from your secret admirer?" Kurt said as Thad took the letter, blushing furiously, and the owl zoomed off like a feathery snitch.

"Yes," Thad mumbled as Jeff and Nick tittered.

"Someone's got eyes for our wildcat," Jeff sniggered.

"The lion will be displeased," Nick said with a smirk.

Thad flashed them a glare and unfolded the letter. His face turned scarlet as he read, eyes flicking back and forth.

"What's it say?" Nick sang, Jeff collapsing into a fit of giggles next to him.

"None of your business," Thad mumbled, trying to hide the letter. Jeff stopped laughing long enough to lean forward and snatch it out of his hands.

"Give it back!" Thad snapped, beet red at this point.

"*Dear Thad,*" Jeff read in a dramatic voice, holding the letter out of Thad's reach as Nick howled with laughter. "*I hope you liked my last letter. I meant it all. You're the smartest boy in school and you deserve someone who concentrates on you instead of Quidditch.*"

Jeff slid off the bench as Thad practically lunged across the table at him, Nick almost crying with laughter.

*"You have eyes I could probably look at all day long,"* Jeff continued, his own voice shaking with mirth. *"And your lips make me wonder what kissing you—"*

Jeff lost it at this point, doubling over and clutching his side as he laughed hysterically.

Thad yanked the letter from his limp fingers, so red Kurt was surprised his face didn't burst into flames.

"You're both rubbish," he said, stuffing the letter in his pocket and glaring at his toast like it had caused him personal harm.

Kurt patted him on the shoulder. "Just ignore them," he said, rolling his eyes as Jeff and Nick made kissing noises at each other.

"Oh, Nick, your eyes make me wonder what kissing you would be like," Jeff said, fluttering his eyelashes.

"I could stare at your lips all day!" Nick said with a dreamy sigh.

Thad twitched and set his wand on the table with a threatening look.

They fell silent, though every now and then let out a titter as they ate like they were surviving a ten-season famine. Kurt thought the Hogwarts house elves would have a much easier job of things once the two of them were gone.

Luckily for Thad's sanity—and most likely Jeff and Nick's well-being—they had Muggle Studies after breakfast. Professor Hector handed out a quiz in which they had to label the parts of a car engine.

Kurt completed it easily enough as his father worked on Charming and fixing cars in Lima and Kurt had spent a lot of time at the shop with him after his mother died. Twirling his quill between his fingers absently, he waited for Thad and Blaine to finish.

Thad still looked mildly embarrassed by his letter and seemed distracted as he wrote, huffing and scribbling out his answers half a dozen times before he finally finished, one of the last ones to do so.

"Someone's preoccupied," Kurt said, grinning as they pulled games from the cupboard for the remaining forty-five minutes of class.

Thad flushed pink.

"Why are you so embarrassed?" Kurt said, unfolding the gameboard and quickly claiming the little sterling hat game piece. "You should be flattered. Granted, saying they're thinking about kissing you so much is a little creepy but it's probably just some second year or something with a crush. It might not even be another boy, you know. Does Flint know?"

Thad nodded, fiddling with the little metal shoe he was holding.

"I just don't want him to get upset about it," he said with a sigh.

"Why would he?" Kurt said, smiling as Blaine laid his hand on his knee under the desk with a small squeeze. "You're marrying Flint. You're visiting with his parents over the holiday. I really don't know what you're worried about. Just write the person back and say you're not interested next time they send you something."

"And make sure you keep Flint in the loop. Jealousy and secrets never end well," Blaine said, flashing Kurt a sad smile.

"Just don't let Flint get himself worked up over it," Kurt said, rolling the dice between his fingers. "And don't apologize because you've done nothing wrong."

Thad sighed heavily, wrinkling up his nose in thought as he stared absentmindedly down at the gameboard.

"It's just...weird," he said after a moment. "No one's ever...I mean...other than Flint...and I basically ate his face..." he was talking more to himself at this point, seeming completely unsure of how to handle the new, unsolicited attention.

"Thad, calm down," Kurt said, taking in his distressed look. "It's not a big deal."

Thad gnawed at his lower lip nervously, wringing his hands a little.

"But what do I do if they try to, like, talk to me or something?" Thad said, paling at the thought.

Kurt bit back a laugh. "Just tell them you're not interested," he repeated. "You're working yourself up over nothing. And stop acting so surprised that someone is crushing on you. I thought we went through this last year, Thad. You're a hottie."

Thad blushed scarlet and Kurt exchanged a grin with Blaine.

"I need some tea," Thad muttered, scrunching up his face as he rolled the dice and voiced his confusion for the Muggle game.

When the bell rang, Thad wandered back to the tower still looking distracted and worried as Kurt and Blaine made their way down to the second floor to Defense. They were waiting outside the classroom for Professor Cooney to show up with Leighton approached with the other sixth year Slytherin boys, shaking his head and laughing as he so often was.

He grinned when he spotted Kurt and waved the other boys away, ignoring their playful jabs about him and Gavin.

"Hey," he said, nudging Kurt and smiling at Blaine, who smiled back, though it was admittedly a little tight.

"Hey," Kurt replied. "Excited to see Gavin tomorrow?"

"Yeah," Leighton said, blue eyes lighting up at the mention of his...boyfriend? Kurt wasn't really sure of what to call them given they only saw each other once a month.

"He seems pretty excited, too," Kurt said, smirking as he thought of the...*unusual* letters Gavin had been sending him in addition to their usual, long exchanges and reminiscing.

Leighton grinned. "Seems like it," he said. "Oh! I got a letter back from Simone. She said it would 'être son plaisir' to sing at the wedding."

"Magnifique," Kurt said, mentally ticking it off the list in his mind.

"Kurtsie, we still think you should let *us* take care of the entertainment," Jeff said from where he was lounging against the wall next to Nick, the two of them changing the colors of passing students' socks absently.

"No one wants to watch the two of you juggling Pygmy Puffs and showing them your impressions of dying Jobberknolls," Kurt said, lifting an eyebrow as the two of them sighed laboriously and muttered something about him being no fun at all.

"I've got to get to class," Leighton said, punching Kurt lightly on the arm. "I'll catch you later, Kurt, guys." He nodded to the others with a grin before jogging after his friends.

Kurt smiled, watching him go for a moment before turning back to Blaine, who was still wearing that same tight smile.

"Hey," Kurt said, taking his hand. "I love you."

"Love you, too," Blaine said, his gaze loosening as he squeezed Kurt's hand and they entered the classroom when Professor Cooney unlocked the door, pushing his thick glasses up his nose.

After turning in their homework, they spent the period relaxing and discussing their plans for the coming week, during which Blaine would be going to the Ministry to take his Apparition test, Flooing from McGonagall's office the day before Easter; Flint and Thad would be Apparating from Hogsmeade for the following weekend to spend the time with Flint's parents at Flint's house.

Jeff and Nick, as per usual, were discussing how best to top themselves for their last Easter break before leaving Hogwarts.

"Well, obviously we'll have the egg fight," Jeff said off-handedly as he watched the miniature models of a Peruvian Vipertooth and Ukrainian Ironbelly that they'd dug from their glass cages snapping and hissing at each other as they moved around the little arena they'd created with their books.

"Obviously," Nick said, nodding curtly. "But we have to do something else. Something...radical."

"Throwing eggs full of chocolate at each other isn't radical?" Kurt said, giving them a disbelieving look.



"Not radical enough for them, obviously," Blaine said, reaching into the arena to lift out the Vipertooth to stop the two models from attacking each other, ignoring Jeff and Nick's disapproving looks.

"So, what would you consider 'radical'?" Flint said curiously, scratching the Ironbelly under the chin absently and watching the tiny dragon kick its foot like a happy dog.

"You'll see," Jeff said with a smirk.

"You all make me glad I'm going home for holidays," Dan said, shaking his head and grinning.

"You're just missing out on all the fun," Nick said.

"And by fun you mean madness, insanity, craziness," Kurt said, smiling as Blaine rubbed the Vipertooth's stomach and the little model rolled onto its back and wriggled in his hand with a purr like a cat.

"More like awesomeness and brilliance," Jeff said, Nick nodding sagely beside him.

After lunch, Wes, David, Jeff, and Nick left to head to their Care of Magical Creatures lesson and Thad wandered off with Flint, most likely to the Room of Requirement or Gryffindor tower. Kurt retreated to the dorm with Blaine, tossing his bag away and collapsing onto his bed with a relieved sigh.

"A full week with nothing to do but relax and try and avoid Jeff and Nick's lunacy," he said, voice muffled in his pillow.

Blaine chuckled. Kurt heard him kicking off his shoes and pulling off his robes, the mattress creaking and sinking next to him as Blaine sat down. He groaned as Blaine straddled the back of his thighs and started rubbing his back gently.

"Does that help a little, love?" Blaine said, leaning forward to kiss the back of his neck.

"Mhmm," Kurt said, unwinding at the touch. "Ugh, Blaine, you're so good at this."

Blaine laughed softly again, his fingers kneading at the knotted muscles in his shoulders. Kurt shifted a little and squeaked when he felt Blaine's half-hard cock pressing against his ass.

"Sorry, love," Blaine murmured. "The noises you make when I do this are just incredible."

Kurt squirmed a little beneath him, struggling to roll over so that Blaine was resting just below his lap on his legs. Blaine smiled fondly down at him, skimming his fingers down Kurt's wrists to rest on his hands.

"Look at you," he said. "You're so gorgeous."

Kurt grinned and reached up to untuck Blaine's shirt from his slacks, running his hands flat up Blaine's Quidditch-toned stomach. Blaine tilted his head back with a faint groan of satisfaction.

"You may want to lock the door," Kurt said in a low voice. "We could be here awhile."

Blaine's eyes darkened and he nodded, reaching into his pocket for his wand and flicking it over his shoulder. The lock clicked and Blaine tossed his wand away before leaning forward, sliding up Kurt to capture his lips in a lazy kiss, his tongue dipping into his mouth as he released a hungry growl from the back of his throat.

Kurt's eyes fluttered closed as he leaned his head back into the pillow and Blaine grazed his lips over Kurt's jaw and down to his neck, sucking gently at the crook in a way that Kurt knew would leave a purplish bruise that would take days to fade if not for magic.

"Blaine," he breathed, digging his fingernails into Blaine's strong shoulders, dragging his hands down his back until he grabbed his ass, pulling him down against him to force their hips together.

Blaine let out a little purr of pleasure into his neck, matching Kurt's motion and rolling his hips down into him.

His heart rate skyrocketed between the sounds of heavy breaths and Blaine's lips against his skin. Blaine dragged his hips forward again and they both gasped at the friction.

"I love you," Blaine whispered, his tongue flicking across Kurt's earlobe and along the shell. "Love the way you sound when we do this. The way you move and look at me and lick your lips without even realizing you're doing it even though it's one of the hottest things I've ever seen when your tongue slides across your lips and all I want to do is taste you."

Kurt's toes curled into the blankets at the hoarse tone of his voice, a rough growl in his ear that sent electricity arching across his nerves.

"The moment we're ready to get back to doing it, I'm going to explore every last inch of you," Blaine continued, still rutting down against him at a slow, steady pace. "I can't wait to touch your skin, so soft and smooth and perfect. I want to taste you again, test to see if the rest of you still tastes as good as it did before. I know it will. You taste like heaven, Kurt. God, I can barely stand it."

Kurt wet his lips, panting beneath him as his eyes rolled back.

"Blaine, *Blaine*, oh god, yes, I want you to do it, *please*. I want you to touch me."

"Soon, love," Blaine said, kissing his neck softly. "Soon. We're not there yet. We're taking this slow, right?"

Kurt groaned in longing but nodded. They *had* agreed to move their relationship back to where it had been before carefully. Still, though, he wanted Blaine *so badly*, wanted his calloused fingers and talented tongue running over his bare skin until he was so far gone he couldn't think straight.

"Promise?" Kurt gasped. "Blaine, I want it *now*."

"Soon, love, I promise," Blaine said, sounding as though restraining himself was costing all of his self-control. "Right now, just let yourself go, okay?"

Kurt closed his eyes again and focused on the friction of their hips grinding together.

"Blaine, ugh, I love you so, *ah*, much," he groaned. "*Dammit*, Blaine."

Blaine chuckled low and dark in his ear. "Come for me, Kurt," he said in a whisper, barely audible.

Kurt shuddered and bit his lip as he obeyed, head lolling to the side on the pillow as he came hard in his briefs, bucking up off the mattress as Blaine continued to rock his hips down into him, lifting his head to watch Kurt falling apart.

"That's it, love," he murmured. "You're so amazing. The way you look when you get like this. So sexy."

Kurt fell back into the pillows, gasping for air as Blaine rolled against him a few more times before coming with a low moan that tumbled across his tongue and lips in the heavy air full of their mingled scents and sounds.

Blaine lay down on top of him, limp and breathing hot in his ear. "Love you," he mumbled. "So much."

"Love you too," Kurt replied, feeling suddenly drowsy and slack.

Blaine pressed a tender kiss along his jaw before pushing himself up and rolling off him. Kurt whined at the loss of his warm weight.

Blaine smiled and dug his wand from between the tangled blankets to clean both of them off, helping Kurt out of his robes and pulling off his shoes, socks and slacks. He undid Kurt's tie and unbuttoned his shirt, grazing his fingers over the hickey he'd left before stripping down to his own boxers.

He curled around Kurt, wrapping an arm around him tightly and nuzzling the back of his neck. "You smell so good," he mumbled. "Can we just stay here for awhile? You can sleep if you want, I just want to hold you."

Kurt smiled and nodded. "I could stay like this for hours," he said, glancing over his shoulder at him. He twisted his head to kiss him gently, slow and careful. He loved that no matter how many times they did this, they always ended like this, simply basking in the love they shared for each other despite everything they'd been through. There wasn't a moment that went by that he wasn't thankful that they'd fixed everything and gotten back together. He couldn't believe that there had been even a moment that he'd considered trying to forget about Blaine, about how much he loved him.

He didn't want to forget about Blaine, ever, just wanted to share these moments with him, the silent love and careful touch that they'd had with one another for so long and that he hoped they'd be able to share for years to come.

---

As he'd expected, the common room was crowded and loud with students celebrating the start of holidays. He'd retreated with Thad into the dormitory not long after the last class of the day had ended and was currently leaning back against the headboard of his four-poster bed as Thad rested between his legs, his back against Flint's chest as he tilted his head back to kiss at his jaw.

"So what are we doing now that break's started?" Flint said, smiling as Thad ran his fingers down his cheek and the coarse stubble growing there.

"Can't we just stay here all week?" Thad said, nuzzling his neck and snuggling against him. "Until we have to leave on Friday, I mean."

"What about Thursday?" Flint said, squeezing him around the middle.

"Our anniversary needs to be special."

Thad's face lit up at this, his dark eyes shining with happiness. "I can't believe we've made it a whole year. Wait...that didn't come out right. I mean...a year is, um...a long time." He blushed, ducking his head in embarrassment.

"I know what you meant, pet," Flint said, smiling and kissing the top of his head. "So, any ideas for what you want to do?"

"Besides you, you mean?" Thad said with a giggle.

"Little wildcat," Flint said, tickling him lightly and earning another giggle as Thad squirmed against him.

"Just being with you," Thad said a little breathlessly. "That's all I want. Just to be with you."

Flint smiled and touched their foreheads together. "Whatever you'd like, pet. But I still got you a present. I hope you know you're getting that no matter what. But I can't give it to you until Friday. I had it sent to my parent's house."

Thad bit his lip and fiddled with the hem of Flint's shirt. "You didn't have to get me anything," he mumbled.

"Of course I did," Flint said. "Stop saying things like that. What did we talk about, pet?"

Thad looked sheepish. "Sorry," he muttered.

"Pet," Flint said, lifted Thad's chin to meet his eyes. "Stop apologizing to me. Stop doubting yourself. Please. We can't keep talking about this over and over again. I hate seeing you feeling like you're not...good enough or something. When you're confident and open about how you feel, it's the most amazing thing in the world. I love it. I love when

you're shy and sweet but when you take control and aren't afraid to say what you want, *that's* the Thad I love to see."

Thad smiled, his cheeks dusting pink. "You really like it?" he said, absently adjusting Flint's crooked tie.

"Yes," Flint said, cupping his cheek. "Thad, when you're sure of yourself, there's nothing you can't do and it's incredible watching you, when you're set on something, when you're determined. You're amazing, Thad. I wish you would just see what I see."

Thad's eyes glittered with unshed tears and he angled his head back to kiss him hard, gripping his face in his hand and inhaling sharply.

"I love you," he said when he pulled back a moment later, wiping his eyes. "I don't know what I would do if you hadn't given me a chance."

"Just give *yourself* a chance, okay?" Flint said, lacing their fingers together and reveling in how well they fit, Thad's small, dark hand in his own rough one.

Thad nodded, looking more cheerful. He worried his lower lip between his teeth. "I got another letter this morning," he said in a small voice. Flint felt a twinge of annoyance at this. Not at Thad, of course, but at whoever was crazy enough to think that Thad would leave him. Didn't they see how much they loved each other?

"You're not mad right?" Thad said, not nervous and scared like he so often was when such a subject came up, which Flint saw as a sign of improvement in and of itself.

"Never," Flint said. "I could *never* be mad at you, pet. All you have to do is make that face you do, when you scrunch up your nose and smile."

Thad did just that, letting out a little giggle as he did.

Flint wrapped an arm firmly around his waist and rolled them both onto their sides, his fingers gliding over Thad's ribs and waist as the other boy laughed and wriggled under the tickling touch.

"Flint!" he yelped. "Stop it, I'm ticklish!"

"That's the point," Flint said, grinning.

Thad pulled his arms free from where they'd been pinned to his side and copied Flint's movement. "I can do it too, you know!" he said, smirking as Flint laughed.

"Okay, okay, truce!" Flint gasped.

Thad stopped tickling him and rolled off the bed, standing up and adjusting his lopsided shirt, a little flushed and half-giggling. "Can we go to the Ravenclaw tower?" he said, gathering up his discarded robes and wand. "Jeff and Nick said they were going swimming and I think the lake might be a little warmer with all the rain. Or maybe we could just take a walk? It's so nice outside." He glanced out the window at the sunny, still damp grounds.

"Whatever you'd like," Flint said, pushing himself up and pulling off his tie. He unbuttoned his shirt, having no desire to wear his uniform in the warmth outside.

There was a sharp intake of breath and he turned to see Thad staring at him, lips parted and eyes raking across his bare arms and chest with a sudden look of hunger.

"Jeff and Nick can wait," he said in a tight voice, dropping his robes and bag and practically jumping onto him, sending them both tumbling back onto the just vacated bed.

Flint laughed at his enthusiasm. "Pet, you're such a wildcat, you know that?" he said as Thad struggled to unbutton his own shirt while continuing to kiss him furiously.

Flint was already half-hard when Thad pressed his bare chest against his own, groaning at the touch and fisting one hand in Flint's hair. There was a sharp knock at the door and Thad sat up so quickly Flint barely had a chance to blink.

"Thad?" a small voice said from the other side.

Flint swore internally as Thad stood up with a surprised look, hurrying to haphazardly rebutton his shirt.

"One second," Thad said, his cheeks flushed and his lips pink and swollen from kissing. Flint resisted the strong urge to pull him back down on the bed and sat up to slip his own shirt back on.

Thad glanced back at him to make sure he was dressed before unlocking and opening the door. "Oh, hi, Cole," he said, sounding bewildered at seeing Cole O'Brien, the fifth year who had been so involved in unraveling Kurt and Blaine's relationship, standing in the doorway.

"H-hi," O'Brien said, sounding a little breathless. Flint saw him blush when he saw Thad's rumpled appearance.

"Can I help you with something?" Thad said politely. Flint knew that he'd been much more sympathetic towards the other boy after learning how friendless and alone he'd been before everything that had happened, knew that Thad had once felt the same, that he'd never find someone who would love him like Flint did.

"I-I was just wondering," O'Brien said anxiously. "You're so good at Runes and...and I've been having some trouble and my O.W.L.s are coming up a-and I was just thinking...um, if you're not busy, would you be able to maybe h-help me? After break?"

Thad blinked in surprise. "You mean tutor you?" he said.

O'Brien nodded, twisting the hem of his shirt between his fingers nervously.

"Oh," Thad said, looking mollified. "I, um, sure, I guess. No one's ever asked me to tutor them before."

"Really?" O'Brien said, eyes wide. "But you're the smartest person in school."

Thad blushed, shrugging. "Thanks," he muttered.

Flint moved to Thad's side, placing an arm firmly around his waist.

"You *are* the smartest person in school, pet," he said, kissing the top of his head and not missing the small frown that creased O'Brien's brow at the gesture. "Now, do you want to go hunt down Jeff and Nick or finished what we started?"

Thad gave him a wide-eyed look of warning, blushing furiously. "L-let's just go find the others," he said. "Why don't you get changed while I set things up with Cole?" He rocked up on his toes to kiss Flint on the cheek.

"Alright," Flint said, smiling. "Love you, pet."

"Love you, too," Thad said with a soft smile.

Flint ducked back into the dorm room, closing the door behind him and frowning. So O'Brien was the one with a crush on Thad? He was sure of it. The look he was wearing when he looked at Thad, the mild flattery and hesitation, it was the same way O'Brien had acted around Blaine for so long. Not that he was worried about anything like what had happened at the Quidditch match. *He'd* certainly never even *thought* about another boy besides Thad and even if Thad *had* had a dream like that, Flint wouldn't mind. They were *engaged* after all.

Still though, O'Brien seemed to have a thing for people who were already attached and didn't seem to have a problem trying to mess with serious couples. Sighing, he pulled off his shirt and slacks and tugged on a fresh t-shirt and jeans.

Thad slipped back into the room a few minutes later looking flustered.

"So, he really seems to like you," Flint said offhandedly as Thad picked up his bag and robes again.

"I've just never had anyone ask me to help with classwork before,"

Thad said, still looking disbelieving. "Other than you of course."

"Well, I need your help," Flint said, taking his hand with a smile. "I'm surprised I passed before you came along."

"You're smart," Thad mumbled.

"But not as smart as you, right?" Flint said, grinning.

"Maybe not," Thad said, looking down at his shoes with the faintest smirk.

"Oh, look at you, being confident," Flint said with a laugh. "I love it. I love you."

"Love you too," Thad said, leaning against his side as they stepped through the portrait hole into the seventh floor corridor.

---

"Kurtsie, wake up!"

"You missed the lake!"

Kurt yelped and jolted awake as cold water drenched his bare chest. Blaine snapped awake next to him with a gasp and they both looked around to see Jeff and Nick running away, giggling madly and waving their t-shirts, which they'd just wrung out over both of them, over their heads.

"You're dead!" Kurt shouted as Blaine shook water from his eyes.

"Both of you!"

They simply cackled and ran from the dorm, leaving the two of them soaking wet, Kurt livid and Blaine simply in shock.

"I *will* kill them," Kurt growled.

Blaine shivered and dug around for his wand, flicking it to dry them both off. "They're just being...well, themselves," he said, frowning a little as he pushed himself off the bed to get dressed.

Thad poked his head around the corner, eyes closed and dark hair dripping wet. "Are you decent?" he said, grinning.

"Yes," Kurt grunted, also standing.

Thad opened his eyes, striding into the room and not looking abashed at the two of them standing there in their underwear.

"I take it you went swimming," Kurt muttered as he dug through his trunk for fresh clothes.

"Yup," Thad nodded, grinning as he opened his own trunk.

"What are you so happy about?" Kurt said, straightening up with a pair of pajamas in hand and giving him a suspicious look.

"Break's starting," Thad said, tossing a towel over his shoulder along with a pair of jeans and sweater. "And next week is my anniversary with Flint. And I get to see his parents. And I'm going to be *tutoringsomeone* when the holiday's over!"

"Really? Who?" Kurt said as he pulled on his pajamas.

"Cole O'Brien," Thad said as he walked towards the bathroom.

Kurt and Blaine both froze, exchanging a shocked look.

"Are you serious?" Kurt said at last.

"Yeah," Thad said, stopping at the bathroom door. "He said he needs help in Runes."

"Thad, um...you remember what he *did* don't you?" Kurt said, treading delicately so as not to upset him. "I'm all for him being...well, normal, I guess, but..." he trailed off, watching Thad closely.

"There's nothing to worry about, Kurt," Thad said, waving him off absentmindedly. "He said he was really sorry about everything and he just wants to make friends and, I mean...I know what it's like, feeling alone and everything so...I mean, I can probably help, right?"



He shrugged and retreated into the bathroom, shutting the door behind him.

"I don't like this," Kurt said the moment he was gone. "There's no way this can end well."

"Well, he *could* be serious," Blaine said, though he sounded doubtful.

"I guess we'll just have to keep an eye on him."

"A *very* close eye," Kurt said, nodding.

The door opened and Flint peered into the room, Jeff and Nick's excited shrieks drifting up from the common room.

"Thad taking a shower?" he said, stepping inside and closing the door behind him.

"Yeah," Kurt said, sitting down on Blaine's bed.

"Did he tell you about—"

"Cole?" Kurt cut over him. "Yeah, he did."

"I don't like it," Flint said with a serious look.

"Me neither," Kurt agreed, frowning. "You think it might be him—"

"Sending Thad letters?" Flint said before he could finish. "Yeah, I think it is." He balled up his fists. "I swear if he tries to mess with Thad...."

"We'll keep watch," Blaine said. "We all know Thad is a bit *too* trusting for his own good sometimes. But if they're ever up here studying, we'll make sure to keep an eye out."

"Thanks," Flint said, running a hand through his hair. "I just...I don't trust that little...creep after what he did. Forcing you a Love Potion?" He shook his head, sighing heavily.

"Don't worry about it," Kurt said, standing up and moving to lay a comforting hand on his arm. "We won't let anything happen."

"Thanks," Flint said, looking a little sheepish for saying anything about it.

"I'd say after everything all of us have been through we ought to look out for each other," Blaine said with a faint smile.

Flint grinned. "You've a fair point there, mate," he said, nodding and glancing towards the bathroom door, where Thad's voice drifted into the room as he sang something Kurt couldn't make out. "Seriously, why does *everything* happen to us?" Flint added with a sigh.

---

"Leigh, you look like you're about to have a fit."

"Yeah, maybe Gavin isn't healthy for you. Your heart's going to give out the second you see each other."

Leighton glared at Scott and Brian, who smirked and high-fived where they were sitting opposite him in the carriage heading to Hogsmeade. He wasn't about to admit it out-loud, but he *was* nervous—well, excited, really—to see Gavin. Weeks of separation with only letters

between one another even though they were so close to each other was driving him insane.

"Why don't you both shut your traps before I shut them for you?" he said, cocking an eyebrow and trying to look a lot less anxious that he was.

They both sniggered and took to discussing their plans for the week as Leighton returned to looking out the window at the passing grounds. He was going to see Gavin in a few minutes and he still had no idea how he felt about the idea of doing certain...things with him. And they were going to be spending a full week together in Kenessey at Leighton's house. He started to panic a little as the carriages pulled up to Hogsmeade Station and he climbed out onto the platform with Scott and Brian, who waved and shouted goodbyes as they moved towards the train with the rest of those going home for the holiday.

Leighton gripped his bag and turned on the spot, looking through the crowd for the familiar pair of large, vivid blue eyes that he'd been thinking about so much over the past two months.

Someone grabbed his arm and turned him around and, before he could do more than yelp in surprise, a pair of lips pressed against his own, the taste of cherries hitting his tongue as arms wrapped around his waist. He melted a little into the touch when he realized it was Gavin, closing his eyes and kissing him back as fire raced across his lips and down his spine.

Gavin groaned faintly, his fingernails digging into the back of his shirt as he lapped at Leighton's tongue, pulling it into his mouth and sucking on it gently.

"Get some, Leighton!"

"Leigh, you're in public!"

Leighton pulled back and turned to glare at Brian and Scott, who were cat-calling from their compartment on the train, the others in the compartment with them laughing as well. He rolled his eyes and turned back to Gavin, whose pale blue eyes shone with his faint smirk. "Hey," he said, removing his arms from Leighton's waist to take his bag from him and hanging it over his shoulder.

"Quite the greeting," Leighton said, grinning as he walked with him from the station and down to the High Street. "It's like you missed me or something."

Gavin laughed softly. "You could say that."

Leighton wet his lips absently, relishing the taste that Gavin left there from kissing him.

"I hope you don't mind hanging out in the shop for a bit," Gavin said, glancing at him. "My shift ends at noon."

"No, that's fine," Leighton said, shoving his hands in his pockets and glancing around the street at the early morning shoppers.

The reached Scrivenscraft's and Gavin tapped the door to unlock it, sliding inside the quiet store, Leighton following behind him.

"Feel free to do...whatever," Gavin said flicking his wand to turn the sign on the window to 'open'. He disappeared to the back for a minute or two to reappear wearing a dark red apron tied around his neck and hips with 'Scrivenscraft's' sewn across the front and fell to the middle of his thighs.

He smiled softly when his eyes fell on Leighton again.

"I love you," he said, leaning back against the counter next to the till and popping another of his candies into his mouth.

Leighton smiled and moved around the counter to push him back against it and kiss him. Gavin's hand slid up his chest to grip his collar and pull him closer, his other hand framing the side of his face and grazing over his jaw. His worry and anxiety melted away at the touch and, before he knew it, Gavin had turned them around and hauled him up onto the counter, hands sliding up Leighton's thighs and mouth and unbelievable tongue gliding over his neck.

"You remember all those things I said I was going to do in my letters?" Gavin said, hoarse and low in his ear.

Leighton gulped and nodded, fingers gripped the edge of the counter.

"I'm doing every last one of them," Gavin said, tweaking one of the buttons on Leighton's shirt.

A nervous whine formed in Leighton's throat and Gavin pulled back looking worried.

"Leigh, we don't have to do anything if you're not ready," he said, suddenly back to soft and loving again as he rested his hands on Leighton's knees. "I can wait if you're not ready. It's killer but...I love you."

"N-no, I'm...I'm ready for *some* stuff, I think," Leighton said, looking down at him, their height difference much more noticeable in this position. "But I'm not really sure how any of this...I mean, I've only been with girls." He mumbled the last part, feeling embarrassed and exposed under Gavin's scrutinizing gaze.

"It's not a big deal, Leigh," Gavin said. "We'll just...you let me start and you tell me when to stop, okay?"

Leighton nodded, giving him a muttered thanks.

"But, unfortunately, I have a shop to run," Gavin said with a frown of annoyance. "So, we'll have to finish this later." His eyes trailed over Leighton's body and he made a small sound of frustration. "Later."

Leighton slid down off the counter, took one step as Gavin turned towards the till, stopped and turned back around, clutching the front of Gavin's shirt and pulling him into a brief, heated kiss.

Gavin looked mildly surprised when he pulled away a few seconds later. He licked his lips absently and smiled. "Are you keeping that then?" he said.

Leighton grinned and kissed him again to slip the candy that had passed between their mouths back onto Gavin's tongue. "Nah, you can have it back," he said, grinning at Gavin's playful glare and moving to the back room, where Gavin had left his bag.

The bell over the door to the shop tinkled and he heard Gavin talking to someone. Sighing, he open a bottle of Butterbeer and pulled out his homework for the week, thinking he'd do it just to keep himself distracted from thoughts of Gavin, though this was much harder every time he heard Gavin laugh or make some vaguely snarky comment about something, at which the customer would laugh.

He tapped his foot a little impatiently as he waited, glancing at the clock every few minutes. Gavin ducked into the back a few times to talk, and once, to push him back into the couch and kiss him hard. He was hiking Leighton's shirt up his stomach and running his hands up his sides when the bell over the door rang and he disappeared to the front again, leaving Leighton half-hard and breathing heavily.

After what felt like days, the clock struck noon and Gavin popped his head around the corner with a grin. "Ready to go?" he said, stepping into the room.

Leighton nodded, trying not to look too enthusiastic and failing miserably. Gavin smirked and reached behind his back to untie his smock from around his middle.

"Gav, can I ask you something?" Leighton said, standing up and swinging his bag onto his shoulder.

"What's up?" Gavin said, now working at the knot around his neck.

"Did you ever...um, I mean, have you done this...before?" Leighton said, a little nervous to hear his answer.

"Have I dated, you mean?" Gavin said, his fingers stilling where they were unfastening his smock. "Yeah."

"Oh," Leighton said.

He supposed he didn't really have any *right* to be disappointed. *He'd* dated. Hell, he'd lost his virginity to Penelope—though, granted, it had been her idea and he hadn't felt any kind of...connection with her for it. It shouldn't make a difference that this was the first *guy* he was dating but...something sank a little when he heard Gavin's answer.

"Nothing serious, though," Gavin said as he continued untying his smock, folding it up and setting it on the table. "Longest relationship I was in only lasted a few months. And I've never...well, I've never had sex...I mean, not sex sex." He frowned a little at his own choice of words before shrugging.

"Really?" Leighton said, perking up a little. Not that he was ready for that yet but, it was nice knowing they'd share it for the first time with each other. "W-why not?"

"None of those guys mattered to me," Gavin said. "I never...I never really got attached to any of them."

"Why?" Leighton said in a small voice.

Gavin paused, turning away from putting out the lamps in the room.

"Because none of them were *you*, Leighton."

Leighton swallowed back the sudden burn in his throat at the look in his eyes, the look of someone who'd been broken for so long and was just now trying to pick up and mend the pieces for the first time.

"I'm here now, though," Leighton said, moving towards him.

"Just...please don't leave again, Gav."

Gavin shook his head. "I won't. I *couldn't*. Not now," he said, blue eyes digging into Leighton, so familiar and pulling up all the things from their past that had given him that occasionally dulled and deadened look. He sighed and ran a hand through his dark hair. "I'm so sorry I left you like that, Leigh. I...I never wanted to hurt you. It *killed* me to hurt you."

"I know," Leighton said, smiling. "But you came back so...I'm not mad. I was. I'm not going to say I wasn't but...I'm not anymore."

Gavin looked grateful, the dullness fading from his eyes with his gentle smile. "I got something for you," he said, moving towards where his jacket was hanging in the corner. "Sort of a very late birthday present, I guess."

Leighton smiled and waited as Gavin pulled a box out of his coat pocket, looking nervous.

"I understand if you don't want to wear it or anything," Gavin said, passing him the box. "I just...I always liked these things and I thought maybe..." he trailed off, watching Leighton closely as he opened the box. He smiled and held up the Claddagh ring sitting inside. Much like the one he'd gotten Kurt for their friendship, but with a dark red heart of garnet instead of the aquamarine.

"It's weird," Gavin said in a distressed voice. "Dammit, I knew it."

"Gav, shut up," Leighton said with a laugh. "It's great. I swear."

Gavin sighed in relief, his face splitting into a wide grin. "You'll wear it then?"

Leighton nodded and slipped into onto his right hand. "I can't wear it on my left hand yet but...I will one day. I promise."

Gavin beamed and hooked his fingers in Leighton's belt loops to pull him close, tilting his head up and kissing him with a sudden hunger and passion that caught his breath in his throat. He took Leighton's tongue between his teeth and tugged gently, grinning as he pulled and forced Leighton to follow him as he walked backwards, stopping beside the desk.

Gavin reached up to play with the hair at the nape of his neck before digging his fingers gently in his scalp. Leighton shivered as Gavin lowered his mouth to his neck, scraping his teeth across the soft skin and playing his tongue over the spot with a soft groan.

He pushed Leighton towards the desk, making the back of his legs hit the heavy chair sitting there. Leighton sat down hard when Gavin continued to push against him, wincing at the jarring movement.

"Only time I'll ever be taller than you," Gavin murmured with a small sigh.

Leighton laughed, his hands coming to rest on the arms of the chair as Gavin slid down onto his knees, gripping Leighton's thighs tightly.

"You trust me, right?" Gavin said, pulling away from his neck to give him a steady look.

Leighton nodded.

"And you're *sure* you're ready to move on to other things?" Gavin said. Again, Leighton nodded.

"Alright," Gavin said, eyes darkening again. His hands skimmed up Leighton's thighs to tug off his belt and unbutton his jeans.

"G-Gav, what are you doing?" Leighton said, eyes widening when Gavin nudged his legs apart.

"Making you feel good," Gavin said, grinning up at him with a wink.

"B-but...I don't—"

Gavin stopped and his gaze softened again. "Leigh, you don't have to do the same thing for me," he said gently. "I don't expect you to. This is just what *I* want to do. I told you I wanted to make you moan, remember?"

"But, if you're not ready..."

"N-no, you can, um...do it, I guess," Leighton said, trying to stop his legs from shaking. *This*, he'd never done before.

Gavin leaned up to kiss him, slow, careful and reassuring, his hand grazing over the front of Leighton's jeans and tugging down his zipper. Leighton gasped and groaned as Gavin's hand slipped down his boxers and wrapped around him, pumping a few times as his tongue swirled around Leighton's mouth.

Gavin pulled back, his lips still brushing across Leighton's and their eyes inches apart. Leighton shivered at look, the hunger and love melding together in the vivid blue.

"Trust me," he whispered. "I love you."

Leighton waited with bated breath, biting his lip hard as Gavin pressed kisses down his neck and the exposed portion of his collar before lowering his head and flicking his tongue across the slit of his cock.

Leighton gasped and jerked his hips up instinctively, digging his fingernails into the arms of the chair he was in as Gavin's tongue licked across the length of his cock a few times before his mouth closed around him and he sucked gently.

Groaning and fighting the urge to thrust up into the amazing, wet heat, Leighton dropped his head back, feeling dizzy and light-headed, barely believing what was happening. Gavin's tongue glided around him and *damn* he'd missed that tongue.

"Christ, Gav," he choked, legs already starting to tremble.

Gavin grinned around him, pulling off with a faint pop. Leighton whined at the loss and looked down at him, frowning.

"You like that?" Gavin said, voice a little hoarse.

Leighton nodded and Gavin pressed the tip of his tongue to the slit of his cock. Leighton swore and twitched in his seat.

"No one's ever done this for you before, have they?" Gavin said, alternating between speaking and playing his tongue over Leighton's cock.

Leighton shook his head, wishing he would go back to what he'd been doing because this teasing was absolute torture.

"Do you want me to keep going?" Gavin said, now pumping his fingers around him lazily.

"Yes," Leighton groaned. "Please, Gav, damn it feels so good."

Gavin leaned up to kiss him briefly, Leighton returning the gesture a little messily, before lowering his head again to wrap his lips around Leighton's cock.

Leighton practically wailed in pleasure, moaning and panting and forcing himself not to move. Gavin looked up at him and he groaned at the sight, his blue eyes piercing as ever as he hollowed out his cheeks and hummed a little around him, sending jolts of electricity fluttering up his body.

"G-Gav, I'm...*dammit*, I'm close," he said, barely able to get his brain to send the words to his mouth as everything went a little fuzzy and all else but Gavin was pushed from his mind.

Gavin continued to suck, humming and teasing his tongue over him.

"Christ, Gav," Leighton choked, his vision flashing white as he came with a long shout, his hips twitching upward towards Gavin's mouth, dimly aware that he could feel Gavin swallowing around him. He closed his eyes, breathing shakily and whimpering as Gavin pulled away from him and tucked him back in his boxers, fastening his jeans again before pushing up to catch his lips in a kiss. He grimaced at the taste of himself on Gavin's tongue, but kissed him back sloppily, feeling completely spent and exhausted.

"How was that?" Gavin mumbled against his lips.

Leighton groaned in reply. "B-brill," he said, barely audible.

"That good, huh?" Gavin said with a smirk. "Well, we'd better get going then before you fall asleep. One, your Mam is waiting and two, I can't imagine my boss would want me doing these kinds of things in the back of her shop and if we don't go soon, I'm going to get started again."

Leighton blinked a few times to try and clear his head before pushing himself up off the chair, stumbling a little as he still felt woozy.

"Don't hurt yourself, you tosser," Gavin said with a laugh.

"Shut up," Leighton said, pushing him lightly as he picked up his bag. Gavin grinned and popped a fresh candy into his mouth. "Ready to go?"

"Yeah," Leighton said, taking his hand with a smile. "Mum's been having a fit, she's so excited to see you. She said she's making a huge lunch so...be prepared for that."

Gavin grimaced. "You're Mam's a horrible cook," he said as they walked out onto the High Street and he locked up the shop with a flick of his wand.

"I'm well aware of the fact," Leighton said, laughing. "I've lived with her for seventeen years, after all."

"Don't be a prat," Gavin said. They stopped in the middle of the street. "Hold on tight, okay? And it might make you a little sick, just so you know. I puked the first time I Apparated."

"Brill," Leighton mumbled, clutching Gavin's hand.

Gavin smiled over at him, eyes softening and warming over. "I love you, Leighton," he said, leaning over to kiss him on the side of the neck.

Leighton returned his smile. "I know," he said.

Gavin squeezed his hand a little, moving closer to him and taking a deep breath before turning on the spot and pressing them both into nothingness.

---

Kurt rolled over, groaning a little and groping around for his alarm clock, face still pressed in the pillows. It was warm and cozy in his



four-poster bed, with Blaine pressed against his side, their legs tangled together under the covers, but his stomach had woken him up for the third time and he'd finally decided to give into it.

Hand thrust through the hangings, his fingers hit his clock at last and he pulled it in, gazing blearily at the face. His eyes widened when he saw that it was already past noon.

"Damn," he mumbled, yawning and rubbing his eyes, barely believing he'd just slept for a full eleven hours after going to bed very late the night before, staying up chatting with Thad and cuddling with Blaine as Jeff and Nick commanded them to stay upstairs as they had "plans" they needed to work on in the common room.

He twisted around to press a kiss to Blaine's forehead before sliding out of bed, thinking he'd just bring something upstairs for both of them and Thad. Stretching his arms over his head with a sound of satisfaction, he padded silently into the hall and made his way downstairs, eyes still only half-open.

He stopped at the bottom of the stairs and his eyes flew open, all trace of sleep gone at the sight that greeted him.

"*What the hell did you do the common room?*" he shouted, staring around at the elaborate configuration of blankets and pillows covering the entire room which seemed to include several complex tunnels, a rope ladder of knotted blankets that hung from the hallway banister, and a parapet constructed from several upturned couches—obviously balanced with magic—that formed the battlements towering towards the spangled ceiling.

Jeff's blonde head appeared over the crenel, a wide grin plastered on his face. "Good morning, Kurtsie."

"How am I supposed to get to breakfast?" Kurt said, glancing at the entrance to the labyrinthine construction, where they'd hung a sign that read "This Way to Awesomeness".

Nick appeared in the middle of the fort, his brown hair tousled and his face split into a smile as big as Jeff's. "Where would the fun be in telling you that?" he said, Jeff sniggering as he disappeared before the wall of the small tower only to pop up a few seconds later at the bottom near the wall of windows.

"Do either of you want to have children one day?" Kurt said, pulling out his wand threateningly. "Because if you don't tell me how to get across this...monstrosity in five seconds, I will make sure that's no longer possible. Not *human* children, at least."

The Beaters tittered and simply ducked back into the wide expanse of fabric and cushions with matching smirks.

"What the hell?"

Kurt turned to see Blaine standing a few stairs behind him with a similar look of confusion and annoyance, dark curls tousled and his cheeks faintly flushed from the heat of the dorms.

"Well, good morning," Kurt said, his annoyance vanishing at the sight of Blaine looking so deliciously rumpled.

"What've they done?" Blaine said, moving to stand next to him and gaze open-mouthed at the fort, Jeff and Nick's muffled laughter reaching them from somewhere in the middle.

"Well, they did say they wanted to do something radical," Kurt said, slipping his wand back in the waistband of his sweatpants.

"This is certainly 'radical'," Blaine muttered. "But...I'm hungry. How are we supposed to get to the Great Hall?"

"I'll get through."

They both turned to see Thad standing behind them, nose wrinkled up as he scrutinized the construction.

"Yeah, I can get through, I think," he said, nodding.

"How do you know?" Kurt said, watching him walk to the entrance and pull back the curtain of blankets.

"Because I know Jeff and Nick," Thad said simply before disappearing into the tunnel.

Kurt exchanged a look with Blaine, who shrugged. They waited in silence for a minute or two.

*"Thaddeus! You came to visit us!"* Jeff's voice drifted out to them.

*"Wildcat, you made it through!"* Nick cried gleefully. *"Would you like some Butterbeer? It's in the dining hall."*

"Dining hall?" Blaine mouthed, eyes wide.

Kurt snorted and shook his head. There were times when Jeff and Nick went so ridiculously over the top that he just couldn't help but laugh.

"They're insane," Blaine said, gripping his face in his hand. "Honestly, completely, one hundred percent *insane*."

"And yet, we put up with them," Kurt said with a sigh.

Thad suddenly appeared on the other side of the room, grinning though his hair was a little messier than before. He beamed and waved at Kurt. "I'll just bring up breakfast," he said happily.

"I'm so glad we became friends," Kurt said with a sigh, grabbing Blaine's hand and tugging him back upstairs. "We'll just leave those two to their business, shall we? They can keep themselves entertained."

"Are you suggesting we do the same?" Blaine said, smirking.

"Maybe," Kurt said with a grin as he pulled him into the deserted dormitory and closed the door behind them, walking over to the bed, already kissing Blaine desperately, a little sloppy as they were both still waking up.

"You know Thad will be back in a few minutes, right?" Blaine murmured as Kurt sat back on the bed and pulled Blaine down with him, rolling over so they were lying down, facing each other.

"Just let me kiss you, then," Kurt muttered, groaning and dipping his tongue into Blaine's mouth, savoring the taste and the way their lips fit so perfectly together.

"I can manage that, I think," Blaine said with a light laugh. It took all of his self-control to not take things further, and they'd barely forced themselves to stop and calm down when Thad pushed backwards into the room with a tray floating in front of him laden with food, Acorn winding around his ankles and meowing hungrily.

"They're serving lunch now since it's so late," he said. He paused, smirking as he saw their flushed and sweaty faces. "Am I interrupting?"

"No," Kurt said briskly, flashing him a warning look as he giggled.

"And thank you."

Thad smiled and set the tray down on the bed beside Blaine, climbing up across from him and pulling Acorn onto his lap when the cat jumped up beside him.

"Not for you," Thad said sternly, tapping the cat on the nose. Acorn gave him a haughty look but curled up a moment later, purring loudly and watching Kurt dish out food.

"So I guess we're stuck in here for the rest of the day," Kurt said, passing the food around. "Not that I had anything to do today anyway but...still."

"We *could* just tear it down," Blaine said, shrugging. "Not a difficult spell to clean it all up."

"Let them have their fun," Kurt said with a smile.

"Somehow, I don't think the rest of the Ravenclaws would classify it as 'fun'," Thad said, scrunching up his face and feeding Acorn a piece of bread. "I'm pretty sure there's a second year trapped in there still trying to find his way out."

Kurt choked on his tea, coughing and spluttering as Thad giggled and Blaine rubbed his back gently.

---

Leighton gasped as his feet hit solid ground again, his head spinning at the strange sensation he'd just experienced, like someone was trying to compress him into a ball.

"Easy," Gavin said gently, steadying him with an arm around his waist.

"That's awful," Leighton said, closing his eyes to fight off the nausea.

"At least you didn't get sick," Gavin said, kissing him softly on the neck and waiting for him to straighten up.

Leighton took a few deep breaths before opening his eyes again and looking around. They were just outside of Kenessey, the little wooden sign on the side of the road welcoming them into the tiny village nestled amongst the green, high hills on the edge of the wide, smooth lake, Loch Corrin.

"Welcome back," he said, glancing over at Gavin with a grin.

Gavin's face was set, his jaw tight as he looked down at the home he'd left four years ago.

Leighton took his hand. "You're safe here now," he said. "He's not here, Gavin. He's not going to hurt you anymore."

Gavin nodded stiffly and set off down the slopping path towards the village, Leighton walking with him and watching him closely.

The sounds of fisherman at the shore drifted up to them as they got closer to the main road, which really only consisted of a few small shops and a pub that served the best fish and chips Leighton had even tasted. His mouth watered at the thought. Then he remembered that his mother would be cooking and frowned.

They walked together past the quiet shops and cottages, a few stray sheep wandering down the street, a dog trotting at their heels.

"Hasn't changed much, has it?" Gavin said quietly.

"Not really," Leighton said looking around at the rolling hills surrounding them and the dark waters stretched across the valley, a few boats gliding across it. "They expanded the Apothecary."

"I bet you love that," Gavin said with a grin.

Leighton smiled. "Yeah, it's great," he said. "I pretty much lived there over the summers after...after you left."

Gavin's face fell a little and he stared down at his feet as they walked, the road changing from faded pavement to gravel.

"There it is," Leighton said, looking up the hill they were climbing to the house perched at the little cul-de-sac at the top. "Home sweet home."

Gavin looked up and smiled at the sight of Leighton's house, the little brick cottage with the leaning chimney rising into the air. Trees rose around the yard, swaying and rustling gently in the breeze.

"You know, I think I always considered your house more of a home than my own," Gavin said thoughtfully. "It...felt more like one than mine did, I guess."

Leighton squeezed his hand as they walked around the curving drive to the front door, which creaked as he pushed it open.

"Mum?" he said, setting down his bag and glancing around the deserted entry. "Mum, I'm home. Gavin's with me."

There was the sound of something heavy falling, a soft swear, and a plump woman with light brown hair pulled up in a loose ponytail appeared around the corner.

"Leighton, darling!" his mother cried. "And Gavin, my, you are a sight! Look at how much you've grown!" She didn't hesitate to pull Gavin into a bone-crushing hug, which Gavin returned with a grin.

"Hullo, Mrs. Cross," he said as she pulled away to hug Leighton.

"Oh, my dear, how *have* you been?" Leighton's mother said, placing her hands on her hips and eyeing Gavin. "You've grown! Not as much as Leighton of course, but I don't think bean stalks grow as much as Leighton."

"Mum," Leighton muttered.

Gavin smirked. "Yeah, he's definitely got to have some giant blood in him somewhere, I imagine."

Leighton's mother laughed. "You were always quite the card, Gavin," she said. "You can tell me all about what you've been up to over lunch. The casserole just came out of the oven."

She turned and walked back towards the kitchen and Leighton exchanged a grimace with Gavin.

"Be brave," Gavin said with a sigh.

Leighton grinned, covering his mouth to conceal his laughter as they walked into the kitchen, where the smell of something burning hit their nostrils.

"Your dad is so lucky he works," Gavin muttered as they sat down and Leighton's mother set plates of casserole in front of them.

"So, Gavin," she said, sitting down across from them with a mug of tea and smiling. "Leighton has told me about everything that's happened and I'll admit, I was a little surprised when he said the two of you were together. But you were so close when you were younger, it sort of makes sense."

"You're not bothered about...about us being...um," Gavin trailed off, looking at a loss for words and quickly shoveled a forkful of casserole into his mouth. Leighton fought back a laugh at the look that crossed over his face as he struggled to chew and swallow the questionable substance.

"About you being together? As two boys, you mean?" she said, sipping her tea. "Well, I'm a little disappointed that I won't have any grandchildren and it took a little while for his father to warm up to the idea but...as long as you're happy, Leighton, that's all we care about." Leighton felt a surge of love towards his mother and reached across the table to grip her wrist briefly. She smiled and patted his arm before he pulled it back and forced himself to suffer through the casserole as Gavin recounted everything he'd been doing since he'd

left Kenessey. Leighton, who'd already been told everything on the first day they'd seen each other in Scrivenshaft's, listened silently. "We moved around a lot, of course," Gavin said, picking absently at his plate. "I think the longest we stayed in one house was two months up in Scotland. Mam was researching kelpies and supposedly there were some pretty big ones living there. I pretty much taught myself when Mam was working. I read *a lot* of spell books and history books too, of course.

"That's how I kept myself busy most of the time. But...it wasn't *too* bad. I usually got along with the locals pretty well except there was one little town in Wales where some guy started hitting on me and so I flirted back and him and his friends beat the piss out of me for being gay."

Leighton's mother clapped a hand to her mouth at this.

Gavin shrugged. "I was alright. Just a few cracked ribs and a busted nose but they got arrested and Mam and I moved on within two days anyway." He sighed heavily, the dull look returning to his eyes.

Leighton reached under the table to lay a hand on his leg and Gavin smiled. "But it's much better now," he continued. "Mam's gotten her book finished so she doesn't have to move around anymore since it's selling pretty well and I can stay in Hogsmeade and now I get to see Leighton so...I'm happy."

Leighton's mother smiled warmly at the pair of them. "It's good seeing you back together again," she said. "You were inseparable when you were younger. I remember Leighton begging me to take me to your house one summer when it rained so hard the bridge flooded over and he was afraid your house was going to be washed away."

"Thanks, Mum," Leighton muttered as Gavin smirked and gave him a look as if to confirm what she's said.

She smiled and stood up, clearing their plates away and taking them to the sink. "If you're still hungry, I can make dessert," she said as she flicked her wand and the dishes started cleaning themselves.

Leighton exchanged a terrified look with Gavin.

"Er, no thanks," he said, trying not to sound too hasty. "We're going down to Carson's for custard, I think."

"Oh, that's right," she said, turning back to them from the sink. "I'm sure you've been missing them, Gavin."

"Probably more than Leighton," Gavin said, nodding.

"Prat," Leighton mumbled, hitting him under the table and earning a smirk.

"Well, try not to be out too late, alright?" Leighton's mother said.

"Your father will want to see you. And Gavin, of course."

Leighton waved over his shoulder in acknowledgement before striding out of the kitchen with Gavin and out into the warm spring air.

"Well, we survived meal one," Leighton said, rubbing his stomach ruefully.

"I don't know if I'll last the week," Gavin grumbled, looking faintly ill.

"Come on," Leighton said, walking a little faster down the hill towards the village, "Carson's."

"Mmm, Carson's," Gavin said. "I remember stopping there every day during the summer. I don't understand how we didn't both weigh twenty stone by the time school started."

"Because we spent the rest of our time exploring the hills and swimming," Leighton said with a laugh. "We should have been killed about a dozen times from rock slides and falling out of trees."

Gavin grinned, nodding in agreement.

They stopped at the little stall in the village to get frozen custard, eating and talking as they walked nowhere in particular, simply happy to be together again after their month of separation. Crossing the little stone bridge that spanned the narrow river that snaked through the hills away from Loch Corrin, Gavin froze in front of an old stone cottage that sat on the other side, a massive willow tree swaying in the front yard, ivy clinging to its trunk and branches and twisting around the section in the middle where the branches had been cut away so long ago.

Leighton stopped next to Gavin, who stared at his old home, now crumbling and in disrepair after being left to the elements for four years.

"Gavin?" Leighton said cautiously. "Gav, we can go. Let's go."

"No," Gavin said, a little sharply. He cleared his throat and his voice softened. "No, I...I want to go in."

"Are you sure?" Leighton said, knowing exactly what had happened behind those walls.

Gavin nodded and walked towards the cottage, his steps stiff and mechanical looking. Leighton followed after him, both of them stepping over the front door, which had twisted off its hinges at some point and lay lopsided in the doorway.

Everything was coated in dust and cobwebs, a branch sticking through a window in the kitchen, most likely from the horrible blizzard they'd had two winters before. Glass and dead leaves crackled beneath their feet as they walked, the stairs creaking ominously as they walked upstairs.

Gavin stopped at his old bedroom, which was tiny and situated at the back of the house. He ran his hands over the indents in the walls where his father had punched or thrown him against them. Tears

welled in his eyes and he sniffed, attempting to wipe them away as Leighton saw the horrible memories washing through him.

"It got so bad at the end," he said, his voice constricted with emotion.

"There were a few times when I'd just lock myself in the closet and wait for him to stop yelling or pass out. Sometimes I wanted to write you. To ask you to come over or...or something but...I didn't want you seeing me like that...when he was...finished with me. After I saw the way you reacted that first time he hit me...I couldn't put you through that again."

Leighton took his hand, clasping it tightly. "I'd have come in a heartbeat, you know," he said softly. "I'd have done anything for you, Gavin. Anything."

"I know," Gavin said, nodding as tears slid down his face. "I just...I know you *would* have, that's why I couldn't...couldn't let you see me. I loved you and I knew it would hurt you seeing me like that and I was sure that...that just seeing you care would make me let something slip."

He turned to Leighton, blue eyes shining. "When we left...I...I didn't feel anything anymore. The second it stopped being us and just being me...and you completely separate...I was just...numb. That's why I didn't care when people would beat me up or any of that...sometimes I'd instigate it just to feel *something*. And I know it sounds really twisted but...it made me think of what...what *he* used to do and I'd think of the look you got, how much you cared and I'd feel again for a little bit. I kept chasing that feeling for so long." He shook his head, staring down at the floor again.

Leighton could remember just how he'd felt when he'd seen that Gavin's father had hurt him, but this...this was so much worse. The way he'd been so deadened for so long and even now used his shell of sarcasm and humor to keep himself from showing how much it had affected him killed Leighton.

"Gavin," he said, his own eyes stinging with tears. He wrapped his arms around Gavin and pulled him close, their arms around each other's shoulders in the broken down cottage where Gavin had suffered so much.

"I love you," Gavin said, tightening his hold around him. "Leighton, you were the only thing keeping me alive sometimes, the only reason I even *cared* enough to survive. I love you so much."

Leighton kissed his neck and squeezed him back. "I can't say I love you like that yet, but I *do* love you, Gavin," he said softly. "I don't think I've ever loved anyone else so much in my life. I know I've said it before but I felt so lost when you left."



Gavin shook against him, his face pressed into his shoulder as he cried and clung to him. After another minute or two, he lifted his head, face tear-stained and eyes red-rimmed and swollen.

"Can we go?" he said thickly. "I'm...I'm finished."

Leighton nodded, kissing him on the forehead before lifting his chin and pressing their lips together in a tender kiss. Gavin released a sob into his mouth but kissed him back, gripping his face in his hand.

They broke apart and Gavin exhaled shakily, glancing around the wrecked room before pulling Leighton out into the hallway and closing and locking the door behind him with a flick of his wand.

"No one should ever have to go in there again," he explained. "No one."

Leighton nodded and laced their fingers together, watching Gavin closely as they walked back outside together and across the overgrown yard.

"Leigh?" Gavin said, his voice no longer shaky as they left the cottage behind and continued up the dirt road into the hills.

"Hmm?" Leighton said, glancing over at him.

"I...I've got something I want to say...well, sing really," Gavin said, frowning faintly.

"You...you want to sing to me?" Leighton said, stopping and turning to look at him in surprise.

Gavin nodded, meeting his gaze and looking a little apprehensive.

"I've been wanting to...I want you to understand just how much you mean to me and...I can't really put it in words, you know?"

Leighton nodded, smiling. "Um...did you want to do it here, or...?"

"Just up ahead," Gavin said, nodding up the path. "To where part of the hill flattens out and you can see the whole valley and the lake...I've kind of thought this through."

"Oh," Leighton said, taken aback by his consideration. "Okay, yeah, let's...let's go."

They continued up the path in silence until they reached the spot. It was hidden from the road by a line of trees, but once they cleared, there was a relatively flat patch of soft grass that offered a spectacular view of the mountains, lake, and village. Boats drifted lazily over the dark water far below them.

Gavin sat down in the grass and Leighton joined him, tilting his head back to look at the clouds drifting across the sky. This, in addition to Gavin's treehouse, had been one of their favorite spots when they were younger, where they would simply lie in the grass and pick out shapes in the clouds and talk about nothing.

Gavin turned to face him, looking nervous.

"It's alright," Leighton said, smiling reassuringly and taking his hand.

"I want to hear you sing. It's been a long time."

Gavin took a deep breath, leaning forward to kiss him gently before sitting back, facing him in the grass. Leighton had always thought Gavin was a good singer, they'd often sang jokingly when they were younger, but his voice had matured in the years they'd been apart and it was so drenched in pain that Leighton couldn't stop the tears stinging his eyes as Gavin sang gently, eyes fixed on him steadily.

*There's a song that's inside of my soul*

*It's the one that I've tried to write*

*Over and over again*

*I'm awake in the infinite cold*

*But you sing to me over and over again*

Gavin took his other hand, gripping them both tightly as tears streamed down his face, though he kept his voice calm.

*So I lay my head back down*

*And I lift my hands*

*And pray to be only yours*

*I pray to be only yours*

*I know now you're my only hope*

Leighton moved closer to him, brushing away his tears as he took a few seconds to calm himself down.

*Sing to me the song of the stars*

*Of your galaxy dancing and laughing*

*And laughing again*

*When it feels like my dreams are so far*

*Sing to me of the plans that you have for me over again*

Gavin's voice drifted across the hills and valleys, catching on the breeze and wafting skyward, as beautiful and terrible as phoenix song.

*And I lay my head back down*

*And I lift my hands*

*And pray to be only yours*

*I pray to be only yours*

*I know now you're my only hope*

Leighton lifted Gavin's chin as his head dropped to his chest and he sobbed. When his eyes met Leighton's, he calmed a little and continued.

*I give you my apathy*

*I'm giving you all of me*

*I want your symphony*

*Singing in all that I am*

*At the top of my lungs*

*I'm giving it back*

Every word was so heavy with conviction and emotion that it almost hurt Leighton to hear the pain that Gavin was pouring out to him.

*And I lay my head back down*

*And I lift my hands*

*And pray to be only yours*

*I pray to be only yours*

*I pray to be only yours*

*I know now you're my only hope*

Gavin sniffed and wiped his eyes, gripping his head in his hand as Leighton held his other hand comfortingly. It took him a few minutes to calm down enough to look at him again, his pale blue eyes still bright with tears when he did.

"I wanted to sing that to you before...before I left," he said. "I wanted to so badly but...I didn't want to scare you off. I thought it would be easier to just...try and forget you than to think that I...disgusted you or something."

"Gav, why didn't you?" Leighton said. "I would have listened. I would have, I swear. I might not have seen it then but *this*, you and me, this is what I've been waiting for. I didn't even know it but...it's what I've wanted all along, I think."

Gavin smiled hopefully and Leighton leaned forward to kiss him, tasting his tears and putting everything he could behind the gesture to make Gavin understand just how much he meant to him, just how much he *did* love him, though he could say he loved him the same way Gavin loved him yet. But he would. One day, he would. He was sure of it. The thought made something swell inside of him and he couldn't stop himself from smiling against Gavin's lips, feeling a jolt of happiness with Gavin repeated the motion.

---

"Kurtsie, you're going to collapse the tunnel!"

"Have you no common sense?"

Kurt turned and glared at Jeff and Nick, who were crawling behind him in the fort of blankets and pillows they'd spent the night before constructing.

"I know how to crawl, thank you," he snapped. "I'd prefer not to, as it's destroying the knees of my pants, but as I have no choice...."

"Good to see you've finally conceded to the fact that we are brilliant," Jeff said.

"I never said you were brilliant," Kurt said, frowning as he came to an intersection before turning left. "I simply told Blaine to let you have your fun. So you both owe me big time, got it?"

"We swear to never interrupt you and Blaine during your wild, naked flailing," Nick said, Jeff sniggering behind him.

Kurt glowered over his shoulder at them. "You know, Thad and Blaine could always decide to just destroy this despite me saying not to. Or the rest of the Ravenclaws could. I don't think any of them are fond of it either."

"Well, they're a bunch of wankers, are they?" Jeff said matter-of-factly as they reached another junction and Kurt was forced to climb over an upturned armchair to continue on.

"Are we almost there?" he said, his back starting to cramp painfully from crawling on his hands and knees. "This is stupid."

"You're stupid," Nick retorted immediately. "And yes."

Kurt turned another corner and sighed in relief when he saw Blaine, Thad, and Flint sitting together under a canopy of blankets, Thad sipping at a mug of tea as Flint and Blaine rolled a ball of yarn between them laughing as Acorn chased after it.

"You survived," Thad observed with a smile as Kurt moved to sit next to Blaine.

"Barely," Kurt muttered, scowling at Jeff and Nick as they sat down to finish the small circle.

"Oh, we should have a séance," Jeff said, glancing around at them.

"Quick, think of a dead person we can contact."

"We could just kill you," Thad said, lifting an eyebrow. "But I probably wouldn't do the séance then. If you talk this much alive, I can't imagine what you'd be like dead."

Jeff and Nick pursed their lips as the others laugh.

"Well, the wildcat's got his claws out," Nick said with a sniff.

"Just for that, we're abandoning all of you in here to find your own way out," Jeff said seriously. "And I won't even feel bad if you starve."

They flashed them all mock glares before crawling off into one of the tunnels.

"Is it crazy to say I'll actually miss this kind of stuff when we leave?" Kurt said, accepting Thad's tea to take a sip before passing it back to him.

"Just don't tell them that," Blaine said seriously. "They're redouble their efforts."

"My lips are sealed," Kurt said, feeling a little sad at the thought that he only had two more months left at Hogwarts and yet feeling excited by the prospect of living with Blaine in London in *their* apartment—the thought still made him smile—while he worked for St. Mungo's and Blaine, hopefully, played for the Tornados with Flint.

He leaned against Blaine, the possibility of such a future so vivid in his mind even with the pain they'd been through together. He thought that maybe the pain was what made it so much easier to imagine.

After all they'd suffered, picturing something as happy as those images of them being together came readily to his mind.

They spent the rest of the day under the roof of sheets, talking and simply enjoying the peace and quiet with the most of the school gone, until a pair of sixth year girls threw a fit when they couldn't get through to the other side of the room and Nick and Jeff were forced to disassemble the fort—which consisted of fifty-seven blankets and ninety-two pillows—under threat of detention until they graduated by one of the girls, who was a Prefect.

"Bloody women," Jeff grumbled, folding his arms crossly when they sat in front of the fire in the mercifully recovered common room.

"Always have to ruin everything," Nick muttered, scowling at the table like it had insulted him.

"You know, Hanna and Gwen are women," Kurt said, glancing up from the book he was reading.

"But they're brilliant," Jeff said, giving him a look and shaking his head as Nick clucked his tongue, considering the chess table stretched between them.

"Oh, excuse me," Kurt said, holding up his hand in surrender.

"You're excused," Nick said, not looking up from the game. "Now...read your book."

Kurt rolled his eyes as Blaine chuckled from where he was sitting beside Kurt, legs stretched across the arm of the chair and his back pressed against Kurt's shoulder as he read through a letter from his mother, who'd been doing better and kept letters coming to both of them steadily.

"Ready for your test?" Kurt said, glancing at the letter over Blaine's shoulder and catching a bit about his Apparition Test later that week.

"I think so," Blaine said with a sigh. "Honestly, I don't like it all that much."

"It does take some getting used to," Kurt said fairly. He wasn't a huge fan of Apparition either, and was glad they'd have everything close when they moved to London. He squirmed at the thought of living together.

"What was that?" Blaine said with a laugh at the movement.

"Just...just excited to live in the city," Kurt said. "With you."

Blaine beamed at him. "Me too," he said, tilting his head back to kiss Kurt on the cheek. "*Especially* the being with you, love."

"Forever right?" Kurt said, smiling as Jeff check-mated Nick and jumped around in victory.

Blaine smiled and nuzzled his neck. "Forever."

## Chapter Twenty-Three

### Thursday

Sunlight streamed through the window, hitting Leighton's eyes and pulling him from sleep. He groaned and rolled over, pressing his face into the pillow and wrenching the blankets over his head.

"Five minutes, Mum," he grumbled, tucking his legs up to his chest and shivering, his legs bare and tangled in the sheets. "Close the curtains."

The bed sank beside him and an arm snaked around his waist. "You should wake up," Gavin breathed in his ear, hot breath ghosting over his skin. "Your parents are still asleep and I thought I'd get you up and take advantage of that."

His hand slid down Leighton's bare chest.

"Christ, Gav," Leighton hissed, glancing at the door. "Did you even lock it?"

"I told you," Gavin said, "they're asleep." His hand dipped into Leighton's boxers and wrapped around his already half-hard cock. Leighton groaned at the contact, still barely awake and bleary from sleep.

"I like that you sleep in your underwear," Gavin murmured, hand moving in slow, careful strokes. "You look good when you're sleeping, you know that, Leigh? You stretch out and make these noises. Were you having dreams, Leighton? Were you dreaming about *me*?"

"Y-yes," Leighton admitted. He *had* been dreaming about Gavin. He'd been dreaming about Gavin for months but the last few nights had been, well...*different* now that he had an actual memory to go on from Saturday.

"Were you really?" Gavin said with a low sound of amusement, hand still moving steadily around him. "And what was I doing, exactly? Was I touching you, Leighton? Do you like it when I touch you?"

Leighton bit his lip, his hips jerking forward into Gavin's hand. "Y-yes," he choked.

Gavin kissed the back of his neck, mouthing gently at the sensitive skin.

Leighton moaned, heat swirling around in his gut and something tingling at the base of his spine.

"Son, I wanted to—*Leighton Cross!*"

Gavin jumped away from him as if scalded and fell off the bed with a loud thump and a yelp. Leighton struggled to cover himself up, eyes wide as his father stared open-mouthed at him from the doorway, tie hanging around his shoulders and robes a little crooked.

"D-Dad," Leighton stammered.

"Mr. Cross, we were just, um—"

"Gavin, out," his father said sternly, cutting across him.

Gavin gave Leighton an apologetic glance and stumbled past his father, cheeks flushed and clothes crooked and rumpled.

Leighton shrank back against his pillows under his father's gaze. He wasn't exactly sure what one said to their father after he walked in on his boyfriend giving him a hand-job.

"Son," his father said after a full minute's silence, taking another step into the room and shutting the door behind him. "You know I love you but I'm still warming up to the idea of the whole idea of you dating another boy, even if it is Gavin."

He sighed, shaking his head. "I think the fact that it's Gavin actually makes it worse because I still remember when you first met when we moved here when you were two and he gave you that stuffed dragon and you were best friends from that day on.

"I understand what you're going through, I was a teenager once too, but there's a reason why Gavin's sleeping on the couch. I don't want any of...*that* in the house, got it?" He exhaled slowly and ran a hand through his thinning, sandy blonde hair. "I'm trying, I'm really trying, Leighton but, I'm just...I'm not ready to deal with it yet, okay?"

Leighton nodded furiously. "Sorry," he muttered, staring at his hands as heat crept up his neck and face.

"Alright, well just...don't let it happen again," his father said with an awkward nod. "I've got to get to work. I just wanted to let you know I've got the Triumph all cleaned and ready if you want to take it out today. Just be careful."

"Yes, sir," Leighton mumbled, still avoiding his gaze. He fiddled with the hem of the blanket for a moment. "T-thanks, Dad."

His father cleared his throat, nodding stiffly and walking out of the room wearing a small frown.

Leighton groaned in embarrassment and rolled onto his stomach. Of course. Of *course* his father would walk in. That was just his luck. He scowled into the pillow, thinking he'd smack Gavin around the head for not being more careful.

The door swung open, the floorboards creaking as someone approached.

"Sorry about that," Gavin muttered, sitting down next to him and laying a hand on his back. "Was he mad?"

Leighton lifted his head and turned slowly to look at him. "What do *you* think?" he said, cocking an eyebrow.

Gavin rubbed the back of his neck nervously. "Yeah, should have locked the door."

Leighton scoffed and sat up. "Prat," he mumbled, pushing himself off the bed and moving towards his closet.

"Aw, come on, Leigh. You're not gonna take the piss out o' me for it, are you?" Gavin said, turning to face him.

Leighton tugged on a pair of jeans. "Well, I *could*," he said, pulling a t-shirt over his head. "But I want to get you on the Triumph."

"That death-trap you call a motorbike?" Gavin said, quirking an eyebrow. "No thanks."

"You owe me," Leighton said, pointing a finger at him sternly. "And it's not a 'death-trap'."

"It's a Muggle contraption and I don't like it," Gavin muttered.

"You'll be fine," Leighton said. "I'm an excellent rider."

"I'll be you are," Gavin said, smirking.

Leighton threw a shoe at him and he ducked it with a laugh.

"Fine, fine, I'll do it," Gavin said.

Leighton rolled his eyes and slipped his arms through the sleeves of his dragon-hide jacket, the dark green, Romanian Longhorn scales gleaming dully.

"You're such a Slytherin," Gavin said, shaking his head. "Suits you though."

Leighton tweaked the zipper. "You think?" he said, grinning.

Gavin nodded, standing and moving around the bed towards him, pushing him up against the wall lightly. "Very well," he muttered, tilting his head to give him a lazy kiss, fingers twisting in the jacket. Leighton smiled and caught Gavin's tongue between his teeth, sucking it for a moment before pulling back and sidling away from him towards the door.

"Tosser," Gavin grumbled, shifting uncomfortably in his jeans before following after him.

"Morning, dearies," Leighton's mother said brightly as they entered the kitchen and moved towards the back door. "I was just about to make breakfast if you're hungry."

"No!" they said simultaneously.

Leighton cleared his throat and Gavin looked like he was fighting back laughter with difficulty. "I mean, erm, we're not really hungry,"

Leighton mumbled. "We're going out on the Triumph."

"Well, be careful," his mother said, blowing lightly on her tea. "Will you be back for lunch?"

"We'll probably just get something at O'Leary's," Leighton said, scooping his wand up from the counter and shoving it in his back pocket. Gavin looked relieved at the proposition.



"Just don't forget you still have homework that needs finishing!"

Leighton's mother called after him as they walked out into the back garden.

Leighton rolled his eyes.

"Yes, dearie, don't forget about your homework," Gavin said, smirking.

Leighton shoved him off the path lightly with a scowl. He unlocked the garden shed with a flick of his wand and pulled the cover off the old motorbike sitting inside.

"I remember when your dad first got this," Gavin said, running his hand over the seat. "You made me come over to watch him work on it for two weeks."

"And you still wouldn't ride it when he was finished," Leighton said, grabbing the handlebars and swinging one leg over the bike.

"Because it's murder," Gavin said, narrowing his eyes at the old motorbike.

"You'll be fine," Leighton said, handing Gavin a helmet. "I've ridden it a hundred times and I've never crashed once. You're always telling me to trust you. So, trust *me*."

Gavin eyed the bike warily for a moment before accepting the helmet with a sigh. "Alright," he said, strapping on the helmet and climbing onto the bike behind him. "Wait, where's *your* helmet?"

"You're wearing it," Leighton said, tapping the ignition with his wand. The bike roared to life, the engine popping and snapping for a moment before settling to a low purr.

"Well, don't you think you should wear one too?" Gavin said as Leighton leveled the bike out and flipped up the kickstand with his foot.

"I'm alright," Leighton said, raising his voice a little over the sound of the engine. "You're safety's more important anyway." He could almost feel Gavin staring at him and smiled a little. "You may want to hold on or you *will* fall off."

Gavin sighed heavily and slid forward on the seat to press against him, wrapping his arms loosely around him.

"And don't try anything," Leighton said, shifting the bike into gear. "I would definitely crash."

Gavin shook against him as he laughed, which he could feel more than he actually heard. He smiled and rolled the bike forward before twisting the throttle. It jumped forward a little as he let off the clutch—he hadn't been on it in months after all—and Gavin's arms tightened around him.

Biting back a laugh, he pumped the throttle and the bike sped up a little, trundling out of the shed onto the dirt path.

"Hang on," he shouted over his shoulder as they reached the front of the house and the road.

Gavin didn't respond until Leighton revved the engine and the bike lurched forward, the tires spinning for a moment as they gained traction. Gavin's arms tightened around him in a death-grip.

"You arse!" he shouted, smacking Leighton across the chest.

Leighton laughed, allowing the bike to pick up to a steady speed as they rolled down the road towards the village. They passed through the town, a few people waving as they recognized them. Leighton bent down a little in the seat and opened the throttle up wider, turning up the narrow road that snaked through the hills.

Gavin's grip loosened after a minute or two when he seemed to realize that they were keeping a steady pace up into the hills. Leighton glanced to his left, where the valley stretched out below them, Loch Corrin gleaming in the sunlight.

"You alright?" he shouted back, tilting his head back towards Gavin.

"Just don't kill me," Gavin replied, still sounding a little nervous.

Leighton laughed, shaking his head. They passed through a grove of ash trees, the pavement dappled in bright sunlight piercing the rustling leaves. Leighton thought that, if he didn't have Quidditch, he might still be happy if he still got to do this, the rush of air over his skin and through his hair, the way the machine responded to the way he moved, really, it was a lot like riding a broomstick. Riding had been one of the things that had improved his flying so much over the previous summer.

They broke through the trees at the top of the hill and felt more than heard Gavin gasp at the view the vantage point offered of the valley, village, and mountains. Leighton eased on the brakes and stopped the bike at the flat section of road that provided a small overlook before the road turned from pavement to dirt as it dipped back down into the hills.

"Leighton, this is brill," Gavin said as he climbed off the bike behind him and pulled off his helmet.

Leighton switched off the bike, kicking down the stand before sliding onto the pavement and joining him in the grass at the side of the road.

"Isn't it?" he said, smiling and shoving his hands in the pockets of his jacket. "I did a lot of exploring last year. This was kind of my go-to place when I needed to think or just...just get away."

Gavin smiled, bright blue eyes lighting up with the gesture. "I love you," he said, tucking the helmet beneath his arm and tugging lightly on the collar of Leighton's jacket to pull him into a kiss.

Leighton responded, resting one hand on Gavin's arm and the other on his neck. Gavin let his helmet fall to the ground and slipped his arm

around Leighton's waist to pull him closer. He loved the way Gavin kissed him. It was nothing like it had been with any of his girlfriends or even with Kurt because he could actually *feel* the love behind it, the tender way Gavin brushed his fingers over his skin and moved his lips carefully against his own.

Gavin pulled back after a few more seconds. "If I don't stop myself now, I never will," he said, looking a little punch-drunk.

Leighton smiled, turning to look across the valley as Gavin pulled one of his candies from his pocket and popped it in his mouth.

"Gav?" Leighton said after a moment's silence, frowning.

"Yeah?" Gavin said, glancing over.

"What are we going to do?" Leighton said. "Once the holidays are over, I mean. I've got to go back to school Monday and then...there's not another Hogsmeade visit til May and then I won't see you again until lessons are over at the end of June.

"And what about next year?" he added, turning to Gavin, feeling anxious.

"We'll figure it out," Gavin said with a smile, taking his hand. "And we'll have all summer and your friend's wedding and we can write all the time."

"I guess," Leighton muttered, dragging a hand through his hair.

"Don't worry about that right now, okay?" Gavin said, squeezing his hand. "We've still got today, tomorrow, and the weekend before you've got to go back. I'm not leaving again, I promise."

"Good," Leighton said, swallowing back the lump in his throat. "It was bad enough when we were kids but...I don't think I could stand it now."

"Leighton, I love you," Gavin said, "and you're willing to be with me. Why in the world would I leave?"

Leighton smiled, blinking a little more than usual and taking a steadying breath.

"This," Gavin said, touching the ring on Leighton's finger, "this is my way of promising that to you. I'm not leaving, Leighton. I'll wait for you to finish school and...after that? I don't know. But I'll go wherever you want. I'm not running anymore."

Leighton laid his hands on either side of Gavin's neck, thumbs brushing his jaw, and kiss him, rough with the scrape of teeth and glide of tongues as he tried to relay just how much what Gavin had said meant to him. Knowing he was willing to wait a full year with only monthly visits and letters between them brought such a rush of happiness that he felt light-headed for a moment.

Gavin seemed taken aback by the sudden enthusiasm but returned the kiss with just as much fervor.

They were both flushed and breathing a little heavily when they parted, eyes searching one another's.

"I didn't want to come back here at first," Gavin said. "To Kenessey. I didn't want to face it but...I'm glad I did. I'm glad I got to see you family and see all our old spots and, yes, even ride that death-trap."

Leighton grinned. "Speaking of 'that death-trap', do you want to head back and get lunch? I'm starving."

"Me too," Gavin said seriously. "If I have to take one more bite of your Mam's cooking, I think I'll be turned off food forever."

Laughing, Leighton climbed back onto the bike and waited for Gavin to strap on the helmet and sit behind him.

"Make sure you hang on this time," Leighton said, smirking as he started the engine with a flick of his wand.

Gavin poked him hard in the gut in response.

---

One year. A full *year*. It seemed so much longer looking back at everything they'd shared with each other, though it had flown by much faster while it was happening.

He snuck into the Ravenclaw tower as planned—though it wasn't really sneaking given he was there a few times a week anyway. Kurt, Blaine, Jeff, and Nick were seated around the table in front of the empty fireplace working on the homework they had due after break.

Kurt smiled when he approached. "He's still asleep. Obviously," he said, closing his Charms book.

"Kurtsie, we gave him enough Sleeping Potion to knock out several *real* wildcats," Jeff quipped, looking up from the complex horoscope charts stretched between him and Nick that were covered in little notes made by the two of them like "Blaine's a Virgo? Not anymore!" and "Pisces=Kurtsie. No wonder he loves mermaids so much."

"Do you really think he's going to wake up without the antidote?" Nick said, giving him a dubious look.

"Please tell me you have the antidote," Kurt said, lifting a perfectly plucked eyebrow.

Flint held up the little bottle of pale blue potion as Acorn trotted across the room to wind around his ankles.

"It's rather devious of you," Blaine said with a faint smirk. "Drugging you boyfriend, sorry, fiancé, to make sure you get to wake him up on your anniversary."

"Well, technically *I* drugged him," Jeff said.

"Thad really *should* learn to keep a better eye on his tea," Nick said sagely.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Just be kind and cast *Muffliato* if you decide to start, ah, celebrating."

Jeff and Nick clamped their hands over their ears and started singing loudly, Flint blushing a little at Kurt's pursed lips and knowing smirk.

"Er, will do," Flint muttered, moving towards the dormitory stairs, smiling at the two fifth year girls who passed him on the way down.

"Hanna-bear!" Jeff shouted excitedly when he spotted her and her friend Jaimie. "I missed you! I mean, Nick missed you!"

Flint glanced back to see Jaimie give Jeff—who she's gone to Hogsmeade with earlier in the school year—a haughty look before sweeping back her blonde hair and tugging Hanna with her towards the door.

"I reckon she's still miffed that I mixed her up with her twin," Jeff said thoughtfully, speaking of the fifth year Slytherin who was identical to Jaimie.

"I wonder why," Kurt muttered.

Flint chuckled as he pushed open the door to the dormitory. Acorn slinked through his legs and leapt lightly onto Thad's bed, curling onto the sleeping boy's chest and purring loudly.

Flint smiled, stopping for a moment to appreciate how peaceful Thad looked, stretched out on his back with one arm draped across his stomach, dark hair rumpled and lips parted.

"Budge off," Flint muttered, sitting down on the bed and pushing Acorn away lightly. The half-kneazle gave him a reproving look before moving to sleep on Jeff's bed instead.

Flint pushed Thad's hair back off his forehead, feeling a little guilty that he'd gone through with Jeff and Nick's suggestion—the fact that it was their idea should have thrown up red flags—that he give Thad a Sleeping Potion the night before their anniversary so that he could plan when Thad woke up.

He uncorked the little bottle Jeff and Nick—their enthusiasm to be involved in the plan had scared him a little—had stolen from the hospital wing along with the Sleeping Potion, lifting Thad's head gently from the pillow and pouring the liquid into his mouth.

Thad swallowed instinctively, licking his lips in his sleep. He groaned faintly and his eyelids fluttered open.

"Flint?" he said, blinking slowly and giving him a look of faint confusion.

"Happy anniversary, pet," Flint said, smiling and brushing a hand over Thad's cheek.

Thad's face split into a huge grin and all trace of sleep seemed to be gone as he threw his arms around Flint's shoulders and hugged him surprisingly tightly for someone so small. He let out a small, excited

giggle into Flint's ear before pulling back, beaming and biting his lower lip.

"Happy anniversary," he said breathlessly. "I love you."

"I love *you*," Flint said, tapping him on the end of the nose.

Thad giggled again. He looked around and frowned a little. "It's late," he said. "I didn't think I'd slept in so late."

Flint rubbed the back of his neck nervously. "Actually, er, Jeff and Nick slipped you a Sleeping Potion. I really wanted to be here with you when you woke up and...well, they thought it would be a good idea."

"They *would*," Thad said thoughtfully, nodding.

"You're not upset?" Flint said.

Thad shook his head, smiling. "It's our anniversary, how could I be upset?"

Flint leaned forward and kissed him gently.

Thad fisted his hands in his shirt and pulled him closer, leaning back and forcing him down onto the bed.

"Mm—pet, wait," Flint said, pulling back with a small gasp. "Door."

He got up reluctantly to toss Acorn out through the door, which he slammed and locked before casting *Muffliato*, Thad tugging off his pajamas almost impossibly fast.

Flint groaned at the site of him and pulled his shirt over his head before climbing onto the bed next to him. Thad grabbed his beltloops and yanked him on top of him.

"You're very enthusiastic today, pet," Flint said with a grin, swinging a leg over Thad's hips and kissing his way down his neck and chest.

Thad arched back into the pillows with a groan.

"You know we won't be able to do any of this after today, right?" Flint murmured around his navel. "Seeing as my parents will be in the same house with us."

"W-well then we probably shouldn't waste our time talking," Thad said, eyes closed and head thrown back.

Flint smiled, licking across his stomach. "Whatever you say, pet," he said.

---

Kurt glanced up at the dormitory door, which had just slammed shut, before returning to his Charms homework.

"I told you," he said with a sniff, glancing at Blaine.

"I never disagreed," Blaine said, smiling and turning the page in his Arithmancy book.

"Can we please not talk about Thad and Flint being rabbits?" Jeff muttered.

"I don't want to think about it," Nick said, shuddering. "We sleep in that room."

Acorn tried to rub against Jeff's arm and he pushed him away. "I don't want you, cat," he said, glaring at Acorn.

"Why do you hate cats so much?" Kurt said curiously.

"I don't *hate* them," Jeff said. "I just...really don't *like* them."

"But why?" Kurt said, closing his book.

"It's really not a good idea to ask," Nick said, scribbling something on his horoscope chart.

"Okay now I'm curious," Kurt said, glancing between the three of them. "Blaine?"

Blaine glanced at Jeff who sighed and held out a hand as if to give him permission to continue.

"When we were in fourth year, there was a seventh year girl with a massive cat," Blaine began.

"I still say it was a tiger," Jeff muttered.

"Anyway," Blaine continued, "Jeff and Nick had just gotten back from Care of Magical Creatures and the lesson had been about Sphinxes."

"Obviously there wasn't a real one there," Nick piped up.

Kurt glared at him for a moment to silence him and Blaine plowed on, "So, anyway, they'd just gotten back and Jeff was freaked out about some story they'd been told about a Sphinx attacking some wizards who tried to steal the treasure it was guarding and this girl's cat jumped from the banister onto his head and he ran off screaming like a little girl."

"I resent that!" Jeff said, scowling at him as Kurt cracked up laughing, clutching his side and almost falling off the couch as Nick fought back laughter with obvious difficulty.

"You did sound a little like a girl," Nick said fairly.

"Oh, shut up," Jeff grumbled, throwing a pillow at him.

Blaine grinned, Kurt still breathless with laughter as he tried to calm himself down. "You sure you'll be able to handle being alone with these two on Saturday, love?" he said, nudging Kurt's leg with his foot. Kurt took a steadying breath, fixing his hair absently. "I can most definitely handle them," he said. "And by handle, I mean control, of course."

Blaine laughed. The past few days had been amazing, just having the time to spend with Kurt and their friends without having to worry about Quidditch—though he still practiced a few times with Flint to stay in shape for their final try-outs the following Saturday—or patrols or even homework really. He tried not to think about the fact that they would be leaving Hogwarts, leaving what had been his home for seven years, in just two months but he kept remembering that once they were gone, he would be living with Kurt in London.

"Did you get your letter of recommendation and everything sent in?" Blaine said, remembering the owl Kurt had received the previous Friday.

Kurt nodded as he picked up his book again. "Sent it out Monday," he said with a smile. "Slughorn was thrilled. He said he was going to talk to Merkwod directly in addition to my letter to make sure I got a good position there."

"I'm not surprised," Blaine said, brushing his foot up Kurt's calf.

"You're the best Potioneer in this school."

"Leighton's pretty good," Kurt said off-handedly. "Scratch that, he's *really* good. Probably better than I am."

"I doubt it," Blaine said, trying to remind himself that Cross was out of the picture and had a boyfriend of over two months now.

"Blaine, you're not still jealous of him, are you?" Kurt said, glancing over at him with a pointed look.

"No," Blaine said, though he didn't quite meet his eye.

"Blaine," Kurt sighed, setting his book down. He lowered his voice so Jeff and Nick, who were arguing over whose horoscope chart was whose. "You're not *really* jealous of him, are you? You know that there's *nothing* going on between us anymore. Leighton's dating Gavin. I have no romantic feelings towards him whatsoever and he doesn't have feelings for me anymore either."

"I know," Blaine mumbled, shifting a little in his seat.

"Then why are you so upset?" Kurt said, laying a hand on his knee. "I thought we'd gotten past all this."

Blaine sighed, unsure of how to phrase the things that had been needling the back of his brain for the past few weeks. "I guess...I just...when we weren't together and you...you just moved on from me so easily. One day we were in love and a few weeks later you were dating him. It's just...I don't think I'd have been able to do that if it was me and...it just made me feel like...like maybe I wasn't, I dunno, all that important."

Kurt's expression made him immediately regret what he'd said, the hurt and chastened look behind his tear-filled eyes.

"I'm sorry, Kurt, I didn't—"

"No," Kurt said. "No, you're...you're right. I was *furious* at you, Blaine. I'd just been humiliated in front of the whole school and you hadn't said a single thing about it and...and Leighton *was* and he kept asking for a chance and all I wanted to do what stop loving you because it made me so angry that I did. And then...then it kind of hit me all at once that we were broken up. That we weren't *together* anymore and that...that was when we, Leighton and I, realized that we just really didn't belong together romantically."



"He saw me out and proud and he was so confused about everything and he was helping me...it's like you said, he was kind of the person I needed to be with then. But I *never* stopped loving you, Blaine. Not for a single second. I'm never going to stop."

Blaine smiled, laying a hand on top of Kurt's where it was resting on his leg. "I love you, too," he said.

Kurt scooted closer to him and pulled him into a tight hug. Nothing sexual, just a gesture of comfort, of love and simply friendship.

"Blaine, you're the most important thing in my life," Kurt whispered.

"You too," Blaine muttered, holding him against his chest for another few seconds before releasing him. He sniffed and blinked hastily and Kurt smiled sadly, brushing a hand over his cheek. "Sorry."

"Don't be," Kurt said. He leaned against Blaine, who wrapped an arm around his shoulders. "How's your mom doing, by the way? She hasn't written me in a few days."

"She's just busy working," Blaine said, resting his head against Kurt's.

"She hasn't been able to write much to me either but it's kind of a good thing, I think. She's keeping herself occupied."

"That's good," Kurt said, nodding.

"Yeah," Blaine said absently. "It's...it's hard to believe it's been a month. Sometimes I still think I'm going to get letters from him."

Kurt clasped his hand tightly and tilted his head back to kiss his neck.

"It's better though," Blaine said. "Especially with you. I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have you."

"Not be a rabbit," Jeff quipped.

"Stop locking us out of the dorm," Nick added thoughtfully.

"Be better friends with your right hand."

"Or your left hand."

"Or—"

"I don't want to know!" Blaine said loudly, Kurt stifling a laugh with difficulty.

The dormitory door opened and they all turned to see Thad and Flint walking down the stairs, hand in hand, and exchanging loving looks as always.

"Finished with your romp, are you?" Jeff said, smirking.

"You'd better not have touched our beds," Nick said, narrowing his eyes.

Thad blushed scarlet. "I don't know *what* you're talking about," he said, avoiding their eyes.

Blaine exchanged a knowing look with Kurt as Flint and Thad said down in an armchair together, Thad draped across Flint's lap. Acorn immediately leapt up to sit on his legs, purring happily.

"What time are you two leaving tomorrow?" Kurt said, stretching languidly. Blaine's eyes trailed down to the strip of smooth, pale skin revealed across his stomach.

"Tomorrow after breakfast," Thad said, snuggling against Flint's chest.

"And then Blaine will be gone all of Saturday," Kurt said with a sigh.

"Nick, Jeff, you'd better behave."

"Us?" Nick said with an innocent, confused look.

"Misbehave?" Jeff added in the same tone.

"Whatever do you mean, Kurt?" Nick said, exchanging a frown with Jeff.

"Mental," Thad muttered, rolling his eyes.

Kurt smiled, stretching back to lie across Blaine's lap. Blaine eyes him hungrily.

"Do you want to take a walk?" he muttered, lowering his lips to Kurt's ear.

Kurt's eyes darkened a little. "Sure," he said, lifting his head to kiss Blaine's neck before he sat up. "We'll be back later," he said, pulling Blaine up with him.

"Going to be rabbits, are we?" Nick said, smirking.

"No, we aren't," Kurt said, flashing him a glare. "Blaine and I are going on a walk."

"Is that what we're calling it?" Flint said thoughtfully.

Thad giggled and Nick sniggered.

"It's so nice to have everything back to normal," Jeff said with a happy sigh.

---

Flint was sure to have the dormitory to themselves that night. Only Trent and Robert were staying over holidays, but they'd agreed—after some serious bribing from Flint—to spend the night in the common room.

"Now, pet, keep your eyes closed, okay?" he said, leading Thad into the dormitory by the shoulders.

Thad squirmed in excitement. "Flint, what did you do?" he said, giggling.

"I have a surprise for you, pet," Flint said, kissing the top of his head. Thad kept his eyes squeezed shut, bouncing a little on his toes when Flint stopped him inside the dormitory door.

"Ooo, it smells good in here," Thad said, inhaling deeply.

Flint smiled, shutting and locking the door. "*Muffliato*," he muttered, flicking his wand before tossing it on his bedside table. He looked around at the hundred or so candles—pumpkin, Thad's favorite—covering every surface.

He moved to stand behind Thad, lowering his lips to his ear. "Just relax and let me take care of you, okay?" he said softly.

Thad leaned towards him a little, eyes still closed.

Flint trailed his fingers down Thad's arms before playing with the hem of his shirt. He hitched the fabric up his stomach and Thad lifted his arms to allow him to pull the shirt up over his head.

"I love you," Flint breathed, kissing gentle across his shoulders and neck, gliding his fingertips over Thad's soft skin.

"Love you too," Thad said, smiling.

Flint slid one hand down Thad's stomach, flicking open the button of his jeans and tugging down the zipper. Thad gasped lightly when Flint's hand skimmed across the front of his jeans, twitching his hips forwards into the touch.

He rubbed gently at the spot until Thad was mewling and gasping, bucking up into Flint's hand. Flint pulled away and Thad whined at the loss.

"Shh, just wait, pet," Flint said, sucking lightly at the shell of Thad's ear as he tugged his jeans down for him.

Thad hissed at the sudden chill and Flint kissed the back of his neck reassuringly, running his hands flat down Thad's bare chest.

"Your skin is so smooth and soft," Flint breathed in his ear. "I could spend days touching you. One day I'm going to. When we're living together and I've convinced you to stay in bed with me instead of going to work and we'll listen to the rain on the windows and then I'll fuck you until you can't walk."

Thad inhaled sharply with a nervous squeak.

"Do you want that to happen, pet?" Flint said, flicking his tongue over Thad's ear.

"Y-yes," Thad whined, nodding.

"Merlin, you look so good," Flint murmured, pulling his hands away to yank off his shirt and jeans, struggling a little to kick off his shoes and socks as he did. He snaked an arm back around Thad's waist, pulling him back. Thad gasped at the sudden movement and the feel of Flint's erection against him.

"You know, you can open your eyes," Flint said with a low laugh.

Thad did, eyes widening at the sight of the flickering candles and delicate white flower petals littering the floor and bed.

"Flint did you do all this?" he said, turning to him

"Of course I did," Flint said with a smile. "Conjuring the candles was nothing. It was the Charm for the flowers and fire that really got me."

Thad turned around fully and wrapped his arms around him, pressing their chests together and kissing the crook of his neck. His lips moved

smoothly over Flint's skin and he hooked one leg around Flint's hips. Flint stopped a little to grip Thad's other thigh and hitch it up as well. Thad tightened his legs around him, nails digging and scraping across Flint's shoulders, lips moving up his jaw to meet Flint's in another slow kiss.

Flint walked over to the bed and laid Thad down gently, climbing onto the bed with him without breaking the kiss.

Thad crawled back towards the pillows, propped up on his elbows and pulling Flint with him with one leg still around his middle. Flint fumbled to hook his fingers in the waistband of Thad's briefs and pull them down his legs. He pulled back to take them off completely, stopping a moment to allow his eyes to rove Thad's body, tanned and smoothly muscled, dark eyes watching him with a blend of love and desire.

"You're...you're perfect," he said.

Thad smiled, blushing faintly.

"I'm serious," Flint said earnestly. "I still haven't quite wrapped my mind around the fact that I get to *marry* you. And wake up to you every day and maybe raise a family with you and—"

Thad shut him up with a searing kiss, forcing him down on top of him and pushing his boxers down with his toes.

Smiling, Flint pulled them off the rest of the way, groping for his wand with his other hand. Muttering the one Charm he's actually mastered, he tossed his wand away and wrapped his slick fingers around Thad's cock. Thad groaned into his mouth, fingernails raking down his back. Flint stroked a few times before smearing lube over himself.

"Are you still sore from this morning?" he mumbled against Thad's lips, rubbing his slick index finger around the still slightly stretched ring of muscle.

"A little," Thad replied. "Sorry."

"We can do other things," Flint said, pulling his fingers away to place his palms flat against the bed and rolling his hips down against him.

Thad linked his legs around him again, using the leverage to pull himself up to gain friction.

Flint loved that they didn't need to say a word, that they could speak just as clearly to each other through soft moans and the grip of fingers, the scrap of teeth and shift of hot breath on skin.

Even when they curled around each other, sweaty and sated, they simply laid there in silence for a long time, ghosting fingertips over skin and exchanging soft kisses.

"You know we're getting married in four months," Thad said offhandedly, barely a whisper in the silence.

Flint smiled and nodded, squeezing him around the middle gently. "I can't wait," he said. He paused. "Happy anniversary, Thad. I love you."

Thad sighed happily. "Happy anniversary, Flint," he said, leaning back against him. "I love you, too."

---

Cole paced impatiently around his room like he had been since Saturday. He wanted to be back at Hogwarts, wanted to be back with *Thad*. Thad had agreed to tutor him, obviously he liked him, and now Cole couldn't wait for the holidays to end. He wished he owned his own owl so he could *at least* write him another letter.

Sighing, he threw himself back onto his bed, staring at the cracked ceiling of his bedroom. Thad was so much like him. Shy and quiet and apparently lonely. Well, Thad wasn't lonely anymore...he was with Wilson. But he had to be confused. Wilson was so obsessed with Quidditch he couldn't *possibly* care about Thad all that much.

The door creaked open and Cole looked up to see his mother watching him through narrowed eyes.

"I thought you were going to clean this place up?" she said, taking a drag from the cigarette she was holding.

"I will, Mum," Cole said, wrinkling his nose at the smell when she exhaled the thick smoke. "I've already done my room, I'll do the rest later."

"Just use that damn *thing*," he mother said, nodding to where his wand was lying on his pristinely organized desk.

"I can't, Mum, I'm underage," Cole said for what he thought was the thousandth time. I really was exhausting having a Muggle parent at times. "I can't use magic outside of school until I'm seventeen."

She muttered something, looking annoyed, and walked away, leaving the lingering smell of alcohol and smoke. Cole stood up to close and lock the door, thankful that his father would be home from working the next day because he was the only one who could stop his mother from drinking.

He sat back down on his bed, tucked his knees to his chest, and wrapped his arms around himself, taking a shaky breath and staring at the ceiling. He didn't want to cry, *hated* crying. His mother always called him a baby when he did. But he couldn't stop the tears from sliding down his face onto his knees.

Sometimes he wished he could have a normal family, or even just have his father more than a few days a week when he got to take a break from work, though he was often too tired to do more than sit and talk to Cole, which was fine with him. There'd been times where they didn't even say anything, just sit next to each other in silence

until his father would sigh and grip his knee and say, "I'm sorry," and Cole would force and smile and pat his hand reassuringly. He curled into a ball on his side, crying quietly and hoping he could fall asleep if only to make tomorrow, and his father's return, and the end of holidays, come more quickly.

---

## **Friday**

"Thad, why are you so nervous?" Flint said, glancing over at him as they walked up the path towards Flint's house, where a thick blanket of ivy climbed the brick walls on one side.

"I'm not nervous," Thad squeaked, one arm tight around Acorn's basket as the cat hissed from the effects of them just Apparating.

"You *know* my parents love you, pet," Flint said, taking his hand and grasping it tightly. "I think they'd be ready to adopt you are their second son if they had the chance."

Thad laughed nervously. "B-but this is the first time that I've seen them as your...your..."

"Fiancé?" Flint said, eyebrows rising up his forehead.

Thad nodded, chewing on his bottom lip. He'd been having a mild panic attack since he'd woken up that morning after spending the night in Flint's bed.

"Pet, you need to calm down," Flint said, laughing as he hitched his and Thad's bags higher on his shoulder. "They're seriously in love with you. You have nothing to be scared about."

Thad didn't reply, as they had reached the front door. Before Flint could reach out for the handle, it flew open and his father, who was both taller and stronger than him, wrapped an arm around his neck and began tousling his hair with a loud laugh.

"Dad, stop!" Flint shouted, trying to pull himself free as his mother, who was standing back a little from the door, smiled fondly at them, tucking her short, red hair behind her ear.

"Miles, you're embarrassing him," she said offhandedly.

"Ah, he knows I love him," Flint's father said, releasing Flint and clapping him on the back so hard that it took Flint a moment to catch his breath. "And there he is! My future son-in-law. Give us a hug, lad."

Thad smiled and hugged him and Flint's mother, looking much less nervous now that he was actually around them.

"Oh, Flint, his ring is lovely," his mother said, examining the band on Thad's hand with a gently smile. "You did a good job picking it out."

"Of course he did!" Flint's father said, beaming at Flint. "He's a Wilson."

Flint's mother rolled her eyes. "Come, with me, darling," she said, taking Thad's hand. "I'm sure Acorn wants out of that basket. We'll

have some tea while those two talk Quidditch like we all know they're dying to."

Thad giggled and followed after her, Acorn's basket tucked under his arm. Flint watched him go for a moment before his father swatted him around the head lightly.

"Ouch, what was that for?" Flint said, rubbing the back of his head.

"Just happy for you," his father said, grinning broadly. "My son, the Tornado. And you're getting married. Bloody hell, I remember when you were still in nappies."

"Yeah, let's not bring those memories up around Thad or I may die of embarrassment," Flint muttered, walking past him into the house.

"And I'm not on the squad yet."

"Yet," his father said. "Only a matter of time."

"Just don't jinx it for me," Flint said, walking past the kitchen, where Thad was sipping tea happily with Flint's mother, who had Acorn curled up in her lap.

"So, how's school?" his father said, sitting down in the den and taking a sip of the Butterbeer that had been sitting half-empty on the table.

"Keeping your marks up?"

"Yes," Flint said, tossing his and Thad's bags on the floor before sitting as well. "Thad's been making sure of that."

His father smiled. "He's a good influence on you, that one," he said.

"Don't you dare mess it up. We might just choose to keep him instead of you if you did."

"Thanks, Dad," Flint said, propping his feet up on the table.

"Shoes off the table, Flint," his mother said as she walked into the room with Thad, who sat down on the arm of Flint's chair, tea clutched in his hands.

Flint sighed and lowered his feet to the floor, kicking his shoes off and pulling Thad onto his lap. Thad yelped and giggled, trying to keep his tea steady.

"You almost made me spill," he said reprovingly.

"Well, then I'd just lick it off," Flint mumbled in his ear on the pretense of kissing him.

Thad's eyes widened and he half-glanced at Flint's parents, who were talking about something for Flint's father's work. "*Flint*," he hissed warningly.

"They're busy," Flint said, kissing the crook of his neck. "You look great today, by the way. Is that Kurt's sweater? It looks familiar."

"Yeah, he said it was too short in the sleeves for him now," Thad said off-handedly. "He said it looked good on me."

"It does," Flint said, eyeing the way the dark blue fabric hugged Thad's arms and torso. He sighed in annoyance knowing he wouldn't be able

to do anything until Monday when they returned to school. "It's torture seeing you looking this good and not being able to *act* on it." Thad smiled a little slyly. "Well, I guess we'll just have to make up for lost time when we get back." "I'd like that," Flint murmured, tugging on his earlobe with his teeth.

---

## **Saturday**

Kurt sighed a little as he watched Blaine zipping up his jacket—which looked *amazing* on him, as he'd known it would.

"I can't believe I have to deal with Jeff and Nick by myself for the rest of the day," he said, "I don't even have Thad or Flint to thin out the crazy."

As if in response to this, Jeff and Nick flew past the open dormitory door, cackling with laughter as a pair of sixth year girls ran after them, screaming something about their impending murders.

"Yeah, this'll be a fun day," Kurt muttered.

"I'll be back after dinner, love," Blaine said, smiling and leaning over to give him a short kiss. "Just try to ignore them."

There was a crash from the common room and a loud, "Stop climbing on the statue, you can't escape!"

"Pretty sure that's impossible to do," Kurt said with a sniff.

Blaine chuckled softly. "Well, try and survive, I guess," he said, kissing him on the cheek.

"I'll try," Kurt said with a heavy sigh, pushing himself off his bed to walk Blaine down to the common room, where Jeff and Nick had taken refuge on the statue of Rowena Ravenclaw to try and escape the girls, who were now pelting them with balls of parchment.

"Good luck," he said, pulling Blaine into a hug. "Love you."

"You too," Blaine said, giving him a quick kiss. "I'll be back in a few hours."

Kurt raised a hand in farewell as Blaine disappeared through the door, shutting it behind him. He turned and rolled his eyes at Jeff and Nick, who were laughing madly. "You two, down, now," he said sternly.

"But, Kurtsie, they'll kill us!" Jeff said, pointing at the two girls.

"Girls, I'll take care of them," he said. They looked skeptical for a moment before sighing in annoyance and storming up the stairs to the dorms.

"What exactly did you do to them?" Kurt said, mildly curious as they climbed down from the statue like a pair of monkeys.

"Nothing," Nick said with a shrug.

"Nothing at all," Jeff said, nodding.

"We *did* make Heather's Prefect badge say Poxy, though," Nick said.



"But only because they made us take down our fort," Jeff said. "I feel it was a reasonable exchange."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "You're both morons, you know that?"

"Kurtsie, when will you learn that that's not how you pronounce 'awesomeness'?" Jeff said, shaking his head, Nick sniggering next to him.

---

The days were going by much too quickly in Leighton's opinion. It was already Saturday and Monday afternoon he was Apparating back to Hogsmeade with Gavin. He was having more fun than he'd had in years, simply visiting all the spots they'd practically haunted as children and enjoying the time they had before they'd be separated for a full month.

They just finished eating lunch at O'Leary's—which they'd been doing at every chance to avoid Leighton's mother's cooking—and were sitting on the docks with cones of frozen custard, feet dangling in the water as they watched the fishing boats drift across the lake.

"Always cherry with you, isn't it?" Leighton said, grinning as he lapped at his custard.

"Because it's Brill. And at least I'm not addicted to Butterbeer," Gavin said, nodding to Leighton's cone.

"Well, here then, have a taste," Leighton said, shoving the cone towards Gavin's mouth and accidentally getting some of it on his nose and lips. "Whoops, sorry," he said, though he was laughing.

"Tosser, no you aren't," Gavin said, licking his lips clean and touching his own custard to Leighton's nose.

"Child," Leighton muttered and reaching up to clean his nose.

Gavin grabbed his wrist. "Here, let me," he said with a grin, leaning forward to lick the tip of Leighton's nose. He nipped it gently before sitting back and running his tongue over his custard, smirking.

"Hilarious," Leighton said, rolling his eyes.

Gavin simply grinned and shoved his custard into Leighton's face, laughing as Leighton blinked and pursed his lips, turning slowly to him.

"Really, Gav?" he said, wiping a hand down his face.

Gavin merely smirked and shrugged.

Leighton sighed, standing and tugging off his shirt and jeans before running across the dock and leaping into the water. He gasped at the sudden cold, sputtering and coughing as he resurfaced to see a drenched Gavin scowling at him. He laughed, treading water and shaking his hair off his forehead.

Gavin shook his head, giving up on his now soaking ice cream and tossing it into the water before standing and stripping down to his boxers and slipping into the water.

"Damn, that's cold!" he shouted, teeth immediately starting to chatter. "Don't be a baby," Leighton said, flicking water at him. "We've been in here in February before."

"When we were kids and stupid," Gavin said, wrapping his arms around himself and shivering.

Leighton grinned, swimming over to him and sliding his arms around him. Gavin continued to shake for a moment before stilling, legs kicking lightly under water to stay afloat.

"Better?" Leighton said, pulling back to meet Gavin's gaze.

Gavin unwound his arms from around himself, placing one hand on the side of Leighton's face and the other twisting in the waistband of his boxers as he kissed him hungrily.

Leighton struggled a little to concentrate on swimming and kissing him at the same time but was soon pulling Gavin's tongue into his mouth, hands skimming down the other boy's back underwater.

"You know, anyone can see us," Leighton muttered.

"Well, then let's go back to your house," Gavin said. "Your parents are still out, aren't they?"

"Yeah," Leighton said, thankful for the cold water given that Gavin's hand was drifting across the waistband of his boxers. "Yeah, let's...let's go."

Gavin grinned and pulled back, hauling himself up onto the docks surprising quickly and helping heave Leighton up next to him.

"Here," he said, flicking his wand to dry them both off. They pulled their clothes on quickly and practically ran back the path towards the main road and up the hill towards Leighton's house, both of them out of breath and gasping for air by the time they made it to the front door five minutes later.

"Are they gone?" Gavin said breathlessly when Leighton pushed into the house.

"Looks like it, I—"

Gavin silenced him with a rough kiss, pushing him back against the wall and already working at the hastily done-up buttons of his shirt. He pulled off his own shirt and pressed against Leighton, mouthing at his neck and shoving his hands in the back pockets of Leighton's jeans to force their hips together.

Leighton shouted out in surprise at the friction, at the way jolts of pleasure set his body tingling and his heart racing. Gavin slammed into him and, dragging his hips roughly against him, and Leighton groaned loudly.

"That's right, you won't have done this before," Gavin mumbled, laughing faintly as he rocked his hips forward and Leighton whimpered at the rush of sensations.

"H-have you?" Leighton said.

"A few times," Gavin muttered, sounding regretful. "But I'd much rather do it with you than anyone else. Christ, the sounds you make."

He growled in the back of his throat and pushed into him again.

"B-bed," Leighton gasped. He was sure if he didn't sit or lie down soon, his legs would collapse underneath him.

They stumbled back to his bedroom, kicking off shoes and undoing belts, all while trying not to break their frantic kiss. Leighton's foot caught on the rug and he fell back onto the bed with a yelp. Gavin laughed and Leighton hooked a foot behind his knee to trip him up and send him tumbling onto the bed next to him.

Gavin rolled on top of him with a smirk, sitting on his hips and pushing him back into the mattress. His bright blue eyes twinkled mischievously and he moved his hips torturously slowly over Leighton's.

Leighton thought he might black out from sheer overload of pleasure. He closed his eyes, fisting his hands in the blankets as Gavin continued to roll against him leisurely. "Christ, Gav, you're killing me," he groaned.

Gavin pushed into him, still unbearably slow.

"Please, Gav, I...I need...I need."

"What do you need, Leighton?" Gavin said, running one hand up Leighton's chest.

"I need...I need—"

"You need *me*?" Gavin said.

Leighton nodded.

Gavin leaned down, continuing to roll his hips into him as he sucked at the spot above his collarbone, leaving a harsh purple mark.

Leighton was losing the ability to think straight, getting closer to the edge every second. Since they'd been interrupted Thursday he'd been ready to explode.

"Oh my god," he moaned, fingers clenching the sheets so tightly they were white. He was so close, seconds away from being completely gone, from screaming or turning into an incoherent mess...

*"Leighton Neal Cross, what did I say?"*

Leighton sat up so quickly, his forehead smashed into Gavin's chin and Gavin toppled backwards off the bed with a shout.

"D-Dad, Mum," Leighton said, hastily pulling a pillow over his bare chest and lap. "You're back early." He gulped. His father looked livid and faintly ill, his mother—who was standing behind him—was red in the face with restrained laughter.

Gavin struggled to his feet, flushed and sweaty with a deep blush creeping over his chest and up his neck. "I'll just...go," he said, glancing anxiously at Leighton before turning towards the door.

"Sit," Leighton's father said sternly.

Gavin obeyed so quickly he might have been Imperiused.

Leighton's father pinched the bridge of his nose, closing his eyes as if to calm himself.

"Darling, they're just being normal teenagers," Leighton's mother said, laying a hand on his arm.

"*Normal* teenagers close and lock doors," his father grumbled, looking thoroughly scarred by the two incidents.

"Yes, well, I'm sure they'll think twice about it in the future,"

Leighton's mother said, flashing them a warning look. "Won't you, boys?"

They nodded furiously.

Leighton's mother tugged his father's arm. He looked like he wanted to say something else, but sighed and gave into his wife's pressure.

Gavin swore softly the moment they were gone and fell back onto the bed. "I'm never getting any, am I?" he said with a heavy sigh.

Leighton scoffed and smacked him across the face with a pillow.

"Let's go out," Gavin said, sitting up. "I can't deal with the embarrassment of being around your parents right now."

"Good idea," Leighton muttered.

They hurried to gather up the clothes they'd scattered across the house and get redressed before going back out into the warm sun.

"I've never been so embarrassed in my life," Leighton said, shaking his head.

Gavin simply grinned. "It was a *bit* funny."

"My parents walking in on us dry-humping is *not* funny," Leighton cried, glaring at him.

Gavin laughed. The sound was so infectious that Leighton couldn't help but smile.

They walked down to the village together, Gavin rolling a candy around his mouth as always. Leighton was beginning to wonder how he still managed to have teeth.

They stopped at O'Leary's—the small pub in the center of the village—for Butterbeers, sitting in the secluded corner they'd come to share over the past week.

"Not looking forward to going back to work," Gavin said, sighing heavily. "Being an adult sucks."

Leighton shrugged. "At least you don't have to deal with first and second years or any of the idiots at Hogwarts," he said. "Sometimes I

just want to band my head against the wall with some of the morons there."

"You could always sneak down to Hogsmeade and stay with me,"

Gavin said with a suggestive grin.

Leighton kicked him under the table with a mock scowl.

The door to the pub opened and an older man with scraggly red hair and beard, donning a patched coat and clutching a half-empty bottle, stumbled in. He looked vaguely familiar to Leighton but he couldn't place him.

"Felix Connolly, is that you? An' aren't you a sight?" Someone called to the newcomer from the other side of the room.

Gavin froze, eyes widening as they fell on the man. That's when Leighton realized who he was. It was Gavin's father.

He'd barely recognized him. He looked twenty years older than he had the last seen him.

Gavin's hand shook violently on the table when his father looked around the pub and his gaze found the two of them. Leighton laid his hand on top of Gavin's and it stopped shaking, though his father was walking tipsily towards them.

"I heard you were back," he slurred, eyes unfocused.

"Leave me alone," Gavin said, the fear evident in his eyes as he remembered every bruise and beating he'd ever received from the drunk standing in front of them.

"Your Mam won't answer me letters," his father said, stopping at the table. "Why's tha'?"

"P-probably because she doesn't want to talk to you," Gavin said, leg twitching against Leighton's under the table. "And n-neither do I."

Mr. Connolly ignored him and turned his focus to Leighton. Recognition flitted across his features.

"I remember you," he said, pointing over Leighton's left shoulder.

"You're the little twat who used to hang around all the time." He took in their clasped hands and sneered at Gavin. "I always knew you were a fucking pillow-biter," he hissed.

Leighton stood up so fast his chair clattered back onto the floor. The pub went silent around them. He'd never hated anyone so much in his life now that he knew just how much Gavin had gone through and never told him.

"Get out," he said sharply.

"An' aren't you a bold lad?" Mr. Connolly said with a laugh.

The barman approach and laid a hand on his arm. "Come on, Felix, you've had too much," he said, "You need to just sleep it off."

"Don' you tell me what to do!" Gavin's father shouted, pushing him off. He rounded on Gavin. "And you! You little queer, you fucked it all up."

We never wanted you, you know that? Neither of us. You're just a bastard. Ask your Mam, she'll say no but it's true."

"Shut up!" Gavin yelled, now on his feet as well.

"We both hated you, I just wasn't afraid to show it," his father said with an ugly look. "Just look at you, you scrawny git, no wonder you're a damn fairy!" He shoved Gavin hard and sent him toppling back across his own chair, which fell back with him with a loud crash.

*Crack!*

Leighton smashed his fist across the man's face so hard his eyes rolled back and he collapsed to the floor in a tangled heap. Ignoring the throbbing pain in his hand and the shocked cries wringing around the room, he ran to Gavin and knelt next to him.

"Are you okay?" he said worriedly.

Gavin looked a little dazed and shaken but nodded. "Yeah, I'm alright," he said, accepting Leighton's hand and pulling himself up. He caught sight of his father and he shook suddenly, the color draining from his face.

"Let's go," Leighton said. He threw a few coins down on the table.

"Come on, Gavin."

He took Gavin's hand and pulled him towards the door, glancing over to see the fear still shining behind his eyes. They walked back to Leighton's house in silence, Gavin staring at the road and gnawing on the inside of his cheek.

Leighton's parents were sitting in the kitchen when they walked in the front door. Leighton's mother took one look at Gavin and the smile melted off her face.

"What's wrong?" she said, standing to help him down into a chair.

"His father's back," Leighton said. "He found out he was here."

Leighton's parents exchanged significant looks. His mother poured out a mug of tea from the kettle sitting on the table, adding a shot of Firewhiskey to it, and forced it into Gavin's trembling hands.

"Drink, dear," she said kindly, "it will help calm you down."

Gavin took a small sip, barely wetting his lips, before setting the mug back on the table. Leighton knelt down next to him, laying a hand on his leg and looking up into his wide, blue eyes.

"Are you alright?" he said. "You can go back to Hogsmeade if you want. You'll be safer there."

Gavin shook his head. "He knows," he said in a choked voice. "He knows where I am now...what if...what if he comes after me again?" he turned to Leighton at last, the pure terror clear behind his eyes.

"What are you trying to say?" Leighton said in a small voice.

"I'm not safe there if he knows that's where I live," Gavin said, tears welling up in his eyes.

Leighton felt like his heart was dropping out of his chest at his words. "Are you...are you going to leave?" he said, a hard lump rising in his throat.

Gavin opened his mouth, closed it, and stared down at his lap. "I don't know," he whispered. "I...I don't want to go, Leighton. I love you." He looked back at Leighton again and pain bloomed in his gaze. "I love you more than anything."

"But you need to be safe," Leighton said, feeling his own eyes start to burn and sting.

Gavin nodded down at his hands, tears sliding down his cheeks.

"Where will you go?" Leighton whispered, taking his hand and clenching it tightly.

"My Mam's probably," Gavin said, sniffing, "She's been very good at hiding where she is. Someone must have told him I was here and they'll have found out I'm living in Hogsmeade by now too.... Dammit, Leighton, I don't want to leave you."

"I know," Leighton said, his own voice shaking. "But we can write. And maybe you can still come see me on the Hogsmeade visit. We weren't going to be able to see each other much anyway."

"But I like being so close to you," Gavin whispered. "I could write you and you'd write back in minutes and...I just thought I was done dealing with him. I'm afraid if I stay in Hogsmeade...I think he might..." He trailed off, but Leighton didn't want to hear it anyway, didn't want to hear that Gavin was fearing for his own life after spending four years building up the feeling of security only to have it come crashing down after one fell swoop.

"Dear, if there's *anything* we can do," Leighton's mother said, looking close to tears herself. Leighton's father nodded, his expression grave. Gavin shook his head. "I'll be alright," he said, forcing a smile. "Mam will let me live with her until...until I can find another safe place to stay or...or he gets locked up or...dies or something." He said it so bluntly, so callously, that Leighton realized just how much he hated and feared his father.

"I've got to pack," Gavin said tonelessly, standing up and walking back the hall towards Leighton's bedroom.

Leighton followed after him, shutting the door behind them. He watched Gavin gather up his things for a moment, throwing them haphazardly into his bag. He wasn't crying anymore, his face blank and smooth and his blue eyes deadened.

"Gavin, talk to me," Leighton said, moving towards him. "Please."

Gavin continued packing for a moment before dropping his bag and sitting down hard on the bed, gripping his face in his hands. He wasn't crying, just breathing shakily and occasionally releasing a dry sob.

Leighton sat down next to him and wrapped an arm around him, pulling him close. Gavin rested his head on his shoulder.

"I don't want to leave you," he said brokenly. "I had to be away from you for *four years* because of him and now..."

"I know," Leighton said. "But you need to be safe. I care more about that than you trying to make me happy by being close. Gavin, I—" he stopped. He couldn't say it, not now. It would make him want to stay close and he couldn't risk him getting hurt. He knew what a maniac his father could be, knew he'd been trying to hunt him and his mother down for years.

Gavin looked up curiously when he cut himself off. "What?" he said, a flicker of hope behind his eyes.

"N-nothing," Leighton said, hating himself.

"Oh," Gavin said, looking crestfallen as he returned to leaning against Leighton's side. "I need to go or he'll be coming here next."

Leighton nodded, biting his tongue hard to stop himself from crying. Gavin stood up and finished packing up his bag, swinging on his shoulder and looking a little lost.

"You know where you're going, right?" Leighton said, standing next to him.

Gavin nodded, his blue eyes digging into him. "I love you," he said.

It took everything Leighton had not to say it back. Instead, he wrapped his arms around Gavin and pulled him into a kiss, slow and careful and hopefully relaying all the things Leighton couldn't say.

They broke apart and Leighton wiped away the tears clinging to Gavin's cheek, barely able to meet his gaze. He forced a tight smile and took his hand, walking back out into the kitchen with him, where Leighton's parents were talking softly.

"Are you *sure* there's nothing we can do, dear?" Leighton's mother said fretfully.

Gavin shook his head. "Not really," he said. "If he knows where I am, I don't think anyone could stop him once he gets the idea in his mind." He sighed and ran a hand through his dark hair. "Thank you for letting me stay. And for giving me the chance to be with Leighton. I...I love him."

Leighton's mother smiled, tears shining in her eyes. She and Leighton's father hugged Gavin tightly, reassuring him that they'd be there in a heartbeat should he need anything. Gavin thanked them with a tight smile. He glanced at Leighton, who followed him out into the back garden.

They stared at each other for a moment, the sudden change of things like a hard blow to the chest.



"I'll write you tonight," Leighton said. "I promise. I'll write you all the time."

Gavin nodded. "I know." He sighed, hitching his bag a little higher on his shoulder. Leighton hugged him tightly, holding him for a long time and trying not to think about when the next time he'd see him, or even be *close* to him, would be.

Gavin pulled back, eyes searching him closely. "I love you, Leighton," he breathed.

Leighton swallowed back the words rising in his throat. "I know," he said instead.

Something dimmed a little behind Gavin's eyes and Leighton *hated* himself for it.

"I'll...I'll see you soon, hopefully," Gavin said, taking a few steps back. "I hope so," Leighton said.

Gavin nodded, looking at him for a long moment before turning on the spot and disappearing with a loud crack.

Leighton stared at the spot for a full minute, barely believing that he'd really gone again. Tears suddenly came thick and fast to his eyes and he fell down onto his knees, sobbing into his hands. He took a few deep breaths, gulping down air and lifting his eyes to the spot where Gavin had vanished.

"I love you, too."

---

## **Sunday**

Flint smiled as Thad curled up onto the couch next to him with the letter he'd just gotten from Kurt.

"Blaine passed his test," he said, not looking up from the letter. He rolled his eyes. "And apparently Jeff and Nick thought the best way to congratulate him would be to set off a whole box of fireworks in the common room. They set the curtains on fire and Flitwick gave them both a week's detention for scorching the ceiling."

Flint laughed and draped an arm around his shoulders, kissing his temple. Thad smiled and leaned into the touch.

"You know, I still have to give you my anniversary present," he said, rubbing Thad's shoulder gently.

"Present?" Thad said, folding up the letter. "I thought what we did Thursday was your present?"

"Of course not," Flint said. "That was just as much a present to myself, really." He smiled as Thad blushed. "I told you I got you something that I had sent here, didn't I?"

Thad nodded, a look of innocent curiosity on his face. "Okay, so, what did you get?"

"Come with me," Flint said, standing up. He pulled Thad up next to him, kissing him on the top of the head and taking his hand to pull him down the stairs to his basement bedroom. His parents had left earlier to go to some kind of function for his father's work, leaving them alone in the quiet house.

Acorn stretched and purred happily when they entered, leaping off the bed to wind around their ankles.

"Alright," Flint said, stopping at the bottom of the stairs. "Close your eyes, okay?"

Thad pursed his lips. "This is becoming a trend with you and surprises," he said, sighing as he closed his eyes.

Flint smiled and kissed his cheek before moving to the desk in the corner. He pulled open the drawer and lifted out the envelope inside, staring down at it for a moment before turning back to Thad.

"Okay," he said. "Open up."

Thad opened his eyes, spotting the envelope in Flint's hand and cocking an eyebrow in confusion. "What is it?" he said tilting his head to the side.

"Here," Flint said, smiling and passing it to him. "Sorry I couldn't wrap it any better. It's not really something that can be wrapped. Though I'm sure Kurt would have found a way to do it."

Thad laughed and slit the envelope open carefully with his wand, lifting out the sheaf of parchment inside. His eyes slid down the page, widening as he reached the bottom.

"Flint, how on earth are we going to afford this?" he breathed.

"It's already been paid for," Flint said, smiling at his reaction. "I've been saving up ever since Christmas and I had some money in my vault at Gringott's that I didn't know about and my parents kicked in a little too. They thought that since your mum is insisting on paying for the wedding, they could help out with our trip. I know how much you love Paris since you go there a lot with your mum and your dad's parents so...I thought it would be a good place for our honeymoon."

Thad let out an excited giggle at the word.

"And as *soon* as we get out of school, if I'm not on the practice squad, I'm getting a job and I'm working non-stop to get the money so that we can have a place to come home to afterwards," Flint said. "I love you. So much, Thad."

Thad smiled and slipped his arms around Flint's middle. "I love you, too," he said, snuggling against his chest. "But *Paris*, Flint! I can't wait!" He giggled again.

"Neither can I," Flint said, pressing a kiss to the top of Thad's head and holding him close.

## Chapter Twenty-Four

Gavin,

*Let me start out by stating the obvious. I miss you. I know I've said it a thousand times in the past few days but it's truer every time.*

*I miss you so damn much and I know we weren't going to see each other much anyway but that doesn't make it any easier. Knowing you're not just down across the grounds from me and that you're in danger while I'm stuck here at Hogwarts wondering if you're alright if the worst feeling in the world.*

*I know you're with your Mum and safe but...I just get this horrible feeling in my gut knowing your father is still on the loose out there somewhere and that he's pissed off after what happened. Honestly, Gav, I'm...I'm scared. I'm scared something is going to happen to you and I'm not going to be there to stop it. I'm scared I'm going to lose you when I just found you. I'm scared that I won't hear your laugh or see your smile or any of that ever again.*

*Please, please stay safe. Don't take any risks coming to see me; I'm not worth you getting hurt over.*

*Write back soon,*

*Leighton*

---

Leighton,

*I'm alright. I'm still with Mum. I don't want to say where because she thinks he might be intercepting our owls now. She got a package the other day that looked like it'd been tampered with and she took had someone look at it and it turned out it had been laced with doxy poison. It wouldn't have killed us, thank Merlin, but we could have gotten seriously ill. It looks like what happened in Kenessey really made him snap. But don't you dare blame yourself, Leighton.*

*I miss you too but don't worry about me, okay? Concentrate on your schoolwork and your friends. I'll be fine. I wouldn't be a very good boyfriend if you failed all your exams from worrying about me.*

*I love you and I miss you,*

*Gavin*

---

Gavin,

*Of course I blame myself. How could I not? It's my fault. He hurt you and I snapped and I shouldn't have. Honestly, I wanted to beat his face in for everything he's done to you. And how am I supposed to concentrate when the person I'm...dating is having their owls intercepted by their lunatic father? I'm worried sick. The guys said*

*I'm...I dunno, whimpering in my sleep or something and Kurt said I'm losing weight. I can't stop worrying about you. I just...I can't think about anything else without you popping into my head with that look you had when you saw him.*

*I keep having these...nightmares about you being trapped and he's there and I can't save you and...I can't let that happen, Gavin. I can't. Kurt's trying to convince me to go to Hogsmeade with him on Saturday since Blaine will be at his last trial with some of his other friends and the rest of his mates are going with girlfriends or other friends but I don't know if I can. I don't think I can see your house or the shop or drink a damn Butterbeer without thinking of you and feeling lost again. Stay safe,  
Leighton*

---

*Leighton,  
Go. Have fun. I'm alright. Remember that before you go to bed. Remember that I'm safe and you're safe and that's all that matters. Stop worrying, please, Leighton.  
I love you,  
Gavin*

---

*Kurt,  
It's Gavin. I'm really worried about Leighton. Please keep an eye on him. I know he's losing sleep and not eating. I know you're close with him and I don't expect you to do anything but if it's not too much trouble, I'd appreciate it. Make him go to Hogsmeade, get him thinking about other things.  
Thanks,  
Gavin*

---

*Gavin,  
Yeah, I've already been keeping a close eye on him when I can. He's been looking sick lately. Slughorn tried talking to him but he insisted he was fine. He's not acting like himself at all. I know he's really worried about you. I'll do my best to keep him busy.  
Kurt*

---

He'd known where the Ravenclaw tower was ever since he'd started patrolling with Blaine but he'd never actually been inside it before. It was brighter than the Gryffindor common room, with a high ceiling and wide, arched windows that looked out to the mountains. He paused to admire the view for a moment, his Runes books clutched in his hands. "O'Brien, there you are."

Cole looked around to see the Ravenclaw Beaters—he couldn't remember their names—standing from their chairs and striding towards him with matching stony expressions.

"Y-yes?" he said, trying not to sound nervous. They were so much *taller* than him.

"We need to have a word before you go up and study with Thad," the blonde said, crossing his arms and giving him a stern look.

"And studying is *all* you'll be doing," the brunette said.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Cole said, straightening up. They exchanged a scoffing look.

"Sure you don't," the brunette said doubtfully.

"Oh, Thad'," the blonde said, his voice rising up mockingly, "'I could watch you study for hours. You're so smart, I don't know why—'."

"Shut up," Cole hissed, heat rising up his neck and creeping down his chest. How on earth had they read his latest letter? Surely Thad wouldn't *let* them.

They smirked.

"We know, O'Brien," the brunette said.

"Flint knows, too," the blonde said, nodding.

"And upsetting Flint isn't a good idea," the brunette said.

"He's got rather large fists, you see."

"And he's not afraid to use them."

"Especially not on a little snot like you who messed with Kurt and Blaine and Cross like you did," the blonde finished, poking him in the chest.

"Touch Thad, and you can kiss goodbye to your bollocks," the brunette said, eyes hard and cold.

Cole gulped.

"Thad's our bunny," the blonde said. "Well, Truffle's my bunny really but now he's been released into the wild since we couldn't have our egg hunt on Sunday due to us having detention. I don't think it would have been as good without Thad's tactics anyway, do you, Nick?"

"I agree," the brunette said, nodding sadly. "Just not the same as last year."

"You know *why* Thad wasn't here, O'Brien?" the blonde said, turning to Cole.

"He was with Flint. And Flint's parents," Nick said. "Because they're engaged."

"You don't fuck around with engaged people," the blonde said, narrowing his eyes.

"So back off Thad, okay?" Nick said with a rather manic smile.

"Or else," the blonde said, pulling out his wand and hitting it threatening off his palm. Red sparks shot from the tip and Cole jumped.

"Glad we're in agreement," Nick said. "Shall we, Jeff?"

"We shall," the blonde said. "I need to thoroughly thrash you after last match."

They walked away, chatting as though nothing had happened and returning to their seats at their chess board.

Cole stayed rooted to the spot for a moment before he remembered Thad was waiting and he jumped a little before scurrying off towards the dormitory stairs, head bowed low.

The door to the seventh year boys' dorm was hanging open when he reached it and he peeked inside tentatively. He bit back a nervous squeak. Thad was bent over, facing away from him, and trying to coax his cat out from under the bed.

"Come on, Acorn," he said, clucking his tongue. "I don't want you eating that mouse. It's so unsanitary."

Cole knocked on the doorframe with a shaking hand, trying to keep his eyes averted from Thad, whose Muggle clothes fit him *very* well.

"Oh, hi, Cole," Thad said, straightening up and smiling. "Sorry. Acorn caught a mouse and he's hiding under the bed with it." He made a face. "I don't want him eating it, *especially* not in here." He shrugged, straightening his shirt, which had hitched up to reveal a strip of tan skin across his stomach. "Ready to start?"

Cole's eyes widened. "W-what?" he squeaked.

"Studying?" Thad said, frowning faintly. "That's why you're here."

"Oh, right," Cole said, internally smacking himself. "Yeah. I've got my Syllabary and—and my notes and...stuff."

Thad smiled brightly. He moved to his trunk and bent over to pull out his own books. "I hope it's okay we're working up here instead of the common room. It's always quite loud in evenings. Especially with Jeff and Nick around. Plus, tomorrow is the last Hogsmeade visit of the year so I feel they're a bit more rowdy than usual. And as Flint's practicing with Blaine, we've got plenty of time."

"That's f-fine," Cole said a little breathlessly.

Thad smiled as he straightened. He nodded to his four poster bed before sitting down on it and leaning against the headboard, legs crossed and books stretched out in front of him.

Cole took a steadying breath and sat down opposite him, barely believing he was sitting on Thad's *bed*. This was where he slept at night, where he dreamt and...no, that sounded creepy. He shook his head a little to clear it.

"Alright, so let's see where you are," Thad said, smiling and taking Cole's book from him. His hand brushed Cole's fingers and Cole shivered a little.

Thad flipped through the book in silence for a few minutes, dark eyes roaming the pages and slender fingers sliding over the lines of texts.

"Okay, so, you're working on diphthongs," Thad said, looking up at him for a nod. "Yes, I know it's a hilarious word, according to Jeff and Nick." He rolled his eyes.

Cole smiled and Thad grinned back. "So," he said. "We'll get started on the first column here, the nouns, okay? I'll read the Runic word and you tell me the English translation."

Cole nodded dreamily. Thad started reading off words and he tried desperately to remember them—he wasn't really all that bad at Runes, actually, but it was a good excuse to be around Thad. He thought maybe doing badly would be beneficial because it would mean Thad would have to tutor him more. It was hard for him to focus when Thad kept smiling and nodding encouragingly even when he messed up.

"Baita," Thad said, looking up expectantly.

"Erm, bait?" Cole said hopefully, though he knew perfectly well that it was 'boat'.

"No, it's boat," Thad said, "bait is baitjanan. That's okay, we'll come back to it."

Cole sighed at Thad's reassuring smile. Really, someone as nice as him really did deserve better than Wilson. Wilson who was even now too busy with Quidditch to focus on Thad.

"S-so," Cole said when Thad had paused to find another section of words in the book, bottom lip between his teeth and head tilted to the side. "It must be hard having to deal with Flint playing Quidditch all the time. I imagine you must be...lonely."

Thad shrugged. "Not really," he said, still rifling through the book.

"I've got Kurt and the others to spend time with when Flint's not around."

"But Hummel's *always* with Blaine," Cole said, trying to sound casual, "Or with Cross. And those other two...Jeff and Nick, they both have girlfriends now."

"I wouldn't call Gwen Jeff's girlfriend yet," Thad muttered. "She might give you a tail."

"Okay, yeah, but still," he said shifting a little on the bed. "You can't say it won't be even worse next year if Wilson is on the Tornados. They practice all the time and they've got *tons* of matches across Europe. And they've *always* got fans hanging off them, even the back-up squad. And then if he makes the regular squad..." he trailed off

thoughtfully, glad to see the smallest of frowns creasing Thad's forehead, his hands immobile on the pages of Cole's book.

"But I'm sure it's fine," Cole said with a shrug. "I mean, what are the chances of someone trying to steal him from you?" He laughed and Thad smiled half-heartedly, still frowning and chewing at his bottom lip.

There was a thick silence for a few seconds and Thad cleared his throat. "Right," he said, sounded distracted. "So, um, yeah, let's...let's move on to the next set here. Um, dailaz."

Cole suppressed a triumphant smile, feeling faintly smug. He allowed himself to move a little closer to Thad on the pretense of finding a more comfortable position and was glad to find that Thad didn't protest.

---

Kurt looked up at another heavy sigh from Leighton. "Okay, what's wrong?" he said, setting down his quill. They'd only been back at school a few days and already he'd already begun to notice the bags under the other boy's eyes, the sunken look of his already this frame that told Kurt he's stopped eating. He'd wheedled out what had happened over the holidays and been doing his best to keep him acting normal at Gavin's request, but he hadn't gotten any better.

Leighton didn't answer, his quill hanging over the letter he was writing to Gavin.

"You're thinking about him, aren't you? Worrying?" Kurt said gently. Leighton nodded, eyes fixed on nothing across the library. Blaine was having a last minute practice session with Flint for their trial the next day and Thad was—much to all their dismay—tutoring Cole and had insisted that he was fine. Jeff and Nick were still hanging around the tower just in case.

"Leighton, you're going to make yourself sick," Kurt said, reaching out to lay a hand on the other boy's wrist. Leighton closed his eyes at the touch, turning away with a pained expression. Kurt pulled his hand back. "Sorry," he muttered.

Leighton shook his head. "S'okay," he said in a cracked voice.

"You need to stop worrying," Kurt said, his heart breaking a little at seeing him so upset.

Leighton turned back to him. "I'm scared," he whispered. "I'm scared he's going to get hurt and I won't know and I won't be there and—" He raked his fingers through his unkempt hair, looking worn and drawn.

"I know," Kurt said gently. "I know you're scared, but killing yourself over it isn't going to help anyone. You need to calm down, Leigh.

Gavin's worried about you. *I'm* worried about you. You're not helping the situation putting your own health in danger.



"Now, we're going to Hogsmeade together tomorrow and you're going to enjoy yourself whether you like it or not."

The corner of Leighton's mouth twitched and he looked marginally happier as he returned to his letter. Kurt watched him for a moment before turning back to his Muggle Studies homework with a faint smile. They worked in silence, quills scratching away in the sunlight streaming through the windows.

They both looked up at the sound of approaching footsteps to see Blaine and Flint striding through the shelves, clutching their brooms and chatting. Kurt smiled, thinking how much their relationship had changed since the previous year when they might as well have hated each other.

"Hey," he said, setting down his book at their approach.

Blaine gave him a kiss on the cheek in response as he sat down next to him.

"Ready for tomorrow?" Kurt said.

"I think so," Blaine said, smiling and pushing his windswept hair back.

"Flint said one of the other people trying out for Keeper broke his arm over the holiday and won't make it to the trial because he needs to rest it so, that's good. Well, not good for them but..." he shrugged.

"And you, Flint?" Kurt said, turning to Flint, who yawned.

"Yeah...it's going well," he said, nodding. "Not looking forward to dealing with Kenna, though."

"But Thad will be there," Kurt said with a smirk. "I'm sure he won't hesitate to show his claws."

"That's what I'm worried about," Flint muttered, frowning.

Kurt exchanged a grin with Blaine.

"Alright, Cross?" Blaine said, nodding to Leighton. He'd been much more sympathetic towards him since he'd heard about what had happened over the Easter holidays.

Leighton shrugged jerkily.

Blaine looked at him for a moment before turning back to Kurt. "Want to head up to the tower? We should make sure Thad isn't being...what did he call it? 'Lip-raped' by Cole."

Kurt snorted but Flint's eyes narrowed, his fists clenching around his broom at the thought.

"Easy, Flint," Kurt said, controlling his laughter. "He's not stupid enough to try anything. Jeff and Nick said they were going to warn him that if he *did* he'd be losing a certain part of his anatomy."

Flint looked a little comforted by this, a reluctant smile turning up the corners of his mouth.

"So, tower?" Blaine said, lowering his voice a little and grazing his fingertips across Kurt's forearm.

Kurt pursed his lips a little. "Just give me a minute," he said, trying not to pack away his things too quickly. "Are you going to be okay, Leighton?" he said, laying a hand on Leighton's shoulder.

"Yeah, I'll be okay," Leighton said with a tight smile. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"I'll get you after breakfast," Kurt said, swinging his bag onto his shoulder.

Leighton nodded and returned to his letter, which already filled half a roll of parchment.

"Let's go," Blaine murmured, eyes darkening as he took Kurt's hand. Kurt gave him a warning look, half-glancing at Flint, who was walking with them on Blaine's other side. Blaine made a small noise of impatience, holding his broom over the front of his robes. Kurt rolled his eyes.

"Every five minutes," he muttered.

"What do you expect?" Blaine grumbled back, eyes sliding down Kurt's body. "You, in those jeans." His tongue flicked across his lips and his throat bobbed as he swallowed. "You can't wear things like that and *not* expect me to react."

Kurt gave him a coy smile and Blaine growled a little in the back of his throat. "Not fair," he mumbled. He lowered his head a little and gave Kurt a heavy look, his hazel eyes smoldering with lust. He smirked when Kurt shivered at the gaze.

Flint seemed oblivious to the silent war of wills the two of them were having with each other, dragging his feet in near-exhaustion from the amount of practice he'd been doing over the past week.

It took all of Kurt's self-control not to simply yank Blaine into an alcove and start ripping his clothes off. There was something about how delectably rumpled he looked after getting off a broomstick, with his tousled hair and flushed cheeks, that was irresistible.

They finally made it back to the Ravenclaw tower, where a group of frazzled-looking third years were waiting at the eagle knocker, unsure of the answer to the door's question, which Blaine readily provided. Jeff and Nick were playing chess in the corner; Hanna perched on the arm of Nick's chair and pushing a hand absently through his hair as she watched them move the pieces across the board.

"Where's Thad?" Flint said, stopping beside them and looking around.

"Upstairs," Jeff said absently, prodding his queen forward to take Nick's knight.

"You left him alone with O'Brien?" Flint said, looking annoyed.

"Don't worry," Nick said. "We thoroughly warned him to leave Thad alone."

Flint looked a little doubtful and moved towards the dormitory stairs.

"Let's hope you're right," Kurt said. "If Cole's tried anything and you didn't stop him you're both going to be in serious trouble."

They didn't look too worried.

"Trust us," Jeff said. "He's not touching Thad."

"If he does, he's an idiot," Nick said. "More of one than he already was, I mean."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Let's go," he said, tugging Blaine's hand towards the stairs. "I don't want to leave Flint in the same room with Cole for too long."

Blaine grinned and followed him up to the dormitory.

"Not subtle at all is he?" Kurt muttered when they walked through the door to see Flint leaning over Thad's bed to give him a deep kiss, one hand wound in the collar of Thad's shirt. Cole looked annoyed, frowning faintly as he packed his books into his bag.

"Hi," Thad said breathlessly when Flint pulled back after a few more seconds.

"Hey," Flint said, smiling. "Want to come back to the tower with me? I'm exhausted and I always sleep better when you're with me."

Thad blushed and nodded. "Yeah, sure," he said, pushing his books aside and sliding off the bed. He glanced at Cole, who looked a little awkward as he walked past Kurt and Blaine. "Cole, you're okay with next Tuesday then?"

Cole nodded at his feet. "Yeah, I'll...I'll see you then." He left, head hung.

Flint exchanged a look with Blaine and Kurt as Thad pulled on his shoes. They hadn't mentioned anything to him that Cole was the one sending him letters, knowing he would—as the innocent, trusting person he was—probably brush the notion off.

"Right, well, we'll see you two later," Flint said, taking Thad's hand.

"We'll meet up with you in the entrance hall tomorrow, yeah, Blaine?"

"Yeah, see you then," Blaine said, looking a little impatient.

They left and Blaine almost ran to the door to slam and lock it, flicking his wand to make sure they weren't overhead.

"Dammit, you look good," he practically growled as he turned back to Kurt, shedding his pads and Quidditch robes at top speed. Kurt bit back a laugh as he struggled to take off his heavy boots and ended up tripping on his own laces.

"Sit down before you hurt yourself," he said, shaking his head.

Blaine sat down on Kurt's bed, pulling off his t-shirt as he did. Kurt took a moment to appreciate just how much more tone his muscles had taken over the past few months. He finished untying Blaine's boots and pulled them and his socks off.

"Sorry I'm all...rank," Blaine said, making a face.

Kurt laughed lightly. "You're fine," he said. He stood up and pulled his shirt over his head. Blaine groaned as he did, reaching out to grab his hips and pull him close before Kurt had fully taken the shirt off.

He yelped in surprise, letting the sound trail off into a sigh as Blaine pressed open-mouthed kissed down his chest and stomach, thumbs rubbing circles on his exposed hipbones.

"God, you taste good," Blaine mumbled. He sucked gently at the hollow at Kurt's hip, nipping at the spot before looking up at Kurt, arms wrapped tightly around his waist and a small smile on his lips. "I love you."

Kurt smiled, brushing the dark curls off his forehead. "I love you too," he said.

Blaine's hands slid down to the backs of his thighs and he pulled Kurt onto the bed so he was straddling his lap. Kurt draped his arms around his neck, tilting his head down to give him a slow kiss.

Blaine ran his hands up his back to pull him closer, groaning as Kurt's hips settled against his own, the friction lighting up his nerves. Kurt traced his tongue across Blaine's lips, sighing as Blaine opened his mouth in reply and their tongues slid together.

Blaine shifted to move back on the bed towards the headboard, one hand on Kurt's lower back, the other wound in the hair at the nape of his neck. He leaned back into the pillow, pulling Kurt down with him. Kurt rolled them both onto their sides, one leg still draped over Blaine's hips. Blaine reached between them to fumble with Kurt's belt, sliding it free and tossing it away before going to work at the button as Kurt kicked off his shoes. He swore into Kurt's mouth and pulled away to look at what he was doing.

"Damn...designer," he mumbled, frowning as he tried to figure out how Kurt's jeans were fastened.

"Here, I'll get it," Kurt said, half-laughing at his struggle.

Blaine gave him a grateful look and rolled onto his back to pull off his Quidditch pants as Kurt deftly undid the buttons on his jeans and slipped them off before tossing them down the bed. Blaine pushed him back down and climbed on top of him, smirking a little as he did.

"What's that for?" Kurt said.

"I just can't look at you without thinking how lucky I am," Blaine said, eyes flicking down Kurt's bare chest. "Of all the guys out there, I'm the one who gets to come home and drive you crazy every night."

Kurt smiled. "Well, I'm pretty lucky too," he said. He smirked. "I guess."

Blaine chuckled. He gave Kurt the familiar fond look he'd always saved just for him and Kurt reached up to pull him down into another soft

kiss, twisting his curls around his fingers. He tilted his head back as Blaine kissed down his jaw and moved his lips along his neck. Blaine bit down gently on his collarbone before returning his lips to Kurt's, a little more needy and desperate than before. He rolled his hips down and Kurt gasped and whined at the friction, a shiver running down his arms and spine.

"*Blaine*," he groaned. Blaine pushed into him again in reply. "God, yes, again."

Blaine pulled back and Kurt whimpered at the loss, lifting his head off the pillow to try and follow his lips.

"One moment, love," Blaine said, smiling. He shifted back off Kurt's legs, taking hold of his knees and wrapping Kurt's legs around his hips. He leaned forward again to catch Kurt's lips in another hungry kiss, rocking their hips together and moaning at the sensation.

Kurt tightened his legs around him to pull him closer, pushing up into him to gain more of the wonderful friction.

"Kurt," Blaine breathed, mouth trailing back to Kurt's ear as he worked his hips at a steady pace. "God, you're gorgeous. The way you move and the sounds you make when you're getting lost like this. I love it. I love knowing I'm the only one who gets to see you like this. No one else ever gets to see you like this. No one."

Kurt nodded. "N-no one but—*ah*—but you, Blaine," he said. "Oh god, that's...that's...god, don't stop, please, Blaine."

Blaine licked along the shell of his ear. "Never, love," he murmured.

"How could I stop when you're asking me so nicely not to?"

Kurt closed his eyes, biting his lip as heat coiled tighter in his gut with every movement. The headboard hit the wall with a gentle thump each time Blaine rolled into him, the bedsprings creaking softly beneath him. His fingernails dug into the taut, sweat-slicked muscle of Blaine's shoulders.

"Are you close, love?" Blaine whispered, low and hoarse in his ear.

Kurt nodded. "Y-yes," he gasped. "God, Blaine, I'm so close."

"Mmm, then just let go, love," Blaine said, flicking his tongue across Kurt's earlobe. "I want to hear you, see you when you fall apart because of me."

Kurt whimpered, his thighs trembling as he struggled to keep his legs up around Blaine's waist. Everything was hot breath and damp skin and the musky scent of sweat and sex and Blaine whispering in his ear, telling him to lose himself.

He threw back his head and moaned loudly, dragging his fingernails down Blaine's back as he came, Blaine's name rolling off his tongue as naturally as if he was breathing.

Blaine lifted his head from his ear to watch him, groaning faintly as Kurt arched his back off the bed, his toes curling in blankets. Blaine let out a soft sound of desire and kissed him hard, Kurt barely able to respond as his body shook and his breath caught in his throat. Blaine swore into Kurt's mouth, his fingers tightening in Kurt's hair and the blankets beside his head. He gasped and exhaled shakily before collapsing next to Kurt, panting lightly.

Kurt glanced over at him, smiling complacently. Blaine smiled in reply and gently brushed Kurt's hair off his forehead, propping himself up a little to kiss him. He sighed when they broke apart, resting his head at the crook of Kurt's neck and pressing his lips to the damp skin.

"I love you," he mumbled, fingertips skimming down Kurt's chest and stomach.

"I love you, too," Kurt said, resting his head against Blaine's. There were a few seconds of comfortable silence in which they both allowed their hearts to steady in their chests.

"Do you think I'll make it?" Blaine said eventually.

"I *know* you will," Kurt said, smiling. "You're an amazing Quidditch player. You and I both know that."

Blaine sighed. "I guess," he muttered.

"Stop. You are," Kurt said, groping around for his wand in the blankets. "You're going to do amazing, and you and Flint will both get spots on the squad, and Thad and I will come to all your scrimmages with embarrassing signs. Remember?"

Blaine smiled. "Yeah, I remember," he said as Kurt flicked his wand before tossing it back onto the bed.

"And then we'll live in that *amazing* apartment and kick Jeff and Nick out when they've overstayed their welcome, which will be all the time, I know, and I'll work at St. Mungo's and...well, it's not going to be perfect, I know that. I know we'll have arguments and moments where we can't stand each other but...I love you so...it'll always boil down to that so...it's perfect for me." He finished with a small shrug and Blaine squeezed him around the waist.

"Sounds good, love," he said, sounding sleepy. He kissed Kurt's neck gently, curling his other arm underneath him to hold him close.

Kurt watched him struggle to keep his eyes open for a few minutes before sleep overtook him, his chest rising and falling with each slow breath. Kurt kissed his forehead, leaning against him and closing his own eyes, thinking they could at least have a few minutes to themselves before unlocked the door and of how nice it would be when they wouldn't have to worry about that sort of thing anymore when they were living together in just over a month and a half.

---

Something warm pressed against Kurt's neck, pulling him from sleep. He leaned into the touch, smiling and making a sound of contentment as Blaine trailed gentle kisses along his neck before pushing aside the collar of his shirt to access the pale skin of his shoulder.

"I love when you wear shirts like this," Blaine muttered, the mattress shifting as he sat down. "When they fall off your shoulder every now and then. It's like porn. You have the sexiest shoulders I've ever seen."

"Um, thanks?" Kurt said, laughing a little.

Blaine continued nipping across his skin, lying down next to him and turning on his side. Kurt rolled over to face him, smiling softly in the semi-darkness created by the hangings pulled around his bed.

"Morning, love," Blaine said, grazing his fingers down Kurt's neck and across his shoulder.

"Morning," Kurt said, stifling a yawn. "When are you leaving?"

"In about twenty minutes," Blaine said, his hand straying down Kurt's stomach towards the waistband of his pajamas. "Thad stayed with Flint and everyone else is asleep so we've got some time." His hand slipped down Kurt's pajamas and he rubbed gently at the growing bulge in his briefs.

Kurt fought back a moan, pushing up into Blaine's hand and closing his eyes. Blaine leaned forward to give him a lazy kiss, palming him carefully until Kurt was mewling and gasping into his mouth.

"Blaine, just touch me, please," he groaned.

Blaine grinned against his lips and slid his hand down Kurt's briefs. Kurt sighed and twitched his hips at the contact. He gasped as Blaine smeared pre-come across his cock before pumping steadily.

"Oh god," Kurt groaned, still half asleep and bleary-eyed.

"Shh," Blaine whispered. "Hush, love."

Kurt nodded and clamped his mouth shut, fighting back the urge to cry out when he came into Blaine's hand a few minutes later.

He relaxed, breathing heavily as Blaine cleaned them both off.

"Mmm, love you," Blaine murmured, making to get up.

"Wait," Kurt said, grabbing his wrist. Blaine gave him a curious. "Your turn," Kurt said, blinking a few times to clear his head.

"I'm fine, love," Blaine said, smiling.

"Lie down," Kurt said sternly, pulling him back onto the bed.

Blaine grinned and lay down again. Kurt rolled him onto his back and slid down the bed towards his legs.

"Love, what're you—oh." He groaned as Kurt yanked his Quidditch pants and boxers down and flicked his tongue across the slit of his cock, one hand wrapped firmly around the base.

"God, love, that's fantastic," Blaine said, fingers running through Kurt's hair and gripping the back of his head as Kurt wrapped his lips around him and sucked hard.

Blaine closed his eyes, features occasionally twitching when Kurt sucked particularly hard or ran his tongue along the underside of his cock. Blaine's fingers tightened in Kurt's hair as he came down the back of his throat with a muffled grunt not long after.

Kurt swallowed quickly, sucking until Blaine's hands loosened against his scalp. He pulled away with a faint pop, wiping the corner of his mouth with his thumb and licking his slightly swollen lips absently. Blaine groaned at the sight and tugged on the sleeve of his shirt to pull him down into a sloppy kiss.

"Merlin, I hope I can concentrate on my trial," Blaine muttered, grinning when Kurt laughed.

A pillow sailed through the hangings and hit the side of Blaine's head.

"There's this thing called a Silencing Charm," Jeff called from where his bed sat next to Blaine's. "Works wonders." He grumbled something about being forced to sleep next to rabbits before falling silent again.

Kurt bit back a laugh and Blaine's grin widened.

"I've really got to get going," Blaine said reluctantly, pulling his boxers and trousers back up. "Have fun in Hogsmeade, okay? Last time you'll go as a student."

"Don't say that," Kurt groaned. "I don't want to think about graduation yet."

"Just under two months," Blaine said, sitting up. He sighed. "Alright, I'm leaving. See you later, love."

"Bye. Good luck," Kurt said smiling as Blaine kissed him on the cheek before slipping through the hangings.

Kurt heard him pulling on his boots and pads before leaving, the door shutting gently behind him.

There was the soft pad of paws on the carpet and Acorn leapt lightly through the hangings onto the bed, purring loudly and looking smug, a dead beetle clamped in his mouth.

Kurt drew his legs back, scooting towards the headboard as the cat chewed happily at its catch.

"That's disgusting," Kurt said, making a face. Acorn simply purred in response.

.

He ended up getting up not long after Blaine left, taking a long shower and dressing as the others woke up. Jeff narrowed his eyes at him as he walked to the bathroom, Nick giving him a questioning look as Kurt stifled a laugh.



"You're going with Cross today, right?" David said as he pulled on a pair of blue and bronze striped socks.

Kurt resisted the urge to roll his eyes at his wardrobe choice and nodded. "Yeah, why?"

"He just seems so out of it," Wes said, emerging tousle-haired from the neck of his black t-shirt, which displayed the Hogwarts crest in the corner and read "*Hogwarts Class of 2012*" across the back.

"He's just worried about Gavin," Kurt said, slipping on his shoes and tucking his wand in his back pocket.

"Still can't believe he's gay," David said, frowning.

"Bi," Kurt corrected him.

"Right," David said absently, pulling on his jacket. "Well, we'll see you around, Kurt."

Kurt raised a hand in farewell as they left together. He sat down on the edge of his bed to wait for Nick and Jeff to emerge from the bathroom, absently checking his hair in the mirror.

Nick was sniggering when he followed Jeff from the bathroom a few minutes later.

"Shut up," Jeff mumbled, tugging self-consciously at his shirt.

"But you look like a swot," Nick said through his laughter, eyeing Jeff's button-down shirt and khakis.

"I do *not* look like a swot," Jeff said, glaring at him.

"What's a swot?" Kurt said curiously as he stood.

"Thad," Nick said simply. "Thad's a swot. But he does it well because he's a bunny. Plus he'd kill us if we ever called him one. But Jeff just looks like a prat."

Jeff scowled at him.

"*Oh*, you're trying to impress Gwen, aren't you?" Kurt said, smiling.

Jeff turned very faintly pink and Nick lapsed into another fit of giggles.

"You look very nice," Kurt said, nodding in approval and flashing Nick a glare. "But it *does* look like you're trying too hard. Here."

He untucked Jeff's shirt for him, undoing the top button and rolling the cuffs up to the middle of his forearms.

"Change into...these shoes," he said, holding up a pair of casual sandals. "And lose the belt."

Jeff did as he was told, grinning at his reflection.

"Better," Kurt said, nodding. "Much more *you*."

"Thanks, Kurtsie," Jeff said.

"You're still a swot," Nick muttered, smirking. Jeff smacked him around the back of the head. Kurt followed them out into the hall, rolling his eyes as they argued about nothing.

Hanna was waiting in the common room for them. She smiled at Jeff as she took Nick's hand. "You look very nice, Jeffrey," she said, Nick

rolling his eyes and Kurt suppressing a laugh with difficulty at the slight swagger the other boy picked up at the compliment. When they reached the Great Hall, Jeff craned his neck a little as he looked to the Gryffindor table, where Gwen was chatting with Dan and a few members of the Quidditch team, all boys.

"She's got a lot of *guy* friends, doesn't she?" Hanna observed off-handedly.

Jeff frowned faintly as they took their seats at the end of the Ravenclaw table.

"Jeff, she's not dating any of *them*," Kurt said, wrinkling his nose as Nick started eating at top speed. Jeff seemed to have lost his appetite. "I look like an idiot," he muttered, plucking at his shirt and sinking down in his seat.

"You look fine," Kurt said, forcing his fork into his hand. "Now *eat*. I don't need someone *else* starving themselves."

Jeff sighed heavily, picking at his eggs for the next twenty minutes, eyes occasionally flicking towards the Gryffindor table. He perked up when Gwen approached them with her usual group of friends, looking very pretty in a pair of dark jeans and a bottle green top that matched her eyes perfectly. She leaned against the table, waving vaguely to her friends and looking a little bored.

Jeff looked like he was about ready to start sacrificing small animals in her name, a dreamy look on his face as he stared at her. Kurt had to look away to keep from laughing.

"So, are we going?" she said, cocking an eyebrow.

Jeff fell off the bench in his haste to stand and Nick snorted into his juice, Hanna giving him a reproving look and nodding at Jeff encouragingly as he straightened up, looking flustered and blushing. Really, it shouldn't be as funny as it was, but seeing Jeff struck dumb and watching him trip over himself like a lovestruck puppy when he was usually one of the loudest, cockiest people at Hogwarts, was hilarious.

Nick managed to control his laughter and pushed his plate away, standing up. "Come on, Hanna," he said, voice still shaking a little.

"Maybe we'll see you there, Kurt."

"Yeah, see you later," Kurt said, smiling as Jeff trailed off after Gwen wearing a look that Kurt knew Nick would make fun of him for until their dying day. He laughed a little and returned to his tea, sipping slowly and reading through the letter he'd gotten from Mercedes, who informed him that everything was going well in Lima and that she and Sam were going strong.

He folded up the letter and stuffed it in his back pocket when he was finished, setting down his mug and glancing down the Slytherin table

to where Leighton was sitting with his roommates. He got up and moved down the aisle towards them, sitting down next to Leighton with a small smile.

"Ready to head out?" he said, smiling around at the other three boys, who grinned in reply.

"Yeah," Leighton said, finishing off his toast. He looked happier than he had for the past week, much to Kurt's relief. "Catch you guys later."

"See you, Leigh," Brian said, giving Kurt a grateful look as Scott and Grant waved briefly.

"You look much better," Kurt said as they passed through the oak front doors onto the sunny grounds, where fluffy white clouds drifted lazily across the bright blue sky.

"I'm feeling a bit better," Leighton said, smiling, thumbs tucked in the pockets of his jeans.

"Good," Kurt said, knocking their shoulders together. "I'm glad." Leighton grinned over at him.

They walked along in silence, occasionally passing other students heading towards the village. Broom and willowherb bloomed along the sides of the path, bright yellow and purple blossoms swaying in the gentle breeze.

They strode down the crowded High Street, Leighton's jaw tightening when they passed Scrivenshaft's and Gavin's house, though he remained silent. The warmth in his eyes faded away instantly and he dropped his gaze to his feet.

"Let's stop by Honeydukes," Kurt said hastily. "I wanted to get something for Blaine for when he gets back."

Leighton nodded, though he didn't look very enthusiastic, eyes flickering towards the paper shop. He sighed and followed Kurt into the crowded sweet shop, replying to his questions and smiling when he made a joke, though the gesture didn't reach his eyes.

"Why don't we go get a drink," Kurt suggested hopefully when he'd paid for his sweets a few minutes later.

Leighton shrugged. "Sure," he muttered, scuffing his feet across the ground as they walked to the Three Broomsticks. He spotted Jeff and Nick with Hanna and Gwen in Zonko's as they passed the shop, Jeff still looking awestruck by Gwen and Nick clutching his side in silent laughter.

"I'll go get us drinks," Kurt said when they stepped into the pub, feeling a little hopeless as Leighton slumped down in a chair by the window, fiddling with a coaster and looking woebegone. Kurt sighed and pushed through the crowd to the bar. He ordered their Butterbeers and waited, drumming his fingers off the counter and frowning as he tried to think of the best way to cheer Leighton up.

"Rough day?"

Kurt turned at the voice and nearly fell off his stool.

"Gavin?" he gasped, eyes wide in disbelief.

Gavin grinned and held a finger to his lips. "Leighton doesn't know I'm here yet," he said, glancing towards the window where Leighton was rolling the coaster around the table with his wand, expression blank.

"But why are you here at all?" Kurt said. "Gavin, you're in serious danger from what Leighton's said."

"I know," Gavin said sheepishly. "I just...I couldn't stay away knowing he was going to be here. And I needed to get some things at my house."

"What things?" Kurt said, pulling out a few Sickles to pay for the drinks.

"Just...things," Gavin said, not meeting his eye.

Kurt pursed his lips and gave him a pointed look.

"Alright, fine," Gavin said, throwing up his hands. "I wanted to get Leighton's letters and all the pictures I have of us from when we were kids, okay?"

Kurt sighed and accepted the two tankards of frozen Butterbeer from the barman with a small thanks. "Just be careful," he said. "We all know you might not be safe here."

"I know," Gavin said, following him through the packed pub. "I just want to spend a bit of time with Leighton and get my things and then I'll be off again, back to hiding." He sounded bitter towards the end of his sentence. He sighed and ran a hand through his dark hair. "Sorry," he muttered. "I just can't stand being cooped up in that tiny flat of my Mam's. It's dead boring there. The only thing keeping me sane is Leighton's letters."

"At least you're safe there," Kurt said with another pointed look.

"Yeah, yeah," Gavin grumbled.

They reached the table where Leighton was sitting, staring down at his hands. Kurt set down the drinks, sliding one across to him. Leighton took it with a muttered thanks, eyes still fixed downward.

Gavin cleared his throat as Kurt sat down and Leighton looked up at last. He stared at Gavin for a moment, blinking and shaking his head as if to make sure he wasn't dreaming.

"Hey, stranger," Gavin said, grinning.

That seemed to wake Leighton up and his forehead creased into an angry frown.

"Are you *insane*?" he hissed. "What the *hell* are you doing here?"

"Visiting you," Gavin said, looking taken aback by his anger.

"But you—you're—Gavin, you're not safe here, you...you blooming *pillock*," he said irritably.

Kurt inhaled a mouthful of Butterbeer. He coughed and spluttered, though the other two ignored him.

"Oi," Gavin said, looking annoyed. "I was trying to be all...romantic or whatever and this is what I get?"

Leighton narrowed his eyes, shaking his head and clenching his jaw.

"Just...just sit before you draw any more attention to yourself," he said, gesturing to the chair next to him. "And for Merlin's sake, keep your head down." He muttered something that sounded a lot like 'wazzak' and turned back to his Butterbeer as Gavin sat next to him.

"Don't I even get a kiss?" Gavin said hopefully.

Leighton sighed and reluctantly turned to give him as extremely short peck on the lips. Gavin pouted, folding his arms across his chest like a toddler denied its favorite toy.

"How are the two of you not an old married couple yet?" Kurt said, sufficiently recovered from his coughing fit.

Leighton made a scoffing sound and Gavin tried to tentatively take his hand on the tabletop. Leighton glanced over at him when their fingers touched, catching his chastened expression, and sighed. He gave him a reluctant smile and laced their fingers together loosely.

Gavin beamed and leaned over to kiss the side of his neck.

"So what *are* you doing here exactly?" Leighton said, allowing Gavin a sip of his drink.

"Needed to get a few things," Gavin said, pushing the tankard back towards him. "Wanted to see you mostly."

Leighton rolled his eyes, though he was smiling faintly. "In other words, you were hoping for sex," he said casually.

"Hey," Gavin said, pointing a stern finger at him. "That's only *one* of the reasons."

Leighton laughed, shaking his head. He gave Gavin a fond look, which Gavin returned, and Kurt could practically see sparks flying between them.

"I can go if you'd like," he said, suddenly feeling like he was intruding.

"No, it's fine," Gavin said, popping a little red candy into his mouth.

"I'm going to go fetch those things and then I'll be back. I don't think I can stay for long though, just to be safe. I don't want him trying to come after either of you or something."

He leaned towards Leighton and gave him a slow, gentle kiss, murmuring, "I love you," as he pulled away. Leighton smiled and watched him go, laughing when Gavin paused at the door to give him a broad wink before walking about into the street.

"He really seems to love you," Kurt said, smiling.

Leighton nodded. "Yeah," he said, grinning and looking down into his drink. "Yeah, he does."

They sipped their drinks in silence as they waited for Gavin to return, Kurt suddenly feeling much better now that Leighton had cheered up. "Kurt," Leighton said, glancing up from his Butterbeer, which he'd been staring into for the past few minutes.

"Hmm?" Kurt said, looking over at him.

He seemed to hover on the edge of indecision for a moment, mouth open but not forming the words he obviously wanted to say.

"If you love someone," he said at last, fingers fiddling around the handle of his tankard, "but telling them could put them in danger, should you tell them or not?"

"Are you trying to say you're in love with Gavin?" Kurt said, giving him a steady look.

Leighton chewed on the inside of his cheek for a few seconds before nodding, still keeping his eyes on his drink.

"But you're afraid telling him is going to make him want to stay?" Kurt said. "And therefore put him in danger."

Leighton nodded again, sadness and conflict blooming in his dark blue eyes as he looked up at him at last. "Kurt, if he came back just to see me while I'm in Hogsmeade, what's he going to do if he knows I love him back?"

Kurt sighed, taking a sip of Butterbeer to give himself time to mull over the question. "Well," he said, setting his glass down with a soft clink. "I think he has a right to know how you feel. I understand you want to protect him but telling him might make it a little easier for him to deal with. Knowing that you love him back will give him something to be happy about while he waits for things to settle down."

Leighton nodded slowly. One corner of his mouth quirked up in a grin after a few seconds. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah, you're probably right. As soon as he gets back, I'm telling him. I'm telling him I—"

*BOOM*

An explosion rocked the entire building, chairs clattering to the ground and glasses falling with loud crashes as screams rent the air.

"What the bloody hell was that?" Leighton said, picking himself up off the floor, where he'd been thrown from his chair by the shock wave.

Groans and cries of pain rang throughout the room.

"I don't know," Kurt said, shaking his head to try and clear the ringing from his ears.

The door to the Three Broomsticks flung open and a middle-aged witch Kurt recognized as a worker from Zonko's ran in, her clothes dusty and singed.

"Someone's blown up the house next to Scrivenshaft's!" she said, clutching at her side, where Kurt saw with a jolt a piece of glass was

jutted through her shirt, which was steadily staining red. "The whole thing's on fire!"

She stumbled and someone ran forward to help her.

Kurt turned to Leighton, whose eyes were wide and terrified. He realized with another lurch in his gut that the house was Gavin's.

"Leighton, stop!" he shouted as Leighton sprinted towards the door, leaping overturned chairs and pushing people aside.

Kurt ran after him into the sunlit street. He gasped, clapping a hand to his mouth at the sight of Gavin's house.

Flames licked out from the busted windows, so hot, he could feel them even though they were half a block away. There were a few people trying to put out the fire with their wands, though most were simply watching in shock as the house was engulfed in crackling flames and billowing smoke.

Leighton was standing a few paces ahead, mouth hanging open and eyes shining as they reflected the yellow light of the towering blaze. He stared, hands trembling, for a moment before letting out a heart-wrenching scream that ripped through Kurt's very core.

Kurt ran forward and grabbed him just before he took off again.

"Leighton, you can't go in there!" he shouted, struggling to hold the taller boy back. "It's suicide!"

"I don't *care*!" Leighton sobbed, tears streaming down his face. "Let me—Kurt, let *go*!"

He freed himself from Kurt's grip and tore off towards the house.

"Leighton, stop!" Kurt shouted, hurrying after him. But it was too late. Leighton was taller and faster and before Kurt had taken half a dozen steps, he was smashing through the front door and vanishing into the sea of flames.

---

Flint shouldered his broom, feeling confident that his final trial and interview had gone even better than the others. He thanked the insane amount of practice he'd been doing with Blaine and on his own over the past weeks. From what he'd heard from Clarence, Blaine had done just as well, blocking every attempt made against him with ease.

"I still have to talk it over with Roger and Kenna, but I'm quite confident that the both of you have just earned yourselves spots on the Tornadoes' back-up squad," Clarence said, shaking Flint's hand with a grin.

Flint tried not to smile too wide as he thanked him repeatedly, itching to go out and tell Thad and get back to Hogwarts to write his parents. He walked out of the Clarence's office onto the pitch, waving to Thad and Blaine where they were seated in the stands waiting for him. Thad

leapt up and waved back enthusiastically, blowing him a kiss and beaming.

Flint laughed and walked into the changing room, peeling off his pads as he went. He was exhausted. Sore and ready to sleep for probably days from the schedule he'd been keeping, but it looked like it would all be worth it.

He punched the air and let out a triumphant shout of laughter. He'd practically just been promised a spot on the back-up squad of his favorite Quidditch team. He already knew half the members of the regular squad through his father and he was going to have Blaine as a teammate. Not to mention the money he'd be getting.

He'd *easily* be able to afford a decent sized flat in the city, especially if Thad got a job as a translator for Gringotts as he'd been hoping to apply for. Stuffing his pads into his bag, he swung it over his shoulder, broom and boots clutched in his other hand, and turned to leave.

"Congratulations."

He stopped, blinking in surprise and feeling a sudden rush of annoyance as Kenna, the Captain of the back-up squad, walked towards him, a small smile playing on her lips.

She shook her long blonde hair back, giving him a look that he assumed was supposed to be seductive, though it just made him want to cringe.

"Um, hi," he muttered awkwardly.

"You certainly know how to handle a Quaffle," she said, stopping a few feet from him and eyeing him with a hungry look.

Flint resisted the very strong urge to roll his eyes. "Yeah, well, I practice," he said, wishing the aisle between the bench and lockers was wider so he could simply walk around her.

"I can tell," she said, smiling.

There was a few seconds' awkward silence. Flint cleared his throat.

"So, can I help you with something?" he said. "I've really got to get back to school. You know...since I'm still *in* school."

She laughed lightly. "I'm aware," she said. She took a few steps closer to him and Flint took a step back.

"I'm gay," he blurted out desperately. "And I'm engaged."

"I don't see a ring," she said, eyes flickering down to his left hand as she continued to walk towards him until he was backed against the wall.

"Because my *fiancé* is wearing it," Flint said. "And did you not hear me? I'm *gay*. Not a fan of all...that." He gestured helplessly at her and she grinned.

"Well," she said in a low voice, tugging at the collar of his shirt and getting much too close, so close he could feel her hot breath on his



neck and smell her perfume. "If you ever decide you're looking for...something different. I'm always available."

Flint gulped.

"Kenna!"

They both turned at the voice and Flint frowned.

"Jeremiah?" he said, staring at the man striding towards them with a faintly stern look.

"Hey, Flint," Jeremiah said, nodding at him with a small smile before turning back to Kenna. "Kenna, leave him alone. He's got a boyfriend."

"Fiancé," Flint corrected.

Jeremiah looked taken aback. "Really?" he said, blinking. "Wow...um, congratulations."

"Thanks," Flint muttered, still feeling extremely uncomfortable with Kenna so close to him.

"Kenna, back off," Jeremiah said, frowning at the young blonde.

"Fine," Kenna said with a sigh, releasing his collar and walking away with a roll of her eyes.

Flint sighed in relief. "Thanks," he mumbled.

"Don't mention it," Jeremiah said, looking as awkward as Flint felt.

"She hits on a lot of the new guys."

"She didn't hit on Blaine," Flint said, shifting his bag on his shoulder.

"She likes...taller guys," Jeremiah said with a frown. "I should know. She wouldn't stop hitting on me until I flat out told her I was only interested in cock."

Flint snorted with laughter. "Strange approach," he said.

"But effective," Jeremiah said, shrugging.

"Blaine told me you were working here," Flint said after a moment's silence.

"Yeah?" Jeremiah said, looking surprised. "Funny, I thought he would be burning effigies of me back in the Ravenclaw tower."

"Not quite," Flint said, smiling. "He's not your biggest fan and...well, frankly, neither am I, but obviously you've changed so...that's good."

Jeremiah smiled, his icy blue eyes flashing with a light Flint had once seen years ago before he'd gone completely off his nut.

"Well, I've got to get back to Thad and Blaine," Flint said. "I guess I'll probably see you around then?"

"Sounds like it," Jeremiah said, nodding and grinning a little wider.

"Right," Flint said, smiling. "Well...see you." He strode back out onto the pitch, nearly falling over when Thad practically tackled him in a hug. "Hello, pet," he gasped, laughing a little as Thad squeezed him tightly.

"Clarence told us," Blaine said, grinning as he watched Thad, who was nearly in tears with happiness. "Basically guaranteed us the spots."

"Yeah, I know," Flint said, beaming as he hugged Thad back. "Can you believe it, pet?"

Thad hugged him a little tighter in response, burying his face in Flint's chest. He froze and pulled back, frowning faintly.

"What's wrong, pet?" Flint said, looking down at him in concern.

"Nothing," Thad said, though he continued to frown. He shook his head a little and smiled again. "Are we going back to the Castle now? I want to write Mum."

"Let's get lunch first," Blaine suggested, rubbing his stomach and pulling a face. "I'm half-starved from skipping breakfast and there's a pub just down the road."

"Yeah, why not?" Flint said, kissing the top of Thad's head. "Might as well celebrate while we're out. Too bad Kurt's not here though," he added thoughtfully.

"I'm sure he's having a lot more fun in Hogsmeade than he'd have with a couple smelly old Quidditch players," Thad said, grinning.

Flint laughed and kissed his temple as they left the stadium together, feeling like everything was *finally* going right in his life.

---

The house creaked around him, smoke filling every inch of space not taken up by roaring flames that seared his skin. Leighton covered his mouth and nose with his arm, eyes burning from the smoke as he coughed and choked on each breath.

"GAVIN!" he shouted, voice a little weak from the initial lungful of smoke he'd taken in when he'd first entered the house. "GAVIN!"

His heart pounded in his chest at the lack of reply. He sobbed dryly and ran through the house, trying to peer through the thick clouds of grey and black smoke. The living room was in ruins, Gavin's bookshelves completely swallowed whole by crackling flames, little ashen fragments of parchment fluttering in the hot air being blown around by the fire.

"GAVIN!" he screamed, leaving the room and turning up the stairs, which groaned ominously with each step he took. Flames licked around the banister hungrily, the dark wood already black and charred in the minute or two since the explosion.

He skirted the burning chunk of ceiling that had fallen at the top of the stairs and ran back the hall towards Gavin's bedroom, eyes and throat burning as he coughed and tried to catch what little oxygen the flames had not yet consumed.

The wall was crumbling towards the back of the hall, scorched and breaking apart at the entrance to the bedroom, which told him that was where the initial blast must have occurred. He climbed over the

door, which was splintered in half in the doorway, flames clawing up the framework towards the creaking ceiling.

"Gavin!" he croaked, running towards the body slumped against the wall in the corner. "Oh, god, don't be dead. *Please*, don't be dead." His stomach clenched and he felt suddenly dizzy at the sight of Gavin's left side, which was raw and bloody, as though the top layer of skin had been stripped away by the flames.

"You can't die," he sobbed. "You can't! Not now. Please just...wake up.... You can't leave me again. Please! I-I love you! I love you, dammit, at least let me tell you that!"

Gavin didn't respond, as limp and still as a doll.

Leighton knelt down next to him, hands trembling and heart thumping as he held his face close to Gavin's mouth. He let out a sob of relief at the faint puff of air that hit his skin.

He scrubbed his eyes with his t-shirt, peering around the room for something to wrap Gavin in to protect his burns. There was a slightly scorched blanket hanging off the side of the bed. Hacking and gasping against his arm, he ran low across the room and snatched up the blanket, hurrying back to Gavin and tenderly wrapping him in the fabric before picking him up, grunting a little in exertion.

The room spun from the lack of oxygen to his brain and he stumbled as he took his first few steps towards the door. Each breath became more and more labored as he blundered through the haze of smoke and sweltering heat, eyes bleary and unfocused. He struggled back towards the stairs, body screaming out for oxygen as he coughed so hard he thought he might spit up a lung.

His whole body shook with the effort to hold Gavin and walk down the stairs, which were groaning even louder than before when he put his weight on them. He was three stairs from the bottom when he heard the snap and crack of splintering wood and the whole structure collapsed beneath him.

He screamed as a sudden, searing pain arched up his side from his left thigh, but he kept his grip tight on Gavin, refusing to look at him, refusing to believe he was really as damaged as he'd looked. He stumbled out of the wreckage of the stairs, knowing that if he didn't get out soon, he was going to pass out as waves of nausea rolled over him from lack of fresh air.

Someone was screaming outside the house. He thought he could almost recognize the voice as Kurt's but his brain was moving sluggishly, things only just starting to seep through before they were swept away again by the blackness threatening to overtake him.

He pushed towards the door, which was hanging open and flapping a little in the rush of hot air.

Ten steps. Nine.

*So close.*

Eight. Seven.

*His brain was fogging over.*

Six. Five.

*He just wanted to sleep.*

Four. Three.

*Three steps. It felt like miles and there was a low whine in the back of his head telling him to just lie down and rest in the warm heat surrounding him.*

Two. One.

He slammed out into the street, gulping down lungfuls of clean air and coughing up smoke and ash, dropping forward onto his knees.

"Leighton!" Kurt screeched, running towards him.

Someone took Gavin from his limp arms and Kurt tugged at his hand.

"Leighton, you have to move," he shouted. "The whole thing's about to collapse, come on!"

Leighton struggled to his feet, stumbling into the street as the house creaked and groaned before the roof collapsed into the attic, sending out a cloud of ash. He moved a little faster as a blast of hot air hit the back of his neck, scorching his skin.

Pain rocked up his leg and his steps faltered. Kurt looked back at him.

"Leighton, wha—oh my god!" He screamed and clapped a hand to his mouth, eyes wide as he stared down at Leighton's leg.

Leighton looked down, head swimming and vision sliding in and out of focus. He felt something lurch sickeningly in his stomach at the sight of the long chunk of wood sticking out of his left thigh, thick, dark blood pouring from the wound and down his leg.

He tore his eyes away and looked around for Gavin, barely able to stay standing on his trembling legs.

"Leighton, you need to sit down," Kurt said, his voice sounding far away and muffled in his ears.

His throat ached, his leg was throbbing, his eyes burned and his whole body was alight with pain.

"Leighton?" Kurt said, sounding worried. "Leighton!"

Leighton collapsed, darkness filling the fringes of his vision. Pale blue sky and soft clouds, marred by a thick shroud of smoke still pouring from the fire. Kurt's face swam before his eyes.

"Leighton?" Kurt shouted, though it was like it was reaching him through a long tunnel. "Leighton, can you hear me?" Kurt looked around. "I need help!"

*"He's not breathing!"* Someone called from might as well have been miles away.

"Gavin," Leighton said weakly, clutching at Kurt's hand. "Kurt...Kurt is he...is he..."

He could say it, couldn't *think* it.

"*There's no pulse!*" the same voice shouted.

"Gavin...no," Leighton said, tears sliding from his smoke-bleared eyes.

"Leighton, just look at me," Kurt said, snapping his fingers in front of Leighton's face. "Stay with me, okay?"

"K-Kurt?" Leighton said, his voice hoarse and barely audible from the smoke.

"I'm right here, Leighton," Kurt said, sounding relieved that he recognized him. "There's a Healer with Gavin now, okay? Just stay awake until they can look at you."

"Kurt, is he...?"

Kurt didn't answer immediately, turning back over his shoulder to look at something Leighton couldn't see.

"He'll be...he'll be fine," Kurt said, though his voice cracked as he said it.

Leighton swallowed, the burn traveling all the way back his throat and down into his gut. Gavin couldn't die. He *couldn't*. He hadn't heard Leighton say that he loved him yet.

He just wanted to sleep.

*He wanted to hold Gavin's hand and see him smile.*

He wanted to sleep.

*But Gavin.*

Wanted...sleep.

*Gavin wasn't breathing.*

Sleep.

*"Leighton, don't you dare fall asleep!"*

Sleep would be so nice. He was so tired.

*Gavin.*

Black.

## Chapter Twenty-Five

"—set an Expulsion Jinx to go off at the door."

"I can't believe he's not dead."

"Might as well be. Did you see—"

"Can we not talk about that? It's...well, it's not pleasant. Besides they said with dittany he might not be too badly scarred."

"If he makes it."

"Stop."

"Did you see what he was holding?"

"The picture? Yeah I saw it. It's next to Leighton's bed."

The fog in his brain thinned a little at the mention of his own name. Everything was moving at a snail's pace, the words filtering into his mind and slowly being sucked in like an overfull sponge trying to take in more water.

His leg felt overlarge under the layer of blankets tucked around him, a dull throbbing rocking up and down the limb as he laid in the semi-darkness.

"Where are their parents?"

"Well, Leighton's parents and Gavin's mother are with McGonagall."

"But they found his father?"

"Yeah. He was passed out drunk in some pub not far from here."

...

"And?"

"Azkaban. For at the very least five years. Could be more. Probably will be given the damage he caused."

"At least they caught him."

"Bit late if you ask me."

Someone muttered something Leighton couldn't hear.

"Jeff, I'm fine. Seriously. That Healer fixed me up in about two seconds."

"I just worry about you, Nick..."

"I know."

"Okay, guys, I think you should head back to the tower. They need to rest. Blaine and I will wait here until their parents come back. You all need sleep, I can tell."

There were a few grateful murmurs of thanks and the sound of retreating footsteps and low voices.

"I'm so sorry I didn't come back right away, love."

"That's okay. No chance of you being hurt. It was bad enough as it was. It was...Blaine, it was awful."

"How's your arm?"

"Fine. Stings but...the burn wasn't too bad."

"Merlin, I'm glad you're okay."

There was a few seconds where he heard them shifting and he assumed they were embracing.

"I love you."

"I love you too. Sorry your trial was kind of overshadowed by all this."

"Don't you worry about that. As long as you're safe."

Leighton opened his mouth to try and make a sound but his throat burned and ached so he stopped. His lungs felt scratchy and swollen with each breath, which rasped down his trachea painfully. He tried to remember what had happened, wracking his overworked and exhausted brain through the haze.

Haze...

Smoke. Raging flames.

*Gavin.*

He tried to sit up but his body wouldn't react and he only managed a slight shift in his bed in what assumed was the hospital wing. The hangings were drawn closed.

"Can we sit? My legs are killing me."

"Of course, love."

Footsteps approached and he heard the scrape of chairs across the floor, bodies settling into them next to his bed.

"I'm exhausted," a voice he recognized as Kurt's said. "And I need a shower so badly."

"Love, you can go." That had to be Blaine. "I can stay. Or we can call his roommates back."

"No," Kurt said. "You saw how shaken up they were. I don't think they'd be able to stand it. Just another hour or two and if he's not awake we'll go."

He could picture Blaine's nod of assent. They were probably sitting close, chairs pushed together and hands clasped. The thought made his sore eyes burn.

"Did the Healers say anything about Gavin?" Blaine said softly.

"Deaf," Kurt said with a sad sigh. Leighton suddenly felt sick to his stomach, barely hearing the rest of what Kurt said. "There's nothing they can do. The explosion completely blew out his eardrum. They said his left ear is permanent but they *think* the right one will heal alright given enough time. They can't be sure since he hasn't woken up yet but they don't think he'll be able to hear anything for a week or two at least."

"They'll keep him here until he's recovered enough to be moved and then he'll go to St. Mungo's if he needs to."

"Let's hope he makes it," Blaine said quietly.

"Yeah," Kurt said with a sigh. "Poor Leighton.... I'm not looking forward to telling him everything when he wakes up."

His voice was fuzzy and echoing across Leighton's mind. No...no, he couldn't fall asleep. He needed to hear what happened to Gavin, to see him...

His body shut down again and darkness swept through him.

...

When he woke again, the space inside the closed hangings was darker than before. His eyes weren't as sore as they had been and he could tell someone had changed his bandages since he'd fallen back asleep. He could hear what sounded like muffled whimpering somewhere close.

"G-Gavin?" he croaked.

The sounds stopped and someone gasped.

"Philip! Philip, he's awake!"

Someone snuffled and groaned as the hangings were ripped open.

Leighton saw his mother's figure in the lamplight.

"Leighton!" she said, sobbing in relief.

"Mum?" Leighton said, voice raspy and barely a whisper.

"Thank Merlin," his father muttered, rubbing his eyes as Leighton's mother bent over the bed to give him a gentle hug.

"Gavin?" Leighton said, his voice like gravel. He looked towards the next bed over, where the hangings were still shut.

"He's sleeping, dear," his mother said, wiping her eyes on her sleeve.

"See...him?" Leighton said, barely able to get his throat and mouth and tongue to form the words.

"Maybe later," his father said. "His mother's with him now and...you probably don't want to see him right now, son."

"But...see...okay," Leighton whispered. The pain rose in his chest and he coughed violently, clutching his throat, which felt like it was being shredded to bits.

"It's alright, dear," his mother soothed, stroking his hair gently. "Shh, calm down, Leighton. Just breathe."

Leighton took a deep breath, feeling like he was overstretching his lungs as he did.

"Water," he croaked, his throat achingly dry.

His father flicked his wand and passed him a glass of cold water, which he gulped down in a few seconds, a little spilling across his chin and down his neck as his hands shook. His mother steadied the glass until he was finished and set it on the bedside table.

"More," he said. It had barely helped and his throat was still dry as a bone.

His father filled the glass halfway and helped him drink.



"No more right now," he said when Leighton asked for more. "You'll make yourself sick."

Leighton slumped back in the pillows. Thick silence lingered over the room and he felt his eyes suddenly sting with tears. Before he could stop himself, he was sobbing painfully, face turned away from his parents.

His mother hushed him gently, tears sliding down her own face.

"He never...heard," he said, throat throbbing with each syllable.

"Heard what, dear?" his mother said softly, stroking his hair soothingly.

"That I...love him," he choked.

His mother laid a hand over her heart, exchanging a torn look with his father.

Leighton stared at the closed hangings of Gavin's bed. He was alive. But he was deaf. What if *didn't* recover? What if he never heard Leighton telling him he loved him?

He hated himself.

He should have told him sooner, should have taken the risk and just *told* him.

He looked over at the bedside table, where a singed picture was propped against the flickering lamp next to his wand. It was of him and Gavin the day Gavin had left Kenessey.

The sadness was clear in their smiles but the thing that cut him deepest was the look that he'd never noticed before that Gavin was giving him even then, the nervous love behind his eyes when they occasionally flickered to Leighton in the old, worn photograph.

Tears slid down his face onto the pillow. It felt like his heart was literally cracking apart in his chest.

Madam Pomfrey appeared from her office, tying a dressing gown around her waist.

"Good, you're awake," she said, bustling over to Leighton. "How are you feeling?"

He shrugged, avoiding her gaze and wiping his eyes on the corner of the blanket.

"He could use more rest," she said, looking at Leighton's parents. "We want to give his leg and everything plenty of time to rest and heal properly. He may need to take another Blood Replenishing Potion tomorrow just to be safe, given how deep he was cut."

Leighton's parents nodded.

"We'll be back tomorrow, darling," his mother said, kissing his forehead.

"Don't worry about Gavin," his father said. "He'll be okay."

Leighton didn't reply, eyes still fixed on the photograph on the table.

"Come on, duckie," his father said softly, taking his mother's hand. They left and Leighton immediately felt alone and cold.

"Open up, dear," Madam Pomfrey said, holding up a spoonful of potion.

He accepted it, his mouth and throat working automatically. He immediately felt drowsiness seep through him.

Madam Pomfrey stuffed the bottle of potion in her pocket and moved around to the other side of Gavin's bed.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Connolly, I need to change his bandages," she said softly.

"Of course," he heard a soft voice, thick with tears, say.

He was drifting in and out.

There was the scrape of a chair.

Footsteps. Rasp of curtains.

He forced his eyes to stay open. He needed to at least see him.

His heart twisted painfully, his gut sinking at the sight of the thick white bandages covering Gavin's left side, from his neck to his knee, another piece of padding tapped over his ears.

He couldn't take it, seeing him like that and knowing that maybe he could have stopped it. He wanted to scream and cry and—

Sleep mercifully overtook him.

The mood in the common room was somber, though the sky outside was as clear and bright as it had been for the past week.

They all had their homework out but none of them could really focus on it. Kurt had been trying to read the same passage in *Advanced Defensive Magic* for fifteen minutes.

The whole Castle had been quiet after the previous day's events.

Besides Kurt and Leighton, half a dozen other students had suffered injuries from the explosion and resulting fire.

Nick had his left shoulder wrapped in a thick bandage where a piece of glass had pierced his arm when the front window of Zonko's—which was two buildings down from Gavin's house—had been blown in.

No one was as bad as Gavin or Leighton, though. Kurt still couldn't believe Leighton had actually managed to get Gavin out of the house. There had been a horrible minute after Leighton had passed out that Gavin had stopped breathing, his pulse so weak that no one could feel it. Luckily for all of them, a St. Mungo's Healer had been in the village at the time. He didn't like to think what would have happened if he hadn't been.

Blaine's hand closed around his own and Kurt turned to him, exchanging a weak smile.

"At least Cr—Leighton is awake," Blaine said softly.

Kurt nodded. He'd been down with the other Slytherin six year boys to visit Leighton after breakfast, adding to the pile of sweets and 'Get Well Soon' cards on his and Gavin's beside tables, though they made sure to keep the area around the photograph on Leighton's table clear. He had barely talked when they were there, giving one or two word answers only when necessary, his voice hoarse and his eyes fixed on the moving picture, his last remaining link to when he and Gavin had been healthy and happy. His dark blue eyes looked completely dead and empty and Kurt wondered if he was really seeing anything at all. Madam Pomfrey hadn't let them stay long, claiming that he needed to rest his throat as much as possible. Kurt caught Leighton's eyes filling with tears as they left and he had a clear view of Gavin's bed, which had the curtains pulled closed around it.

"Do they know when Gavin will wake up?" Thad said in a small voice from where he was curled in Flint's lap, his homework long since finished.

Kurt shook his head. "I think it's a good thing he's out," he said. "It gives some time for his...burns to start healing. Dittany couldn't fix everything."

"Was it bad?" Flint said, holding Thad around the middle as the other boy shuddered.

Kurt nodded. "His whole left side," he said, trying not to think about the raw, peeled look of Gavin's skin through his singed and burnt clothes when the Healer had unwrapped him from the blanket.

Nick shifted and winced, clutching his still tender shoulder. Jeff gave him a worried look, turning to him, and Nick waved him off, muttering that he was fine.

The blonde Beater had been in near hysterics when he'd all but carried Nick into the street the day before, hands covered in blood as he completely disregarded the cuts and scratches covering his own arms. Apparently Nick had shoved Jeff—and in turn, Gwen—out of harm's way and tried to cover Hanna when the window had blown in, earning him the full brunt of the blast across his back and shoulders.

Jeff watched his best friend closely for a moment before returning to his barely started homework. His eyes flickered in Nick's direction every few minutes, a look of concern on his features.

"I think we're going to head back to the Gryffindor tower," Flint said when Thad's head started to droop against his shoulder. He glanced at Thad, whose head was resting at the crook of his neck, his dark eyes closed. "He didn't sleep much last night," Flint added softly. "He just lets himself worry too much about everyone, you know?"

Kurt nodded, smiling faintly. Thad was the most caring and kindhearted person he knew and he so often let himself care almost *too* much for other's well-being.

Flint kissed Thad's forehead and lifted him gently as he stood. Thad snuggled a little closer to his chest, mumbling something in Runes. Flint smiled, nodding at them in farewell, and carried Thad carefully from the tower, whispering something to his Kurt couldn't hear.

Blaine sighed when the door closed behind him.

"What's wrong?" Kurt said, glancing over at him.

Blaine was silent for a moment, chewing the inside of his cheek, before he looked over at him. "I just keep thinking...what if," he said softly, "what if something worse had happened than you getting burnt while you were helping Leighton? What if the house had fallen or...or you'd gotten hit with something? And all I could think about was my fucking stomach...."

He shook his head, looking angry and on the verge of tears.

"Blaine," Kurt said, laying a hand gently on his arm. "Blaine, don't be mad at yourself. You didn't do anything wrong. How on earth were you supposed to know what was going to happen? And I'm fine, so...no harm done, alright?"

Tears welled in Blaine's eyes and he looked up at him with a tortured look. "I...I'm supposed to protect you, Kurt," he whispered. "I'm supposed to make you safe here and...and I never can. Dammit, it's just like last year when those idiots—" He cut himself off, clutching his face in his hand, his shoulders shaking.

"Blaine...Blaine, don't." Kurt gripped Blaine's knee, tilting his head down to try and meet his eye. "You know, I could be just as mad at myself for all the things that have happened to you. What about what Jeremiah did? I wasn't even...we didn't even *know* each other then, Blaine, and I'm always wishing I could turn back time and stop what he did to you because I know how much it affected you...how much it *still* affects you. But I *can't* change it so...why not just be happy while we can?"

Blaine sniffed and lifted his face from his hand to look at him. He gave him a weak smile. "I knew there was a reason I loved you," he said, his voice still thick with emotion.

Kurt smiled.

"All I can say is I'm glad Flitwick chose me to show you around Hogwarts," Blaine said, straightening a little in his seat and taking Kurt's hand. "Imagine if he hadn't...you could be dating Jeff or Nick instead."

Kurt laughed.

Jeff looked up, prodding his quill in his direction and giving him a stern look. "I wouldn't be so quick to doubt, Kurtsie," he said, narrowing his eyes. "I can be very persuasive." He paused thoughtfully. "Plus I'm brilliant and devilishly handsome."

"And so very modest, too," Blaine muttered, rolling his eyes.

Jeff shrugged, sighing in a tired sort of way. "I'm just awesomeness," he said, Nick rolling his eyes beside him with a faint grin.

"So, Jeff, how did things end up with Gwen?" Kurt said. "Are you two together now?"

Jeff sighed and pulled a face. "No," he said heavily. "I mean...not really...sort of?...I have no idea." He ran a hand through his blonde hair with a confused look, Nick laughing silently beside him.

They attempted to work on homework, the mood decidedly lighter, before they finally gave up around dinnertime, having spent most of the time fighting back laughter at Nick's jabs at Jeff's attempts to impress Gwen.

Kurt snuck a helping of roast beef and Yorkshire puddings out from the Great Hall with him to take to Leighton, who he *knew* wasn't eating anything Madam Pomfrey gave him.

Jeff and Nick went back up to the tower with Hanna while Kurt went to the hospital wing with Blaine.

"Thanks for coming with me," Kurt said as they walked through the nearly empty corridors. "I know you probably don't want to."

"It's fine," Blaine said, smiling. "I know his friendship is important to you...and he obviously loves Gavin so..." He shrugged and Kurt squeezed his hand gratefully.

Leighton was lying awake when they entered, eyes fixed on the canopy above his bed, the moving photograph of him and Gavin clutched against his chest. His eyes didn't move when they approached and sat down, though he shifted a little under the blankets.

"I brought you some dinner," Kurt said, holding up the covered dish hopefully.

"Not hungry," Leighton said, his voice still rough from all the smoke and ash he'd inhaled.

"Leighton, you need to eat," Kurt said wearily, sighing in annoyance. He really was stubborn when he wanted to be.

"No," Leighton said, turning his head away as Kurt tried to feed him a piece of Yorkshire pudding.

"Leighton," Kurt said warningly.

Leighton clamped his mouth shut resolutely, scooting away to the opposite side of the mattress.

"Dammit, *eat!*" Kurt all but shouted, slamming the dish on the table and causing Leighton and Blaine to jump.

Blaine's eyes widened and he glanced towards the closed door of Madam Pomfrey's office, quickly flicking his wand to cast *Muffliato*.

"I'm not hungry," Leighton said, glaring at Kurt.

"What the hell are you trying to achieve, exactly?" Kurt snapped, matching Leighton's glare. "You think starving yourself will bring him back? You think it'll make him hear again? You think he'd be pleased to find you you've been slowly killing yourself and not taking your medicine?"

"Yeah, I know, Leighton," he said at Leighton's surprised look. "I've studied the subject enough to know that a Blood Replenishing Potion makes you nauseous when you actually take it." He paused, closing his eyes for a moment to try and calm himself down. "You think this is how he'd want you to act?"

"You don't know what he'd want!" Leighton cried, his voice cracking at the strain on his vocal chords. "You don't know!"

"I know he wouldn't want this!" Kurt said just as loudly. "I sure as hell know that much!"

Blaine stared at him, mouth hanging open and eyebrows raised, but Kurt ignored him.

"You're being an idiot," Kurt said, blue-grey eyes narrowed at Leighton and face twisted in disgust. "If Gavin was awake, he'd be ashamed of you. I know I am."

Leighton continued to scowl for a moment before his blue eyes glistened and he turned away, tears slipping from them onto the pillow. He looked over at the closed hangings of Gavin's bed.

Kurt took his hand where it was lying on the bed and Leighton returned the pressure immediately, letting out a strangled sob as his other hand tightened around the photograph pressed to his heart. Kurt stroked his hand gently with his thumb, relieved that he was allowing himself to break down. He waited, keeping a firm grip on the other boy's hand, until Leighton calmed.

His dark eyes were red and swollen when he finally turned back to Kurt.

"What if he doesn't wake up?" he said in a broken whisper. "What if he never hears...hears me say that I I-love him?"

"I don't know, Leighton," Kurt said gently. "But hurting yourself isn't going to help anything."

Leighton looked away, shame rising in his eyes.

"Here," Kurt said, holding up the dish of food. "Eat. Please."

Leighton hesitated for a moment before taking the bowl. He ate slowly, looking like it was taking all his will-power to force himself to take each bite. But he cleaned the dish, passing it back to Kurt when he was finished.

"Thank you," Kurt said, giving his wrist a squeeze.

Leighton gave him a small, sad smile in return.

Madam Pomfrey came out of her office a few minutes later with Leighton's potion and Kurt watched him closely to make sure he drank it all as the Matron moved to straighten Gavin's pillows.

Leighton made a face and drained the glass of water Kurt passed him. He sank back into the pillows, looking faintly ill.

"We'll let you rest," Kurt said, patting his arm as he stood with Blaine. Leighton nodded, eyes closed as he breathed slowly through his nose. Kurt gave him a final, long look before taking Blaine's hand and leaving, hearing Madam Pomfrey pulling the curtains shut around Leighton's bed.

The corridors were empty as they walked in silence back to the tower, the walls away in the red-gold glow seeping in through the windows from the setting sun.

The common room was loud and crowded as it often was in the evenings, Jeff and Nick causing most of the noise as they played a very enthusiastic game of Exploding Snap in the corner, Acorn hissing angrily from under the couch every time the deck went off.

The dormitory was mercifully quiet and empty. Kurt slipped his shoes and started unbuttoning his shirt to change. Blaine's arms slid around his waist.

"I love you," Blaine murmured, pressing a tender kiss to the back of Kurt's neck before resting his head on his shoulder. "I'm so glad you weren't hurt. I...I don't know what I'd do if it was *you* in that bed..."

Kurt laid his hands on top of Blaine's and turned his head to kiss him.

"Love you too," he said, smiling as he rested his forehead against Blaine's. "And I'm fine. Stop stressing yourself out, Blaine."

Blaine reached up to brush his fingertips across Kurt's cheek, jaw shifting as he swallowed and blinked with a pained look.

"You're so beautiful," he said, voice trembling. "I love you so much, Kurt."

"I know," Kurt said, covering Blaine's hand with his own. "I know, Blaine. I love you too."

Blaine sniffed. "I just...I can't lose you.... I can't lose someone else."

"You're not losing me," Kurt said reassuringly.

Blaine's hazel eyes searched his face for a moment.

"Kurt," he said at last. "I...are you ready? To...to get back to where we were?... I want...I just really need to be close to you."

Kurt was a little taken aback by the request. He hadn't actually thought about it much since Blaine had made the suggestion over a month and a half ago. He'd been content with what they'd been doing,

with the heated make-out sessions and occasional—though not infrequent—times when they moved beyond.

"O-oh," he said, feeling himself blush at the thought and the intensity of Blaine's gaze.

"We don't have to if you don't want to," Blaine said, grazing his thumb over Kurt's cheekbone.

"N-no, we can," Kurt said, gulping. "I just hadn't really...you know...thought about it that much."

"Yeah, neither had I," Blaine said, smiling. "That's why I think we're ready again. We don't *need* it. It's not...there's no disconnect like there was before. I don't want to do it to...get off. I want to because I want to be closer to you...I want to *feel* you."

Kurt's mouth went dry and he inhaled sharply at his tone.

"Okay," he said nervously, his voice rising half an octave. He cleared his throat and nodded. "Yeah, a-alright."

Blaine smiled and kissed him softly. "Thank you, love." He pressed his lips to Kurt's jaw briefly before pulling back to lock the door and cast the usual spells. He tilted his head to the side with a concerned look.

"Kurt, we don't have to do this."

"I know," Kurt said, nodding. He took a calming breath and smiled. "I know. I want to, too. It's just...a little sudden, I guess."

Blaine said and walked back to him, sliding one hand along the side of his neck to pull him into a slow kiss. Kurt laid one hand on Blaine's arm, his other coming to rest on his hip. Blaine angled his head to the side to deepen the kiss, stepping closer to Kurt and wrapping his arm around his waist, his fingers tightening in the fabric of Kurt's shirt. Kurt stepped back towards the bed, Blaine following without breaking the kiss, until his knees hit the mattress. He sat down, separating from Blaine with a small gasp.

Blaine pulled his shirt over his head and Kurt finished unbuttoning his own with shaking fingers as he stared down at his own hands. When he looked back up, Blaine was standing in front of him in just his boxers, a loving look on his face as he brushed a loose strand of hair off Kurt's forehead.

The touch calmed Kurt and he smiled in reply, sliding to the very edge of the mattress to slip out of his jeans before moving back towards the head of the bed. Blaine set his wand down on the bedside table before lying next to him, tracing his foot up Kurt's ankle and cupping his face in his hand.

"I love you," he whispered, leaning forward to kiss him before Kurt could reply.

Kurt loved when he kissed like this, careful and sweet. Not that he minded when things got heated and needy between them, but this was



much more special. These were the moments he'd been missing when things were falling apart between them, when the love was so blindingly clear and present that he felt light-headed.

Blaine's hand skimmed down his shoulder and arm to rest on his waist, his thumb gliding along the bottom of his ribcage. He moved closer to Kurt so their bodies were pressed together, warm skin against warm skin.

Kurt whined in the back of his throat when their hips pushed together, his hands shaking where they were resting on Blaine's chest. He opened his eyes to see Blaine watching him. His eyes were darkened but the love blazing behind them was much more evident than anything else.

He smiled and pressed a closed-mouth kiss to Kurt's lips before reaching behind him to get his wand.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Kurt said when Blaine gestured for him to hold out his hand. "It...it's going to hurt. A lot."

Blaine nodded. "I know," he said, pointing his wand at Kurt's hand. "I want to, Kurt. I told you I did."

Kurt gulped as a clear, thick substance spread across his fingers.

"Okay," he said. "If...if you're sure."

Blaine kissed the corner of his mouth. "I'm sure," he murmured.

Kurt bit his lip, sliding his slick-up hand across Blaine's hip before slipping it down his boxers. Blaine gasped when his fingers brushed over his entrance but simply put Kurt into a deep kiss, groaning when Kurt tentatively rubbed his fingertips against the tight ring of muscle. It was a little strange and he had to stop himself from thinking about what he was doing and concentrate on the gentle sighs and moans slipping across Blaine's lips into his mouth. He held his breath and pushed one finger into the tight heat.

Blaine winced and grimaced in pain and Kurt made to pull his hand away.

"No, it's fine," Blaine muttered, stilling him with a hand on his arm.

"Keep going."

Kurt waited a moment before pushing his finger in the rest of the way, trying not to think of how utterly bizarre when he was doing was.

Blaine started breathing heavily against him, whining softly at the sensation but nodding for him to keep going. Kurt hesitantly pushed the tip of his middle finger in with his index, stopping when Blaine grunted in pain to give him a minute to adjust before continuing.

He moved his fingers carefully, trying to remembering exactly how Blaine was always so incredibly gentle Blaine always was when he did the same thing to him. He pushed a little further in and Blaine let out a shout of surprise when Kurt's fingertips brushed against his prostate.

He kissed Kurt hungrily, one hand winding in his hand and the other forcing their hips together. Kurt crooked his fingers to hit the bundle of nerves again and Blaine groaned loudly.

"God, *Kurt*," he breathed, pushing his hips forward to try and gain friction.

Kurt pulled his fingers free to add a third, pausing to give Blaine time to get used to the burn and stretch. Within a few minutes, Blaine was gasping and groaning as Kurt's fingers brushed his prostate every other time his fingers pushed into him.

"Love, I want *you*," he pleaded. "I want you so badly."

Kurt slid his fingers free, Blaine whimpering faintly at the loss. "Are you s-sure?" Kurt said, heart thundering in his ears. He didn't know *why* he was so nervous. He supposed he was just afraid that he might do something wrong or that he wouldn't be able to make Blaine feel as good as Blaine made *him* feel.

"I'm sure," Blaine said, nodding and kissing him gently. His forehead was glistening with sweat from the pain, his eyes just barely overbright. "I love you."

"I love you too," Kurt said.

Blaine rolled onto his back, arching a little off the bed to pull off his boxers as Kurt stripped of his briefs with trembling fingers.

"What's wrong, love?" Blaine said, catching his expression.

"Just...just nervous," Kurt said, not looking at him.

"About what?" Blaine said, resting one hand on his arm.

"I just want to make sure I'm...good, I guess," Kurt said, feeling incredibly stupid as he said it.

Blaine's gaze softened. "Love, of course you'll be good. You'll be amazing because you *are* amazing. At everything. I love you."

Kurt smiled anxiously. "I love you too," he said. He moved to sit on his knees between Blaine's legs, nodding when Blaine rested one on his shoulder with a questioning look.

He spread the remaining lube across his erection, leaning forward to kiss Blaine as he did. Blaine slid one hand through his hair, gripping the back of his head gently. He tensed a little when Kurt pressed the head of his erection against him, tugging on his hair lightly in encouragement.

Kurt almost screamed when he pushed his hips forward at an agonizing pace. It was unbelievably tight around him and he had to stop for a moment to keep from thrusting forward or just coming on the spot. A cold sweat broke across his brow at the effort of moving slowly when he gained control over himself.

"Oh my god," he groaned, fingernails digging into Blaine's thigh.

"Blaine...oh my *god*."

Blaine was panting beneath him, chest rising and falling with each shallow breath, face screwed up in a mix of pain and pleasure. After what felt like hours Kurt's hips hit Blaine's ass and he took a few minutes to give them both time to adjust to the position. He could barely even think straight.

"I finally understand why you like this so much," he choked, glancing up at Blaine, who smiled and pulled him back down into another searing kiss, twitching his hips up to encourage Kurt to move.

Kurt pulled back slowly before pushed back into him with a low moan, Blaine letting out a low cry of pleasure when he hit his prostate. It gradually picked up a steady pace, closing his eyes to keep himself from losing it too soon and wondering how in the hell Blaine managed to last so long when they reversed roles.

Blaine's leg tightened over his shoulder, the other limb wrapping around Kurt's waist to pull him even closer. "Kurt...Kurt, will you please touch me, love?"

Kurt swore internally as he realized he's been completely neglecting Blaine, reaching between them to wrap his fingers around his cock, which was leaking pre-come across Blaine's stomach. Blaine groaned at the touch, jerking up into him and digging his fingernails into his scalp, his other hand finding Kurt's where it was keeping him propped up on the bed.

"Blaine, I'm *so close*," Kurt groaned, the heat so tight in his gut he thought he might explode if he held back any longer.

"M-me too, love," Blaine said.

"Go on," Kurt said, kissing his neck softly and tasting the tang of sweat.

Blaine was silent for a moment before his body stiffened and he clenched down around Kurt with a low moan, coming between their almost touching bodies. Kurt whimpered and gripped Blaine's hand on the bed as his own orgasm hit him like a freight train a few seconds later.

White flashed across his eyelids and he collapsed on top of Blaine, the room spinning around him as pleasure rocked through his body over and over again.

It took him a full thirty seconds to recover enough to roll off of Blaine onto the bed beside him, both of them hissing when he pulled free. They laid there for a few minutes, panting and basking in the afterglow of what had just happened.

Kurt sought out Blaine's hand on the bed, clutching it tightly despite the fact that both their palms were slick with sweat, among other things.

"Wow," he said, staring up at the canopy of dark blue fabric.

"Yeah," Blaine said, sounding equally breathless and punchdrunk.

"That...wow."

Kurt turned his head to look over at him, smiling softly. "I love you," he said, leaning over to kiss him.

"You too, love," Blaine said, squeezing his hand. He shifted, wincing a little.

"Are you okay?" Kurt said anxiously.

Blaine nodded. "I'm fine," he said, smiling. "Really. And that was...you were incredible. If you don't want to, I understand but I'm completely fine with us...you know, switching every now and then."

"No," Kurt said, "I mean...yeah, we can...we can definitely do that. That was...amazing."

"Awesomeness?" Blaine said, grinning.

Kurt laughed. "Yeah, you could say that."

Blaine found his wand in the blankets to clean them both off before draping his arm around Kurt's waist and resting his head at the crook of his neck, kissing the delicate skin gently. "You," he muttered between kisses, "are perfect. Seriously, utterly, completely perfect." Kurt smiled, tangling their legs together on the bed. "You know, at some point we're going to have to unlock the door and let everyone else in. Which will require putting on clothes."

"Let them sleep in the hall," Blaine murmured, continuing to trail light pecks across his neck and jaw, stopping to nip at his ear every now and then.

Laughing lightly, Kurt snuggled against him, grateful for even the temporary moment of peace and happiness to break the constant cloud of darkness that had been lingering over them since the day before.

---

Each hour passed by in a haze, time slipping by in spurts so that one minute he was being released from the hospital wing on Monday morning with nothing but a scratchy throat and a faint limp in his left leg and the next he was sitting at dinner that evening without any recollection of his classes that day.

Gavin was still...asleep. He refused to call it anything else. Telling himself that Gavin was simply sleeping made it much easier for him to go to class and meals rather than simply haunting the hospital wing during his every waking moment.

Kurt was keeping a close eye on him, making sure he was eating and getting enough sleep. He also accompanied Leighton to the hospital wing Monday evening after dinner, clutching a bouquet of wildflowers they picked from around the grounds. Leighton didn't really see the

point in them since Gavin couldn't see them anyway but Kurt had insisted that they would brighten the room.

Gavin's mother was leaving as they walked in. She gave Leighton a tight smile and a brief hug, her eyes red-rimmed and puffy and her short, dark hair a little unkempt.

Leighton watched her go for a moment before following Kurt into the hospital wing, which was empty save for Madam Pomfrey, who was carefully pulling the thick bandages off Gavin's side and limbs.

Leighton bit his tongue hard to keep from crying out at the sight of the waxy scars that covered his skin from the side of his neck to his left knee.

"We'll come back later," Kurt said hastily, grabbing his arm.

"N-no," Leighton said, pulling away from him and moving towards Gavin. "No. I don't care what he looks like."

Madam Pomfrey looked a little hesitant to let him near Gavin but stood to the side when he approached. He looked down at Gavin, whose face was calm and undamaged, and brushed his fingers lightly over his cheek. Tears slid down his face onto the shiny, taut scars.

"Can't you heal them?" he said, looking to Madam Pomfrey through blurred vision.

She shook her head sadly. "The dittany stopped most of the scarring but it can only do so much. He's very lucky though, it could have been much worse."

"You call *this* lucky?" he croaked, gesturing to Gavin's disfigured side and limbs.

"Leighton, you know that's not what she meant," Kurt said gently, laying a hand on his arm.

Leighton shook his head, turning back to look at Gavin's face. "I don't care what he looks like," he said, gripping Gavin's hand and feeling the calloused burns covering it. "I love him. He's still perfect."

Kurt's hand tightened on his arm.

Gavin was perfect. Leighton had always thought so, even before he'd felt more than friendship for him. Gavin had always been the one to make him laugh and smile when he was upset, had always been there for him when he was lonely or hurting. Seeing him lying there, silent and damaged, brought such a pain to his chest that he almost had to sit down to catch his breath.

He wanted Gavin to wake up so he could tell him everything he should have told him before all this had happened. But then he remembered that Gavin wouldn't be able to hear him anyway and fresh tears sprang to his eyes.

Kurt Conjured up a vase to put the flowers in, setting it down on the table amongst the cards and sweets Gavin's friends had sent. Leighton

didn't move for a long time, simply standing and staring down at Gavin.

When he looked at him long enough, he could barely even see the scars anymore, just...Gavin. Whole and healthy and simply sleeping softly, sure to wake up any time to greet him with a wide smile that made his blue eyes twinkle.

He wiped his eyes, bending over to press a kiss to Gavin's forehead.

"I love you," he murmured in his ear, even though he knew Gavin wouldn't hear him. He liked to think that maybe, somewhere deep in his brain he'd be able to sense how close Leighton was, *feel* just how much he loved him.

"I'm going to stay here for a little bit," he said, turning to Kurt. "You head on back to Blaine and the others. I'll be okay," he added at Kurt's hesitant look.

Kurt nodded. "Okay," he said, squeezing Leighton's arm briefly. "I'll see you tomorrow."

Leighton smiled in reply, turning back to Gavin as Kurt's retreating footsteps faded into the background.

"Can I just talk to him for a little bit?" he said, glancing up at Madam Pomfrey. "I swear, I just want a few minutes and then you can...finish." He gestured to the bandages she had just Conjured up.

She nodded after a moment's hesitation and retreated to her office.

Leighton looked down at Gavin, still clutching his scarred hand. "I wish I had something to say to you besides...I'm sorry," he said, hanging his head. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you that I loved you. I'm sorry that I didn't go with you to your house. I'm sorry that I hated you for so long for leaving me and that I made myself forget about you when the whole time you were just loving me and now...and now I love you back and...and—" His voice broke and tears slipped down his face again.

"Please don't...don't die, Gavin...I don't know what I'd do without you.... I can't...can't do this alone. I can't lose you when I just found you again." He squeezed his eyes shut to try and stop the flood of tears. "I love you. I swear...I'll say it every day...every *second* I can if you just *wake up*. Please...please, Gavin...just wake up."

But Gavin remained still and unresponsive. Leighton broke down, gripping his hand and sobbing so hard his throat started to ache again.

"You have to wake up," he choked. "You...you haven't even seen me p-play Quidditch...remember, you said you were going to watch me play, Gavin? You p-promised you'd watch.... You need to wake up...you need to give me a c-chance to tell you I l-love you...please."

He lifted Gavin's hand to his lips, kissing the rough, scarred fingers gently. He saw Madam Pomfrey waiting at her office door hesitantly and set Gavin's hand back down on the bed.

"I'll be back tomorrow before breakfast," he said. He didn't know why he kept talking when he knew Gavin couldn't hear him. He supposed it was more of a comfort to himself than anything. "I promise. I love you, Gavin." He knelt down to kiss him on the cheek again, eyes trailing down his scars as he straightened up.

He really *didn't* care what Gavin looked like. Yes, he thought he was attractive and loved the way he looked but more than that, he loved who Gavin was, the way he made him smile and the look he got in his bright blue eyes when he told Leighton he loved him. He thought he'd gladly wear the same scars if only to have the chance to see that look again.

---

Tuesday couldn't come fast enough for Cole. It was like time was running deliberately slow. But it *finally* arrived and he made his way down to the library after dinner to wait for Thad. He was a little disappointed that they wouldn't be studying in the Ravenclaw dorms again but at least he got to be all alone with Thad.

He'd nearly melted when Thad had smiled at him that morning when he was coming to the Gryffindor table to sit with Wilson. And he *talked* to him. Told him he'd see him that evening and he hadn't seen at all bothered or annoyed by him.

Cole nearly skipped the rest of the way down the corridor. He managed to control himself though. He didn't want any of the people passing him to think he was crazy or something.

He took a table at the very back of the library, where there was no one but the dark-haired Ravenclaw Beater—Nick? Yes, he remembered the other one calling him Nick—sitting with his girlfriend and helping her with her study for her Transfiguration O.W.L. His eyes narrowed when he spotted Cole, who simply ignored him and moved to a table around the corner where he was out of sight.

He unpacked his notes and books, as well as the essay he was supposed to be writing for that the class, double checking to make sure he'd taken out all the pages he'd doodled Thad's name on when he was bored.

*"Flint, stop it!"*

Cole looked up at Thad's voice, which was followed by a giggle.

*"I'll stop it when you stop liking it,"* he heard Wilson say in a low voice.

Cole scowled, peering around to see where the voices were coming from, deciding they must be on the other side of the shelf his table was situated behind.

*"Flint, I'm supposed to be meeting Cole to tutor him!"* Thad said in a slightly scolding voice.

"*He can wait a few minutes,*" Wilson muttered. "*I want to kiss my fiancé.*"

Cole heard him push Thad lightly up against the shelves. There was the wet sound of kissing, punctuated by soft whimpers and sighs from Thad. Cole felt something stirring in his gut just like the last time he'd overheard Thad and Wilson kissing and he told himself to put his hands over his ears, but his body didn't seem to want to obey him. A part of him wanted to sit and listen to Thad making those noises. Disgusted with himself, he shoved his fingers in his ears.

After a minute or so, when Thad *still* hadn't emerged, he pulled his fingers free, frowning.

"*Oh, god, Flint. Oh god, oh god...ah.*"

Cole's eyes widened and he stood to walk silently over to the shelves, peering through the books to the other side. He clamped a hand to his mouth and jumped back, tripping over his own feet and very nearly falling over. He sat down hard in his seat, whole body trembling from what he'd just seen.

Thad. Up against the bookshelf. Wilson. On his knees and—

He couldn't even think about it. He tried to clear the image from his head but he couldn't. He wanted to cry or puke or...something. He wasn't quite sure yet. Why in the name of *Merlin* would they do *that* in the middle of the library where anyone could see them?

Well...he supposed it was a rather private spot normally. He froze when he realized that Thad might appear around the corner at any moment and realize he'd been there the whole time.

As quickly and quietly as possible, he packed up his bag and sprinted down the aisle away from them. He waited for a few minutes at the end of the row, fighting back tears and vomit in equal measure. He shrank behind the shelves when Wilson appeared at the end of the row, a faint smirk on his swollen lips.

Cole watched him leave for a moment before turning and hurrying back to where he'd been sitting. Thad was standing at the end of the row, craning his neck and rocking up on his toes as he looked around. "Oh, there you are," he said, smiling as he spotted Cole, who tried to ignore his flushed cheeks, tousled hair, and rumpled robes, which—unfortunately for him—looked very good on Thad.

"H-hi," he muttered, not meeting his eyes as he sat down.

"What's wrong?" Thad said, sitting next to him. The genuine concern in his voice sent a wave of conflicted emotions through him.

"Nothing," he mumbled, eyes fixed on his books as he unpacked them and his notes again.

Thad's fingers rested lightly on his wrist and Cole froze turning slowly to look at him.



"What's wrong?" Thad said, his head tilted to the side and his dark eyes full of curious sympathy.

Cole had the sudden urge to kiss him but he suppressed it and shrugged instead.

"I...I like someone," he mumbled. "And they'll never like me back." Thad's features softened and compassion bloomed in his eyes. "Oh, don't say that," he said, his hand still resting on Cole's wrist. He smiled. "I mean, I never thought Flint would like me back and I liked him since second year and now look at us." He got a faraway look in his eyes, thumb brushing almost unconsciously over the ring on his left hand.

He turned back to Cole, patting his arm. "Anyway, don't give up," he said, smiling kindly. "Don't spend all your time worrying over it, either but...you never know."

Cole opened his mouth, the words hanging on the tip of his tongue. *It's you. You're just like me. You were lonely just like me.* But he swallowed them back and forced a smile instead.

"Thanks," he said softly, though he felt tears burning his eyes when Thad squeezed his arm gently before turning to the partially finished essay Cole had brought along.

"This is quite good," Thad said, looking impressed as he scanned the parchment. He turned to Cole, eyes narrowed. "Are you sure you're not just pretending you need tutoring?"

Cole froze.

Thad laughed. "I'm kidding," he said, shaking his head as he returned to the essay.

Cole laughed nervously, closing his eyes for a moment to calm his racing heart as Thad scratched out a few things in the essay, making notes in the margins.

"Okay," he said after a few minutes, turning to Cole and holding the essay out. "You mixed up hailaz and hailayas here. I'm assuming you meant 'heal' not 'holy'?"

Cole nodded, resting his chin on his fist as Thad started going into a long explanation about fricatives. He sighed, smiling at how the Runes tumbled so easily off his tongue when he got excited. He was so nice and friendly and just...

"*Perfect*," he sighed.

"Hmm?" Thad said, glancing up at him.

"N-nothing," Cole said, blushing as he realized he'd said the last word out loud.

Thad frowned for a moment before diving back into his lecture.

Cole sighed in relief. He really was perfect, in Cole's opinion. He was the smartest student in Hogwarts, incredibly good-looking, funny,

kind...there was just the problem of Wilson. It was just like with Hummel.

Cole scowled. Why did all the good guys at Hogwarts have to have boyfriends? He sighed in annoyance. He couldn't screw it up like he had last time. He had to be subtle and careful. Make Thad slowly doubt Wilson until everything came crashing down without Thad realizing he'd done any of it.

He smiled faintly.

"Something funny?" Thad said, smiling as well.

"Not really," Cole said, marveling in the way Thad's eyes lit up when he smiled. He cleared his throat and shifted his chair a little closer to Thad's. "So, um, how're things with Flint?" he said, watching him closely and trying not to think about what he'd seen not twenty minutes earlier.

"Good," Thad said, a dreamy smile spreading across his face. "Great. Perfect."

Cole fought back a scowl. "Yeah?" he said, pulling a face of innocent curiosity. "I heard his trial went well."

Thad nodded, beaming. "They've pretty much promised him the spot," he said.

Cole nodded slowly. "It's too bad about all the fans he'll have to deal with though," he said offhandedly. "If the Tornadoes fans are anything like the girls at Hogwarts, he'll have women hanging all over him."

Thad frowned faintly. "Yeah...I suppose there might be some...fans..." he trailed off, a thoughtful expression crossing his face.

Cole gave the moment a few seconds before saying, "What's wrong?" in a concerned voice.

"Nothing," Thad said absently. "I mean...I think it's nothing."

Cole thought he heard him mutter something along the lines of 'perfume' and 'probably nothing'.

"What about perfume?" Cole said, tilting his head to the side in a questioning look.

"It's nothing, I'm sure," Thad said, shaking his head. "It's just...we were at the trial and the Captain of the back-up squad followed Flint into the locker room and... It's nothing, really."

"No, you can tell me," Cole said, nodding encouragingly.

Thad bit his lip for a moment before continuing. "Well...Flint told me she was kind of flirting with him when he first met her and then Saturday she came out of the changing rooms first and when Flint came out his shirt was all...crinkly and he sort of smelled like...perfume. I'd tell Kurt but he's so worried about Gavin...oh, gosh, I hope I'm not bothering you with this." He trailed off, looking mildly ashamed of voicing his worries.

Cole stopped himself from smirking. "You're not bothering me at all," he said gently. "I'm sure it's nothing. Probably just her flirting with him again."

"But he didn't say anything this time," Thad mumbled, more to himself than Cole. He paused for a moment, gnawing at his bottom lip, before shaking his head slightly and returning to explaining something about Cole's notes, though he was obviously distracted.

"Well, well, look at what we have here."

Cole and Thad looked up simultaneously to see Derricks, the Gryffindor sixth year Thad had saved Cole from a few weeks before, leaning against the nearest shelf, leering at the pair of them.

"What do *you* want?" Thad said, narrowing his eyes, his hand twitching towards where his wand was lying on the table.

"You already know that, Jenkins," Derricks said, his voice low and vulgar, his eyes hooded behind his hair raking over Thad's body.

Thad made a noise of disgust. "Why don't you go take a leap off the Astronomy tower, you numpty?"

Derricks growled in the back of his throat, fists clenching at his sides.

"One of these days, Jenkins. You're going to be alone and you're going to regret being such a tease."

Thad rolled his eyes. "And how *exactly* am I a tease?" he said in a bored voice, not looking at Derricks.

Derricks walked towards them, resting his hands on the table and leaning closer to Thad, his face inches from him. Thad pulled back with a look of disgust.

"You strut around the Gryffindor tower and throw yourself all over Wilson and expect people to just think it's cutesy and excusable but it's not," Derricks hissed. His eyes slid down Thad's body again, a hungry look crossing his features that sent a nervous shiver down Cole's spine. "Wilson can't always protect you, you know."

"In case you haven't noticed, Flint's not here," Thad said in a contemptuous voice. "And I can defend myself perfectly well when I'm not having my mouth attacked by a deplorable troll like you."

Derricks growled and his hand jerked towards where Thad's arm was resting on the table. But Thad was much too quick for him and his wand was pressed against Derricks' chest before Cole had a chance to blink.

"Go ahead," Thad said, smirking. "Try it."

Derricks glared at him for a moment before straightening up. He cast a lewd look in Cole's direction before striding off through the shelves, hands shoved in his pockets.

"Idiot," Thad muttered.

"Aren't...aren't you frightened?" Cole said, his own hands trembling at the memory of what Derricks had done to him.

"Not really," Thad said, shrugging. "He's a right manky berk if you ask me, but he's off his trolley and has about as much sense as a Horklump." Cole giggled and Thad grinned.

"He hasn't been bothering you, has he?" Thad said, looking mildly concerned.

Cole shook his head, trying not to be too pleased by his worry.

"Good," Thad said, nodding firmly. "I've got a few choice spells for him if he ever tries anything else on anyone else."

Cole smiled, though his insides were squirming happily at the fact that Thad was willing to defend him and *care* about him.

"Okay," Thad said as though trying to clear his head. "Runes." He shook Cole's essay out and picked up his explanation where he'd left off earlier, though Cole was much too busy switching his focus between staring at Thad and formulating his next step at getting him away from Wilson to concentrate on anything he was saying.

---

Wednesday dawned grey and dreary, the ceiling of the Great Hall heavy with dark cloud and the morning owls spraying them all with droplets of water as they flew overhead.

Kurt paused to look up from his toast when a screech owl landed in front of him. He glanced at the letter.

"It's for you," he said, glancing at Thad, who was sitting next to him, frowning faintly into his tea.

"Hmm? Oh, thanks," he muttered, reaching out to untie the envelope from the owl's leg. The bird took off in a flurry of wings, sending water flying.

"Another letter from your admirer?" Kurt said, trying to sneak a glance at the letter.

"Yeah," Thad said, though he didn't sound annoyed or embarrassed as he usually did when he got the letters. In fact, he was smiling faintly as he read the neatly printed script.

"You don't seem upset about it," Kurt said, itching to know what Cole was saying to Thad.

Thad smiled and shrugged. "They're really sort of nice, actually," he said, fiddling with the corner of the parchment. "They're always so kind to me.... I wonder who it is." He wrinkled up his nose in thought.

Kurt exchanged a glance with Blaine, who shrugged a little helplessly.

"Um, Thad," Kurt said, turning back to the other boy. "Don't you think it's a bit...creepy, what they're doing? I mean...okay, look at this part..."

"I saw you in the corridor today and you smiled and it was like I had pixies in my stomach or something. I wish I could tell you who I am

but I see you all the time and I don't think you notice me at all'. Okay, am I the only one who thinks these are slightly stalkerish?"

Thad took the letter back with a faint frown. "He's not a stalker," he mumbled. "He's...well, he's like I used to be with Flint. Are you saying *I* was a stalker?"

"No, I'm not and you know it," Kurt said. "I'm just saying they need to learn to back off. And I'm sure Flint can't like it either."

"Yes, well, Flint knows that *I* wouldn't cheat on *him*," Thad muttered.

"What's *that* supposed to mean?" Kurt said, frowning.

"It's not *supposed* to mean anything," Thad said, sounding annoyed.

"Thad, I'm just—"

"Merlin, Kurt, can't you just keep your damn opinions to yourself for once?" Thad snapped, slamming his fork down. "I'm not like you, I don't have a ton of guys willing to date me so excuse me for being flattered that someone actually finds me attractive." He snatched his bag off the floor, swinging his legs over the bench and stomping off down the aisle.

Jeff and Nick gaped after him, a half-eaten piece of toast hanging from Jeff's open mouth.

"What the hell?" Kurt said, feeling as shocked as Jeff and Nick looked.

He turned to Blaine. "What did I do? I was just trying to help him!"

"I know, love," Blaine soother, patting his leg under the table. "I think...I think maybe he might be a bit...jealous."

"Jealous?" Kurt said incredulously. "Of *what*?"

"Well," Blaine said slowly, carefully. "Think about it. You moved here in sixth year and no one knew you but within a week you were dating Flint. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that," he said hastily when Kurt opened his mouth, "I'm just saying you started dating the person Thad had like for years and hadn't even known was gay. And then everyone found out that I loved you so there were two guys chasing after you and Thad still didn't have anyone. And then *this* year, Leighton—who was supposedly completely straight—gets a crush on you and you end up dating him.

"And you know how naïve Thad can be. He thought it was crazy for us not to be together when we still loved each other even though we had problems that needed fixing. He thought we were throwing it away, throwing away something he'd been looking for for years.

"Plus he has to deal with girls always flirting with Flint while almost no one does the same to him and now he's got someone who's being nice and flirty with him without him making the first move like he did with Flint and you're telling him he's just a stalker, which makes it sound wrong rather than sweet like Thad is thinking it is." He shrugged as he finished and took a sip of his juice.

Jeff and Nick were staring at him like he'd just grown an extra head. "There's no way Thad can be feeling all that at the same time," Nick said.

"He'd spontaneously combust from emotional overload," Jeff added, eyes wide.

"Not everyone has the same emotional capacity as a troll," Kurt said, pursing his lips.

He sighed. He'd known Thad had been upset about him dating Flint but he'd never realized just how much he might have been affected by everything else.

"I'm going to go talk to him," he said, pushing his plate away. He kissed Blaine on the cheek. "I'll see you in Defense, okay?"

Blaine nodded before returning to his plate as Kurt walked towards the exit. He saw Leighton towards the end of the Slytherin table, picking absently at his food. He'd been slipping steadily into a deep depression with each passing day Gavin was unconscious, amplified by the fact that the Slytherin-Hufflepuff match was the following Saturday and Leighton had been hoping for Gavin to see him play.

He found Thad sitting on the sill of a wide window in the second floor corridor, head hung and feet kicking absently.

Kurt sat next to him, rain pattering lightly against the glass behind him. He cleared his throat after a moment and Thad stopped kicking. There was a thick silence between them.

"I'm sorry," they said almost simultaneously.

Thad frowned. "Why are *you* sorry?" he said, looking over at him.

"Because you're right," Kurt said. "I never stopped to think how much you went through because of me, Thad. And I know it's nice hearing things like you're getting in those letters, knowing there's someone who likes you even if it's not reciprocated."

Thad nodded sheepishly, blushing.

"That being said," Kurt continued, "You should still tell...this person that you're not interested because you might be getting their hopes up. You know there's no chance of them being with you and you don't want to lead them on, right?"

"Oh gosh," Thad said, clapping a hand to his mouth. "I never thought of that." He sighed, staring down at his feet. "I just don't want to just them."

"Just be gentle," Kurt said, smiling. "Tell them you think it's very sweet but that you're not interested. Hopefully C—they'll get the hint and move on." Though seriously doubted it given what Cole had done in the past.

Thad sighed again.

"I just...I feel bad," he muttered. "I don't know what I'd have done if Flint had done the same thing to me."

"Well you can't exactly date two people," Kurt said, grinning.

Thad smiled.

"Plus...I don't think Flint likes it much," Kurt added. "Someone else being flirty with you, I mean. That's his job."

For some reason, a look of annoyance crossed his face. It was gone a split second later when the bell rang to signal the end of breakfast.

"I'm going to go get someone homework done, I think," Thad said, though Kurt was sure he was lying. Thad always had his homework done days in advance. "I'll see you later, Kurt."

"Yeah," Kurt said, frowning as the corridor slowly filled with chattering students. "Bye."

He watched the crowd swallow him up before turning and heading towards Defense. He sat in his usual seat next to Blaine, leaning across the table towards Flint, who was laughing about something with Dan.

"Hey, I think there's something up with Thad," he said in a low voice so the others couldn't hear. "You might want to talk to him."

Flint looked surprised, brow furrowed in a frown. "What's up?"

"I'm not really sure," Kurt said. He briefly recounted the conversation he'd just had with Thad. "In any case, I think he probably would want to talk about it but he's too stubborn to say it."

"Okay," Flint said, nodding and looking worried. "I'll talk to him tonight." He turned back to Dan, still frowning.

"Did you two drink tea and make up then?" Blaine said, smiling.

"No tea. But yes," Kurt said. "I think he just likes being flirted with without have to flirt back. He's never had it from anyone but Flint so... I can understand why he'd like it."

"Mmm, you're such a good friend, you know that," Blaine mumbled, hand stroking Kurt's thigh.

Kurt bit back a laugh. "And *you're* being silly," he said.

"I can't help it," Blaine said, pulling a mock sultry look that had Kurt putting a hand to his mouth to keep from laughing. "You being compassionate does things to me, love. God, tell me you care about my well-being."

Unable to stop himself any longer, Kurt burst into laughter that had the rest of the class—and Professor Cooney—turning to stare at him, Blaine grinning with a mildly smug look, and Jeff and Nick rolling their eyes and grumbling something about mental rabbits.

---

As he often did, Leighton met up with Kurt after his Double Potions Wednesday before his Charms class and Kurt's Transfiguration.

He'd been forcing himself to eat and sleep despite the fact that every time he saw food he felt sick and he'd often lie awake for hours thinking about Gavin before slipping into awful nightmares.

There had been one the night before where he'd been told that Gavin had died while he was in class and he'd woke up in a cold sweat, tears streaming down his face as he tried to get the images of being told Gavin had died alone—which were so vivid he'd nearly snuck out of bed to make sure they weren't true—out of his head.

"How're you doing?" Kurt asked softly as they walked down the fourth floor corridor together.

Leighton shrugged. "Okay," he lied.

"No you're not," Kurt said with a sigh. "I know you're taking care of yourself but I can still see you're not doing well."

Leighton avoided his gaze, keeping his eyes fixed instead on the floor ahead of him.

"Leighton," Kurt said gently, touching his elbow. "I'm sure he'll be fine."

Leighton turned to him and Kurt's face fell seeing his expression.

"How do you know that?" Leighton said. "How do any of you know he's not...not going to..." He looked away as his throat started to burn again.

"Leighton, I know you're worried," Kurt said. "And I know you're scared but...Gavin's obviously a fighter. Given what you've told me about everything he went through from his father... I don't think he's going to give up that easily. Not when he loves you as much as he does."

Leighton opened his mouth to ask if he really thought that was true, when he heard his name.

"Leighton!"

He turned to see Brian and Grant running towards him like they were being chased by a herd of raging centaurs.

"What?" he said, panic suddenly gripping him.

"G-Gavin," Brian gasped, Grant collapsing against the wall, clutching his chest and wheezing. "He—"

Leighton didn't let him finish; he was already tearing down the corridor, shoving people aside and ignoring Kurt's calls for him to come back.

No. No, Gavin couldn't have died without him. He *couldn't* have left him alone. Not now.

Tears blurred his vision; his still tender leg was throbbing as his muscles strained to keep him going so fast he nearly slammed into the closed doors of the hospital wing.



He burst into the room, eyes immediately finding Gavin's bed. His heart dropped at the sight of Gavin's mother crying into her hands as Madam Pomfrey finished yanking the curtains shut around the bed.

"N-no...no," Leighton choked, shaking his head.

Madam Pomfrey turned at the sound of his voice and she smiled. *Smiled*. What right did she have to smile when Leighton's world had just been smashed into a thousand pieces?

"You must be looking for Mr. Connolly," she said. "He'll be out in a moment, I believe."

Leighton frowned. "W-wha—?" His eyes found Gavin's mother, who looked up at him, her dark eyes lighting up with her wide smile.

"He's awake," she said, happiness pouring out through her overjoyed tears.

Leighton stared at her, barely trusting his own ears.

The door to the bathroom off the side of the wing opened and Gavin limped slowly out, each step shaky and hesitant. His mother hurried to help steady him.

"You wouldn't believe the piss you have to take after being unconscious for four days," he muttered, frowning as he ran a hand through his damp hair. "And the smell of me. Thank Merlin for showers."

His mother laughed and tapped him gently on the side of the arm. He looked up at her and turned towards Leighton at her nod. His face split into a broad grin, his blue eyes sparkling as they always did when he saw Leighton.

"Just in time," he said, gripping his mother's arm so he could limp in Leighton's direction.

Leighton laughed in relief. His legs nearly gave out from under him from the rush of emotions he'd been through in the past two minutes. He walked shakily to Gavin, barely seeing the scars visible on his neck and arm, the rest covered by the pajamas he was wearing.

"I can't believe it," he croaked. "Gavin...I thought...I thought you were *dead*."

Gavin frowned a little, squinting at him.

"He can't hear you, dear," his mother said gently.

"Oh," Leighton said, heart sinking a little. "R-right... Um...how...?"

"We're writing things down for now," Gavin's mother said, checking that Gavin was steady before hurrying to fetch the parchment and quill sitting on the table beside Gavin's bed, which had a few notes in her handwriting explaining Gavin's deafness. Leighton took them from her with trembling fingers.

"The Headmistress has been kind enough to let him stay here for a while since he seems well enough not to need to go to St. Mungo's."

Someone is going to come teach him sign language just...just in case he doesn't...recover." Her voice broke a little as she said it but her joy at having Gavin awake seemed to overshadow it. "He started asking about you the second he woke up, you know. He wanted to find you right away but we told him to let you go to class. Then your roommates happened to walk by and they ran off to find you before we could stop them."

Leighton smiled before bending his head over the parchment, writing as neatly as possible though his hands were shaking violently. He handed the parchment to Gavin, who accepted it with a smile.

Leighton waited anxiously as Gavin stared down at the three words he'd written for a long moment.

"Really?" Gavin said, looking up at him with a hopeful smile.

Leighton nodded.

"I love you too," Gavin said, his eyes filling with tears. "Merlin, I hope I get to hear you say it someday."

"Me too," Leighton said, nodding.

Gavin passed the parchment quill to his mother before taking a wobbly step towards Leighton, who moved forward to meet him, pulling him into a careful hug.

"I love you," Gavin mumbled in his ear. "I love you so much, Leighton. God, I hope I get to hear you say it soon."

Leighton squeezed him gently in reply.

There were rapid footsteps behind him and he turned to see Kurt sliding around the corner, struggling for a moment to catch his footing on the slick marble floor.

"Gavin!" he said, panting a little and looking relieved. "They said—you were awake." He paused for a moment to catch his breath. "How are you feeling?"

"He can't hear you," Leighton said as he and Gavin broke apart, though he clasped his hand tightly.

"Right," Kurt said, frowning a little. "I forgot." He turned to Leighton.

"But otherwise...how is he?"

"He's feeling fine, he said," Gavin's mother said, wiping her eyes and smiling. "Leighton and food are his top priorities, it seems."

Leighton grinned, glancing over at Gavin, who was looking at them in turn to try and read their lips. He didn't seem too upset about not being able to hear, but he'd always been optimistic. Leighton thought that it would probably start to sink in soon if he didn't recover, though. He hoped more than anything that he would. He wanted Gavin to hear him say that he loved him, to know just how much he meant it. He couldn't put his heart into ink and paper like he could his own voice. Right now, though, the only thing he cared about was that Gavin was

awake. Gavin was walking around and talking and laughing and grinning like he always was. And at the moment, that was enough for him.

---

"Thad?"

"Yes?" Thad said in a rather clipped tone, not looking up from his book.

"Is something...wrong?" Flint said nervously. Ever since Kurt had mentioned their brief argument that morning, he'd been wanting to talk to Thad, but he'd been acting vaguely distant all day, barely even talking during their Runes lesson that afternoon, a class in which they usually spent most of the time writing each other little notes in the back of the room.

The news of Gavin waking up had spread quickly around the school and they'd stopped by after dinner briefly to see him before returning to the Gryffindor common room with Thad, who'd spent the first twenty minutes talking to—much to Flint's annoyance—Cole O'Brien. Apparently the two of them had become a lot closer during their study sessions than Flint had anticipated.

He'd glared openly at O'Brien, who seemed vaguely frightened of him at first. Until Thad had scolded Flint for being mean and forced him to spend the next fifteen minutes watching O'Brien's smug little face.

"Wrong?" Thad repeated, turning the page a little more forcefully than necessary.

"Y-yeah," Flint said. "Kurt said you two had a little bit of a fight and then...then you barely talked to me all day. Did I do something?"

Thad's eyes lifted from the page, the dark brown searching Flint's face closely for a long moment.

"No," he said at last. "No, you didn't *do* anything."

"O-okay," Flint said, scooting a little closer to him on the bed. "Did I *not* do something that I should have?"

Thad sighed, sounding annoyed, and closed his book. He looked up at Flint. "Does it annoy you when I get those letters? The ones from my...admirer?" he said.

"Well...yeah, of course it does, pet," Flint said. "I don't want someone else looking at you like that or thinking about...kissing you or any of that stuff. I'm the only one who can do that, remember?"

Thad nodded, lips pursed. "And you would want me to tell you if anything like that happened, right? If someone was flirting with me?"

"Yeah," Flint said slowly, not really sure what he was getting at.

"Huh," Thad said. He stared into space for a moment before picking his book up again and returning to where he'd left off.

"So, you're...not mad at me?" Flint said hopefully.

"Nope," Thad said shortly.

Flint reached out to lay a hand on his arm. "Did you want to maybe...you know...?" he trailed off hopefully.

"Not really," Thad said, eyes still fixed on his book. "I'm not in the mood right now."

"Oh...alright," Flint said, a little disappointed, not to mention confused. Thad had *never* said no to fooling around before. Usually, he was the one to start it. He sat back against the headboard, utterly perplexed as to what Thad's problem might be and wondering if he wasn't being one hundred percent honest with him.

---

The days slid by slowly, April turning to May as the greenhouses flourished with exotic plants and the sun shone overhead in between the days when warm spring rain fell across the Castle and grounds. A week had passed since Gavin had woken up and Leighton could see just how much Gavin's deafness was starting to affect him.

There were days when he was bright and cheerful, greeting him with a broad grin and exchanging 'I love you's with each other—Gavin had asked the young woman his mother had hired to teach him sign language how to say it during his first lesson—before talking for hours. Leighton was starting to pick up on the hand signals as Gavin had taken to using them when he talked, his tone changing since he could no longer hear himself, but for the most part, he was writing the words out on parchment for Gavin to read.

But more often than not, Leighton would arrive at the hospital wing to find a frustrated and impatient Gavin staring at the wall, his instructor telling him repeatedly not to give up or to try again.

What seemed to annoy him most was the fact that he could not visit the rest of the Castle as he was technically not a student anymore.

They allowed him to eat in the Great Hall, but he couldn't walk Leighton to class or visit him in the Slytherin common room. Leighton was sure to spend every spare moment in the hospital wing with him to make up for it, though.

The scars from Gavin's burns were showing improvement with regular application of Dr. Ubbly's Oblivious Unction, though they both knew they would never fade completely, that he'd always have a rough look to his skin, his hand would always been overly calloused and almost nerve-dead.

The Wednesday before the Quidditch match, Leighton was lying next to Gavin on his bed in the hospital wing, enjoying the silence that they could share. Gavin sighed heavily, turning his head away from him.

"What's wrong?" Leighton said, both out loud and with his hand.

"I'm hideous," Gavin mumbled.

Leighton sat up, frowning down at him. "No you're not," he said slowly, allowing Gavin time to attempt to read his lips.

"Yes I am," Gavin said in a small voice. "How can you even look at me? I'm disgusting..." He stared down at his left hand, tears welling up in his eyes at the sight of the waxy scars covering it and his arm.

"You're...Gavin." He reached out to turn Gavin's head so he was looking at him. "You're perfect," he said slowly. "I love you." He held up his hand—thumb, index, and pinky raised—with a small smile. Gavin returned the gesture, though he still looked upset.

When Leighton left a few minutes before curfew, he didn't head down to the Slytherin dungeons. Instead, he made his way up to the Ravenclaw tower where, luckily, he was able to slip in behind a group of chattering fourth years.

Kurt was sitting on the floor, leaning back against the couch between Blaine's legs and frowning down at his Charms book.

"Kurtsie," Jeff said when he spotted Leighton.

"Hmm?" Kurt said, looking up. "Oh, hey, Leighton." He closed his book, smiling. "What's up?"

"It's Gavin," Leighton said. "I...I want to sing to him."

The others exchanged looks of faint surprise; Thad's bottom lip quivered and his eyes filled with tears at the thought.

Kurt shifted in his seat, leaning forward towards him. "But...Leighton, he's d—"

"I know," Leighton said, cutting over him quickly. "But he sang for me...I just...I want to do the same for him. He...he's feeling so down about...how he looks and everything. He thinks I don't like the way he looks anymore. But...I don't care how he looks. I love *him*, not his body."

Kurt smiled. "Alright, so, what do you need our help for?"

"I need to learn how to do the sign language for the song," Leighton said. "So he knows what I'm saying. Do any of you know it or anyone who might?"

"I know it pretty well," Nick said, setting down his quill.

"Me too," Jeff said, nodding.

"Really?" Kurt said, turning to them in surprise. "Why?"

"My baby sister Celia was born partially deaf," Nick said. "She can still hear okay but...my Mum taught the whole family how to sign when she was little. We don't really use it anymore because she can read lips so well but I still know most of it."

"I just liked learning swears," Jeff said, grinning.

"Brill," Leighton said, "I mean...not the swears, the other stuff. Could you teach me if I show you the lyrics?"

"Sure," Nick said, shrugging. "When?"

"Well...if you're free now," Leighton suggested hopefully. "I've got practice tomorrow and Friday night."

"Yeah, alright," Nick said, shutting his book and pushing his homework aside. "Hanna's with her friends and Divination is boring anyway."

Leighton grinned and sat down on the floor next to him. "Thanks," he said.

It took him a full hour and a half to memorize everything, triple-checking to make sure he was doing all the signals correctly and hoping that Gavin would either be able to understand them or read his lips. He snuck back to the Slytherin dorms, almost getting caught by two Prefects, and crawled silently into bed, running everything over in his head before drifting into a fitful sleep.

Friday evening, he made his way straight from the Quidditch pitch to the hospital wing, emerald robes dusty and limbs aching.

Gavin smiled half-heartedly when he entered, sliding his left hand under the blanket out of sight.

\*"Stop it," Leighton said, setting his broom on the floor and yanking the blanket down so that he could see Gavin's bare torso.

"Hey!" Gavin shouted, trying to grab the blanket.

"Stop," Leighton said, making his gaze as stern as possible. "I don't care how you look, Gavin. I love you. I love everything about you. And these scars are part of you and so I love them too."

Gavin's jaw tightened.

"Now, I'm going to sing for you. And you're going to like it," Leighton said, pulling a chair over to sit next to the bed.

"But I can't *hear* you," Gavin said, scowling. "What the hell's the point?"

Leighton took his right hand and placed it on the side of his own neck.

"Look at me," he said, staring straight into Gavin's bright blue eyes.

"And feel it. Just...try and imagine it, okay? I swear if...*when* you can hear again, I'm going to sing to you every day. I love you."

Gavin smiled a little reluctantly, his undamaged fingers still lightly touching Leighton's neck. Leighton took his other hand and held it tightly for a moment. He looked steadily at Gavin, brushing his scarred arm gently before singing softly, his hands moving smoothly as he did.

*I'm here again*

*A thousand miles away from you*

*A broken mess, just scattered pieces of who I am*

*I tried so hard*

*Thought I could do this on my own*

*I've lost so much along the way*

Gavin's eyes flickered back and forth between his hands and face, tears slipping gently down his face onto the pillow. His fingers

trembled against Leighton's neck, where the vibrations of his voice traveled down Gavin's arm. He hoped he could imagine what it sounded like, feel the faint quiver from the restrained tears and know just how much he loved him.

*Then I'll see your face  
I know I'm finally yours  
I find everything I thought I lost before  
You call my name  
I come to you in pieces  
So you can make me whole*

He took a deep breath to try and calm himself and Gavin's hand gripped his arm gently, a small, sad smile lighting up his tear-filled eyes.

*I've come undone  
But you make sense of who I am  
Like puzzle pieces in your eye  
Then I'll see your face  
I know I'm finally yours  
I find everything I thought I lost before  
You call my name  
I come to you in pieces  
So you can make me whole.*

His voice broke, his whole body shaking as he started crying silently, tears splashing from his face onto his hands. Gavin's grip tightened on his arm, the scars rough against his skin. If only he'd gotten there sooner...if only he'd stopped him or gone in with him. He barely got the next words out, raw emotion ripping them apart as he met Gavin's gaze, praying he knew just how much he meant them.

*I tried so hard. So hard.  
I tried so hard.*

Gavin's hand slid up from his neck briefly to wipe away his tears.

*Then I'll see your face  
I know I'm finally yours  
I find everything I thought I lost before  
You call my name  
I come to you in pieces  
So you can make me whole  
So you can make me whole*

He hung his head, closing his eyes and shaking gently. Gavin's hand lifted from his neck and the bed shifted as he sat up. He wrapped his arms around Leighton tightly, burying his face in his neck, which dampened with his tears.

Leighton pulled his arms from between them to hold him back, clutching him as he cried, repeating over and over that he loved him and sobbing even harder when he knew he couldn't hear it.

"I love you," Gavin whispered, voice shaking. "Thank you. I know I'm not perfect but...you make me feel like I am."

Leighton held him a little closer in reply. "That's because you are," he breathed, hating that he was the only one hearing the words.

Cole glanced down the hall before slipping into the seventh year Gryffindor boys' dormitory. He shut the door behind him and locked it. Better safe than sorry.

He recognized Wilson's bed immediately, as it was the one with a picture of him and Thad sitting on the bedside table. He glowered at the bed for a moment when he realized that that was where the two of them—he shook his head. *Don't think about that.*

It was bad enough that Thad had written him, well, he'd sent it to his 'Secret Admirer', a letter telling him that he wasn't interested in him. It was very sweet and apologetic but he *knew* Thad was doing it to please Wilson because Thad had *told* him about it in their last study session. Told him that there was someone writing him letters and that they made him feel good about himself but that he didn't want to lead anyone on.

"And I know Flint doesn't like it," Thad had said, sounding annoyed. He'd sighed. "I don't understand how it's okay for someone to flirt with him but not with me. And he didn't come clean about that Kenna woman flirting with him either. Gosh, I hope that's all that happened...he...he wouldn't cheat on me, would he? Especially not with a...a woman..."

Cole had assured him that Flint would never do anything like that, knowing that sticking up for Flint, who openly disliked Cole, would make him seem a thousand times better in Thad's eyes. He just needed to twist the circumstances a little more in his favor.

And that was what brought him to the seventh year dorms.

He opened Wilson's trunk, digging through it for a t-shirt, which he rumpled up randomly before spritzing it with the perfume he'd stolen from one of the girls in his Charms class. He didn't know if it was the same scent as the woman who'd flirted with Flint but he didn't really think it mattered. Thad was already having concerns, it wouldn't take much more than a gentle push to topple him over the edge into doubt. Cole pulled out the lipstick he'd stolen with the perfume and smeared a little of it onto the collar of the shirt before balling it up and tossing it well out of sight under Wilson's bed. He shut Wilson's trunk, shoving the perfume and lipstick deep into his bag before slipping back out into the hall, smiling and humming gently.



He simply loved when things went according to plan.

## Chapter Twenty-Six

*Watch your step.*

"I'm fine. Stop worrying."

*I'll never stop worrying about you*, Leighton said, hand moving a little hesitantly as he helped Gavin down towards the Quidditch pitch.

Gavin smiled, leaning heavily on Leighton's arm as he limped across the sloping grounds. His burns had given him a limp, his body permanently bowed from the deep scarring on his side and leg. His hand kept a steady grip on Leighton's.

They stopped just outside the stadium, ducking beneath the stands so they were out of sight from those walking onto the pitch towards the stairs.

"Are you sure you'll be okay?" Leighton said, slowing himself down to give Gavin the chance to read his lips.

"I'll be fine," Gavin said, blue eyes lighting up with his smile. "I'm excited to watch you play. And your friends said they'll explain what's going on to me."

"Yes, well, Jeff and Nick can't always be trusted according to Kurt," Leighton said, frowning faintly. "They might tell you I'm...shouting about sex or something."

"What?" Gavin said, laughing.

"That's what Kurt said," Leighton muttered.

Gavin's smile softened a little. His undamaged hand brushed across Leighton's face. "I love you," he said. "So much."

Leighton smiled sadly. "I love you too," he said, eyes flitting to the bandages over Gavin's right ear.

"They still said it might heal," Gavin said, catching his glance. "I might hear again, Leighton. But...if I don't, I'll still know you love me. Even though...even though I don't know how you can stand to stomach me." His eyes dropped to his shoes, brows furrowing.

Leighton touched Gavin's chin lightly to lift his gaze back to him.

"Gavin," he said, hating the sight of tears welling in Gavin's eyes. "I told you, I don't care. I love you. I don't care what you look like."

A tear slid down Gavin's cheek. "You're...perfect," he whispered. "And I'm...I'm a...monster."

"You're not a monster," Leighton said, running his hand down the rough skin of Gavin's neck. "I told you, I don't care. I don't care if you're scarred or...or bald or fat or if you decide you want to wear nothing but neon pink polka dots for the rest of our lives. I don't *care*, Gavin. I love *you*. Your eyes and lips and hair and your whole body,

scarred or not. So stop thinking there's something wrong with you and—"

Gavin pulled him down by the collar of his robes into a rough kiss, fisting his other hand in Leighton's hair. Leighton returned the kiss readily, pushing him gently against the backing of the stands and gripping his face in his hands.

Leighton grazed his fingers down the side of his neck, gently caressing the calloused skin. He wished Gavin would understand just how much he meant what he said. That he really *didn't* care about how he looked and never would. Gavin had always been perfect in his eyes, the one who'd been there for so many moments in his life and taught him more than anyone about friendship and love.

Gavin's hands started straying down Leighton's chest and stomach and Leighton pulled back reluctantly.

"Gav, I've got to get to the match," he said, shifting in his suddenly uncomfortably tight—who was he kidding, they were *a/ways* uncomfortably tight even without his current...problem—Quidditch pants.

Gavin sighed but nodded. "Alright," he said. "Maybe...later."

"Definitely," Leighton said, nodding eagerly.

Gavin grinned and pressed a kiss to the side of his neck.

Leighton helped him up the stairs into the stands to where Kurt was sitting with the rest of the seventh year Ravenclaw boys and a few hangers-on. Kurt smiled and moved closer to Blaine to give Gavin a place to sit. Jeff made a few rapid gestures with his hands that Leighton didn't quite catch and Gavin laughed.

"What?" Leighton said, narrowing his eyes suspiciously.

"Nothing," Gavin said as Nick and Jeff high-fived. "Go play Quidditch. I love you." He held up his hand in the now familiar gesture, which Leighton returned before hurrying back down to the changing rooms to finish pulling on his Quidditch pads and fetch his broom.

A few members of his team sniggered at the sight of him.

"What the hell is so funny?" he said, nonplussed.

Grant cleared his throat, eyes flicking very briefly down Leighton's body. Leighton glanced down and swore softly, tugging his robes around himself as his team roared with laughter.

"Oh yes, haha, you're all hilarious," he muttered, rolling his eyes and trying to ignore Grant's cry of, "Get some, Leigh."

---

"So, okay, explain to me what's going on with the whole 'points' thing," Kurt said, frowning faintly and turning to Blaine.

"Alright," Blaine said, smiling, "it's a bit confusing but, okay, Slytherin beat us but Gryffindor beat them. But not by much. Slytherin will almost definitely win today. Hufflepuff has got three great Chasers—" "Especially that new one," Jeff quipped. "The fourth year. You know, the one with the blue hair?"

"Lupin, yeah," Nick said, nodding.

"Anyway," Blaine continued, ignoring them, "The Slytherin Keeper is still pretty green but I think Leighton will catch the Snitch quick enough that it won't matter too much. He only took about three seconds to catch it last time.

"So, we lost to Slytherin by eighty points and Gryffindor beat them by twenty so if Slytherin beats Hufflepuff by less than seventy points we only need to beat Gryffindor by one hundred points which will be easy if we can catch the Snitch early.

"It's pretty easy once you figure out the points system."

Kurt nodded slowly. "I have *no* idea what you just said," he said.

Blaine laughed. "All you need to do is cheer for me come June," he said, gripping Kurt's leg lightly.

"I can handle that much I think," Kurt said, smiling.

"Though it's going to be odd playing against my, I can't believe I'm saying this, teammate," Blaine added.

Flint grinned.

The two of them had received their letters the previous day officially offering them positions on the Tornados back-up squad. Flint had practically had a heart-attack when he'd found out, torn between running to tell his parents and kissing Thad senseless.

Kurt had noticed that when he'd finally let Thad go to go to the Owlery with Blaine, that Thad's face creased in a small frown and that his smile when Flint had told him the news hadn't quite reached his eyes. Even now as they sat in the stands discussing the possibility of the two of them trying to find an apartment—obviously something smaller than the one Blaine's parents had bought for them—in the same building as Kurt and Blaine in London, Thad was sulking faintly, arms folded across his chest and a small scowl on his features.

Kurt was just about to lean forward to ask him what the problem was when the stands erupted in cheers as the two teams strode onto the field. Gavin shifted a little next to him, raising his right hand to return Leighton's gesture with a broad grin.

"I can't believe you've never watched a Quidditch match before," Jeff said, shaking his head as his hands moved smoothly.

"Not *everyone's* obsessed with it," Thad snapped unexpectedly.

All of them turned to stare at him but he didn't seem to notice, eyes fixed straight ahead.

"Pet," Flint said nervously. "Pet, what's wrong?"

"Nothing," Thad muttered.

"It's not nothing," Flint said softly. "What's been bothering you?"

"I'm fine," Thad said tersely, turning away from him. Kurt thought his eyes were a little over bright.

"Pet, talk to me," Flint said, barely audible over the sounds from the stands.

"I've got nothing to say," Thad said, arms tightening protectively over his own chest. "Just...leave me alone. Please."

"A-alright," Flint said, looking hurt and confused.

Jeff and Nick exchanged anxious looks.

"Thad, what's wrong?" Nick said, tone unusually gentle.

"We'll help fix it," Jeff said.

"Can't you all just leave me alone?" Thad snapped, voice cracking. "I know how to handle myself. I'm not a child."

"Thad, we know you're not—"

"God, Jeff, just *shut up* for once," Thad shouted, glaring at him.

Jeff muttered an apology, turning back around in his seat and hanging his head.

"Pet, what's wrong?" Flint said, looking seriously concerned.

"Nothing," Thad repeated, a tear slipping down his cheek.

Madam Hooch blew her whistle and the two teams shot into the air.

Jeff and Nick started explaining what was happening to Gavin, their eyes flicking to Thad every now and then.

"Thad," Flint said gently. "Please tell me what's wrong."

"I don't want to talk about it," Thad said, wiping a hand across his eyes. "Please."

Flint watched him for a moment, looking close to tears himself.

"Okay," he said at last, resting a hand on Thad's leg and looking relieved when Thad didn't immediately pull away.

Kurt turned to Blaine, who shrugged, looking worried, and mouthed, "Cole?"

Kurt chewed on his tongue. He knew Thad had been tutoring Cole and, according to Flint, the two had become relatively good friends. He'd thought Cole had changed after everything that had happened with Blaine. He'd certainly been much more subtle about having a crush on Thad. If it hadn't been for what he'd done to him and Blaine, he never would have guessed it.

He was itching to talk to Thad, but he wasn't about to try and have a discussion with him in the middle of a crowded stadium.

The Hufflepuff crowd cheered as their Chasers scored their third goal of the match, Gavin's eyes were fixed to Leighton, who was circling the

pitch high above their, eyes darting around the sky as he searched for the little golden ball.

"He's really good at this," he said, smiling. "*Really* good."

Kurt nodded. "Best I've ever seen," he said, turning to Gavin as he said it to let him read his lips. "Apart from Blaine of course," he added hastily.

Gavin grinned, Blaine chuckling softly.

"I'm not about to deny he's a great flier," Blaine said. "Strange he's not interested in playing Quidditch after he graduates, though."

"Potions is a very persuasive calling," Kurt said, smiling.

Leighton suddenly dipped into a nosedive, a look of intense concentration on his face, and Gavin sat up straighter in his seat. Kurt spotted the Snitch fluttering a few feet above the grassy surface of the pitch.

"This is good, right?" Gavin said, glancing at Kurt, who nodded. He turned back to look at Leighton, blue eyes shining with anticipation. Leighton shot past the Hufflepuff Seeker, gripping his broom tightly with one hand, the other reaching out towards the tiny winged ball. Gavin let out a shout of excitement when Leighton's fingers closed around the Snitch and the Slytherin crowd exploded with cheers. Kurt clapped along with the rest of them, smiling as Leighton rose back up, punching the air with his fist and laughing, eyes searching out Gavin in the crowd. He beamed and held out his hand to say 'I love you' and Gavin returned the gesture with a grin.

The Slytherin team gathered around Leighton, the seven of them landing at the center of the pitch, talking excitedly.

"Damn," Blaine muttered.

"What?" Kurt said, glancing over at him.

"Now we'll have to beat the Gryffindors by one hundred and forty points to win the Cup," Blaine said, nose wrinkling in thought.

"I'm sure you'll do fine," Kurt said, patting his leg and watching as Leighton broke free from his teammates to head towards the stands.

"And if you *do* lose, the Gryffindors will win the Cup so it's not the end of the world. You'll be playing for the Tornadoses either way."

Blaine nodded. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah, I guess you're right. As long as one of wins, right, Flint?" He grinned at Flint, who smiled half-heartedly in reply, eyes still fixed on Thad, who had taken to staring at his knees, brow furrowed and arms wrapped around himself.

The crowd started heading out onto the pitch, chattering excitedly.

Leighton broke through to where they were sitting, face flushed from flying and wide grin pasted on his face. He helped Gavin onto his feet, angling his head down to give him a brief kiss.

"That was brill," Gavin said. "Really brill, Leigh. You're seriously good at that."

"I should be, given the amount of time I've practiced," Leighton said, laughing.

Gavin's blue eyes twinkled mischievously and Kurt thought he heard him say something about congratulating Leighton, whose cheeks instantly turned a bright shade of pink.

"Y-yeah," he said, gulping. "Okay."

Kurt bit back a laugh at the look on his face. "I guess I'll see you later, then," he said as Leighton wrapped a steady arm around Gavin's waist.

"Yeah," Leighton said, paling at Gavin's expression. He gulped. "Bye, Kurt."

Kurt exchanged a smirk with Blaine as they walked off together, Gavin limping slowly and Leighton keeping a careful eye on him. He turned to Thad, who standing next to Flint with his arms folded resolutely across his chest.

Kurt reached out to take hold of his elbow gently. "Okay, you and I are going to have a little chat," he said so none of the others could hear. Thad looked like he wanted to resist but gave into the pressure after a moment, sighing with a hint of exasperation and following Kurt, who gave Flint a brief, reassuring glance, through the crowd.

"What?" Thad said waspishly when they'd reached the area behind the changing rooms.

"What's your problem?" Kurt said, keeping his voice calm.

"I don't *have* a problem," Thad said, picking at his fingernails and not looking at him.

"Bull," Kurt said. "What's wrong with you and Flint? What did he do and why are you refusing to talk to him about it?"

Thad burst into tears.

"Thad!" Kurt said, moving quickly to lay an arm around his shoulders.

"Thad, what's wrong?"

"I'm afraid Flint might leave me," Thad sobbed brokenly.

"*What?*" Kurt said. He'd *definitely* not been expecting that response.

Thad nodded, tears streaming down his face.

"W-why would you think that?" Kurt said, rubbing his back gently.

Thad shrugged. "H-he's going to be on the Tornadoes and he's going to be famous and—and there's going to be people so much b-better than me that will w-want him." He scrubbed his eyes and looked up at Kurt, fear and hurt clear in his eyes. "D-do you think he'd...he'd...." His bottom lip quivered and he started crying again.

"Thad," Kurt said soothingly. "Thad, I *know* he wouldn't leave on you. *You* know he wouldn't leave on you. Especially for some random fan. You're being silly."

Thad sniffed heartily, eyes red and puffy as he looked up at Kurt again. "I k-know," he said, leaning against Kurt's shoulder. "I just...what if he changed his mind, Kurt? W-what if he realized how boring I am and...he meets someone...and I'm just...a pale, scrawny bookworm...."

"Well, Flint loves you, Thad," Kurt said. "He loves you and everything about you. Why do you keep thinking you're not good enough for him? You keep tearing yourself down. I thought you and Flint worked this out. What's changed?"

Thad shrugged, though Kurt had a horrible inkling that Cole was behind it.

"You need to talk to Flint about this," Kurt said. "And...Thad, don't listen to what *anyone* says about him not loving you or...anything like that," he finished lamely.

"W-what do you mean?" Thad said, frowning.

Kurt sighed. "Thad... I know you're friends with Cole now or, whatever, but if he's...said anything about Flint or—"

"N-no, he's really nice about Flint," Thad said earnestly. "Even though Flint's not nice to him. He's changed, Kurt. He's really a lovely person once you get to know him."

Kurt fought back a derisive snort with difficulty. "Just make sure you don't let anyone say that Flint doesn't love you," he said, squeezing Thad's shoulder. "And you should really talk to him about this, you know."

Thad looked down at his feet sheepishly. "He'll just get upset about me doubting myself again," he muttered.

"But you believe me when I say he wouldn't cheat on you, right?" Kurt said, watching him closely.

Thad nodded.

"And you're not going to listen to what anyone else says?" Kurt said. Thad shook his head.

"Alright," Kurt said, giving him a fond squeeze around the shoulders. "Now, for starters, I think you should apologize to Jeff and Nick so they don't spend the rest of the day looking like a couple of kicked puppies."

Thad smiled, wiping his eyes on the corner of his shirt and walking with him back towards the stands through the chattering crowd.

---

"Off," Gavin breathed, hot breath ghosting over his ear.



Leighton gulped, trembling fingers moving to unfasten his emerald robes as Gavin pulled back to watch him with a hungry look. The fabric slid off his shoulders onto the floor of the darkened Slytherin dormitories. He hesitated for a moment before tugging his t-shirt over his head, thankful he'd taken his pads and boots off in the changing rooms before coming back to the Castle.

Gavin let out a soft groan at the site of him and he suddenly had the urge to cover himself back up. He hated how pale and lanky he was. But as he'd been trying to convince Gavin not to be self-conscious about his scars, he let his inhibitions melt away.

Gavin laid his unblemished hand on his chest, tracing the planes of faint muscle with his fingertips. Leighton closed his eyes, shivering at the delicate feel of skin on skin. He inhaled sharply when Gavin's fingers hooked in the waistband of his pants, whimpering when he trailed down across his groin and glided over the inside of his thigh.

"I wish I could hear the sounds you're making," Gavin said, brow furrowing in frustration. He sighed, eyes dropping to where his hand had settled back on Leighton's stomach.

Leighton covered the hand with his own and Gavin looked up at him.

"Why don't...I'll make it even," he said softly.

Gavin frowned. "What do you mean?"

Leighton held up a hand, smiling, and bent down to dig his wand from his robes. He pointed it at himself, wincing in anticipation, and muttered, "*Exsurdo*".

Everything went silent, like someone had pressed thick cotton into his ears. It was strange, especially, seeing Gavin's mouth move and form words that he could not hear.

*I can't hear now*, he said, moving his hands in response to Gavin's frown.

*What? Why would you do that?* Gavin said, obviously angry by his sharp hand movements.

*It's only temporary. I looked it up in the library. Now I can see what it's like for you.* He smiled. *I love you.*

Gavin's expression softened. *I love you.* His hand slid up Leighton's chest to rest on the side of his neck and he tilted his head up to kiss him gently. The lack of sound made him hyperaware to every touch, each soft skim of fingertips over his skin.

He wound his fingers in the hem of Gavin's shirt and tried to hitch it up his chest but Gavin stopped him, grabbing his wrist and pulling away from their kiss to shake his head, nervous fear shining in his eyes.

Leighton gave him a steady look. *Stop. Please. I want to see you. All of you.*

Gavin swallowed, eyes darting around the room. Leighton touched his face gently and he looked back at him again.

*Please?*

Gavin exhaled slowly before nodding. Leighton smiled and hiked his shirt up his stomach. Gavin lifted his arms to allow him to pull it over his head, immediately wrapping his arms around himself when the fabric was free.

Leighton gently pulled his arms away, running his hand down the harsh scars on his left side. Gavin's eyes filled with irritated tears and he turned away, jaw clenching stiffly.

*Lie down,* Leighton signed, nodding to his four-poster bed.

Gavin looked like he was going to disagree for a moment but complied when he caught Leighton's pleading look. He chewed anxiously on the inside of his cheek, eyes everywhere but Leighton's face as Leighton took off his shoes and socks before tugging his jeans down.

Gavin tucked his legs up against his body, turning to try and hide the waxy scars covering his thigh. Leighton waited patiently, stroking his calf reassuringly until he uncurled his legs again, stretching them out across the bed, though his gaze remained fretful.

Leighton stood for a moment to strip down to his boxers before sitting back down on the bed at Gavin's feet. He skated his fingers across Gavin's left thigh, sure to touch every stretch of skin before continuing up to his hip, pulling the waistband of his boxers aside to kiss his hipbone. He felt Gavin twitch and stiffen under the touch and continued to press his lips against the scarred skin, planting soft pecks over the spot until Gavin relaxed again.

He shifted position so he could continue kissing up Gavin's side, the silence heavy against his ears. He ran his fingertips down Gavin's stomach, feather-light touches brushing across his skin, lips still moving up his side. Gavin's chest rose and fell steadily beneath him and he could feel his pulse racing against his lips when he reached his neck.

He lifted his head to look at Gavin, meeting the bright blue gaze and gently brushing a hand through his hair. "You're perfect," he said, though he knew neither of them could hear it. "I love you."

Gavin repeated it, lips moving silently, and pulled him down into a slow kiss, his tongue dipping into Leighton's mouth. There was the smooth vibration of a mute moan across his skin and he groaned in response, pushing his hips against Gavin's thigh.

Gavin's hands tightened against him, nails scraping across his skin gently, and his hips twitched forward. Leighton pulled up from the kiss, heart skipping nervously in his chest.

*Let me take care of you,* he said.

Gavin's eyes widened at the suggestion.

*You don't have to do that*, he said.

*I know. I want to*, Leighton said, smiling. *Please?*

Gavin's throat bobbed and his eyes flitted down to his scarred arm and side.

*Let me do this for you*, Leighton said, brushing the backs of his fingers across Gavin's cheek.

*Okay*, Gavin said at last, nodding.

Leighton kissed him, sucking on his bottom lip and feeling the rush of air across his skin as he sighed, before moving slowly back down his body, grazing his lips down his chest and stomach. His tongue slid across the faint ridges of muscle, which contracted at the touch. He laved the hollow of Gavin's hip with his tongue, stroking the inside of his thigh with his thumb until Gavin was bucking and jerking his hips upward.

Leighton looked up to see him panting and obviously groaning, moistening his lips with his tongue and digging his fingers into the bedspread. He pressed a tender kiss to the purplish mark he'd left before gently pulling Gavin's boxers down to the middle of his thighs. He felt himself blushing at the sight of Gavin's erection, harsh, purplish-red and leaking pre-come across his stomach. He'd never even seen another guy's...cock before and, oh god, was he really about to do what he'd said he was going to do?

Gavin's hand touched his arm and he jumped, not even realizing he'd just been sitting there staring at his groin for thirty seconds.

*You don't have to do this*, Gavin said. *I'll still love you if you decide you're not ready. I understand.*

*I want to*, Leighton said, steeling himself. He nodded, more for his own sake than Gavin's and wrapped his fingers tentatively around Gavin's erection. Gavin arched into the touch, an unheard moan vibrating across his chest.

Leighton pumped gently, spreading pre-come with his fingers and trying to do what he enjoyed. He squeezed and twisted his wrist intermittently. Gavin eyes fluttered shut, lips parted and head tossed back into the pillow.

Leighton chewed on his bottom lip for a moment before lowering his head and tentatively sucking on the head of Gavin's cock, grimacing at the faintly bitter taste that hit his tongue. Gavin shook beneath him, his legs curling across Leighton's lower back and hands sliding through his hair.

Leighton dipped his head lower, keeping his hand wrapped around where his mouth couldn't reach without him choking himself. It was strange, there was no denying that, but he reminded himself that this

was Gavin, who loved him and had done the same for him without hesitation.

He sucked gently, looking up to see Gavin watching him, his head tilted to the side and a look of love-infused pleasure etched across his face.

"I love you," he said mutely.

Leighton hummed lightly around him in reply and Gavin's eyes slid back for a brief moment. He hummed again, low in the back of his throat so that the tremors rolled up across his tongue. Gavin's fingers wound in his hair again, tugging gently. Leighton glanced up at him.

*I'm close*, he said, his hand shaking.

Leighton nodded and returned to running his tongue along the underside of Gavin's cock, sucking and occasionally bobbing his head. Gavin tugged a little more insistently on his hair and Leighton shook his head, flashing him quelling look and hollowing out his cheeks. Gavin's fingers dug into his scalp and a silent cry escaped his lips. Wet warmth flooded Leighton's mouth and he tried not to gag at the taste or sensation. Some of it slid down his throat and he pulled away from Gavin, coughing and covering his mouth.

Gavin looked horror-struck and tried to sit up but Leighton pushed him back down and crawled up the bed towards him to kiss him hard.

Gavin's cry of surprise vibrated across his lips but he started kissing him back a split second later, tongue lapping against Leighton's. He pulled Leighton's bottom lip into his mouth, sucking gently before flicking his tongue across the corner of Leighton's mouth and down his chin to clean off the smear of come that had slipped from his lips. After a long minute, Leighton pulled back, smiling faintly at Gavin's flushed cheeks and glazed expression.

"I love you," Gavin said slowly, his hand brushing across Leighton's face.

"I love you, too," Leighton said, smiling and leaning down to kiss him softly before lying next to him, one arm curling across his chest as Gavin pressed his lips to the side of his neck.

They laid in the comfortable silence for a long time, both enjoying the fact that they didn't need words to show just how much they loved each other.

Gavin looked up at him after a time and Leighton lowered his gaze to him with soft smile.

*I'm leaving tonight*, he said.

Leighton stared at him. *What?* He said at last, something clenching painfully in his gut.

*I have to, Gavin said. I'm healed. They said I could stay for the match but seeing as I'm as healthy as I'll get other than my ear, I can't stay anymore. I'm not a student.*

Leighton's heart dropped into his gut.

*I'll write every day, Gavin said, gripping his hand with his free one. He brushed his thumb over the Claddagh ring, which Leighton had finally started wearing on his left hand. Every day. I swear. There's less than two months left and then I'll see you again.*

Tears stung Leighton's eyes. *Why didn't you tell me?* He said, feeling slightly betrayed.

*I didn't want to make it harder than it already would be, Gavin replied, looking ashamed. I love you and seeing you hurting kills me inside.*

Leighton stared at the canopy overhead for a moment before nodding. *You swear you'll write?*

*All the time, Gavin said, smiling. And it won't even matter that I can't hear you.*

Leighton forced a smile. He didn't want Gavin to leave but he knew there was no way he'd be allowed to simply live in the Castle until the year was over. And he couldn't go back to Hogsmeade either. He knew there would be plenty of nights filled with fitful dreams and lonely days over the next few weeks, but for now, he held Gavin a little closer and kissed his forehead, glad to share the quiet peace with him while they had it.

They laid there for hours, not talking much, enjoying each other's company and the silence, until Leighton ended up falling asleep, their arms wrapped around each other. When he woke up a few hours later, the spot where Gavin had been lying was cold and empty save a slip of parchment covered in Gavin's handwriting.

*Leighton,*

*I couldn't wake you up just to have to see you hurting to say goodbye.*

*I just couldn't. I hope you're not mad at me, I just can't take seeing you cry. I love you so much. I swear we'll see each other soon.*

*I swear. Don't worry about me, focus on your exams. You look so peaceful sleeping right now. I can't wait to be able to sleep next to you. I love you more than anything, Leighton. Never forget that.*

*Gavin*

The ink was smudged in a few spots, no doubt from Gavin crying as he wrote it, hating himself for leaving without saying goodbye. But Leighton understood. He knew it would have been painful for both of them, and that he'd at least be able to look back at a happy memory as the last time he saw Gavin until the year was over. Still, he couldn't stop the tear from splashing onto the page to make the ink run down the page.

He pulled open the drawer of his bedside table and laid the letter in with the others he'd gotten from Gavin, as well as the picture of the two of them he'd carried around with him while waiting for Gavin to wake up.

The Charm he'd used earlier had worn off and he could hear the sounds of the celebration still going on downstairs. He didn't feel like celebrating though.

Tears slipped silently down his face to fall onto his hands. Wiping them away hastily, he tucked his knees up to his chin and wrapped his arms around his legs. He felt cold and alone and...incomplete, like a piece of him was missing. It was much like the feeling he'd had after Gavin had left him when he was twelve, amplified a thousand times now that he knew how he felt and that he felt the same thing.

He curled into a ball on his bed, yanking the blankets up to his chin and already counting down the days until the end of June.

Flint laid a tentative hand on Thad's leg.

"Are you going to tell me why you were so upset?" he said gently.

Thad fidgeted in his seat where he was wrapped around himself against Flint's headboard. Flint thought he heard him mutter something like, "being stupid," his head lowered to his knees.

"Thad, you weren't being stupid," Flint said. "A bit mean, yes, but you were obviously upset. You need to tell me what's wrong, pet, or I can't help fix it."

Thad sighed, his dark eyes as vulnerable as the first time he'd kissed Flint over a year ago.

"I'm scared," he said at last.

"Of what?" Flint said, thumb lightly caressing his knee.

"That you're going to become famous and forget about me," Thad said in a very small voice, eyes pooling with tears.

"Oh, pet," Flint said. He pulled Thad into a tight hug, the other boy squeaking in surprise. "I could *never* forget about you. And you know I'd quit the team in a heartbeat for you, right?"

Thad nodded against him. "I k-know," he said. "I...I just know you'll m-meet all kinds of interesting people a-and I'll still b-be just boring old Thad."

"But I *love* 'boring old Thad'," Flint said, stroking his hair. "And you're not *boring* at all, pet. You're smart and funny and I love how you can control Nick and Jeff just by glaring at them at the way you wrinkle your cute little nose when you read and how you can be adorable and sexy all at once. Trust me, you're anything but boring."

"Just...just don't leave me," Thad said. "Please."

"Couldn't if I tried," Flint said, swiping his thumbs over Thad's cheekbones to wipe away the tears. "How could I leave all this?" He

wriggled his fingertips over Thad's ribcage and Thad giggled, squirming at the touch. "Ekan leubhan iuwiz. Fura libha. Right?" Thad nodded. "Forever," he muttered. He sighed against Flint's chest. "Is there something else you're not telling me, pet?" Flint said, pulling back to look at him.

Thad gnawed at his bottom lip for a moment. "It's just...that Kenna woman," he said at last, not meeting Flint's eyes.

"What about her?" Flint said, feeling a surge of annoyance just at the mention of her name.

"She...she was flirting with you once," Thad said, twisting his hands in his lap. "And, um, after your last trial you...y-you smelled like p-perfume and, um..." his eyes filled with tears and he sniffed.

"Oh god, pet, no, *no*, is that what's upsetting you?" Flint said. "Oh my god, no, I...she was getting...overly flirty with me and Jeremiah stopped her, thank god. Apparently she hits on a lot of guys. I just...didn't want to upset you. Plus, you really think I'd leave you for a *woman*?" he said, half grinning.

Thad smiled reluctantly.

Flint leaned forward, dropping his voice to a rough whisper. "You know how much I *love* your co—"

"Flint!" Thad all but shouted, turning bright red, eyes widening.

Flint smirked. "Well, it's true," he said, shrugging and leaning back to his previous position.

Thad shook his head in disbelief, cheeks still flaming red.

"You're not going sit there and say you don't feel the same way about me, are you?" Flint said, biting back a grin as Thad turned an even deeper shade of scarlet. At this point he was just trying to see how far he could push him.

Thad spluttered incomprehensibly, not meeting his eyes.

"*Pet*?" Flint sang, trailing his fingertips over Thad's leg. "You haven't answered me yet."

Thad scowled adorably.

"Say it," Flint said, grinning. "Say it or I'll tickle you until you do."

Thad ducked his head and mumbled something.

"Pet," Flint said warningly, wriggling his fingers in mid-air.

"I like your cock!" Thad said loudly. He clapped a hand to his mouth, turning red again as Flint laughed.

"Wow. Didn't need to know that."

They turned to see Dan standing in the doorway of the dormitory.

"Just came up to get my History of Magic notes but I think I'll come back later," Dan said, looking like he was debating between laughing and being disgusted. "Have fun with your...yeah, I'm leaving." He turned around, shaking his head and closing the door behind him.

Thad groaned in embarrassment, falling face first onto the bedspread. "I hate you," he mumbled. "No you don't," Flint said, squeezing the back of his thigh. "You love me. And you love my—" "Flint!"

---

"Blaine?"

Blaine glanced up from his Arithmancy book to see Kurt watching him. He closed his book, smiling. "Yes, love?"

"I love you," Kurt said.

Blaine's smile widened. "I love you too," he said, leaning over to kiss Kurt on the cheek. "Something on your mind?"

"No, not really," Kurt said. "I just feel like I don't say it enough sometimes. And it's true. I really *do* love you."

"I know you do, love," Blaine said, sliding a hand over to grip his knee. Kurt smiled a little sadly. "I'm sorry," he said softly. "For everything that happened."

Blaine set his book down and turned to him. "Love, is something wrong?" he said softly.

Kurt shook his head. "No. I just...seeing Thad being upset made me think of it and...I feel bad. And you're so good at really *showing* me that you love me and...I just want to make sure you know that I love you just as much."

"Of course I know," Blaine said, taking his hand in both his own.

"Love, I can see it every time I look at you. You don't have to get as...emotional about it for me to know that you love me. The little looks and smiles you give me, the way you still kiss me sometimes like you're a little afraid that I won't kiss back, the fact that you blush sometimes when I tell you how incredibly perfect you are... You wouldn't do those things if you didn't love me."

Kurt's cheeks dusted very faintly pink and he smiled, his blue-grey eyes shining. "I really do," he said softly, squeezing Blaine's hand.

Blaine leaned forward to press a gentle kiss to his lips. "Mmm, I know," he said, rubbing their noses together and earning a soft laugh from Kurt. "Now come here so I can snuggle you."

"But...homework," Kurt said, gesturing towards the multiple books scattered across the bed with a faintly frantic look. Once again, his pile of assignments had managed to reach an alarming peak. He always got mildly annoyed that Blaine was able to handle his workload on top of Quidditch and Prefect duties.

"Snuggling takes precedence over homework," Blaine said, sweeping the books off the bed with his arm and ignoring Kurt annoyed cry.



"And I promise I'll help you get it all finished before Monday." He held out his arms, given Kurt a slightly pouting look. "Please?" Kurt rolled his eyes but slid over the bed to lie against his side, giggling a little when Blaine wrapped his arms tightly around him and nuzzled the top of his head.

---

"All I'm saying is that you were the one who said snuggling took precedence over homework," Kurt said, pursing his lips and giving Blaine a stern look.

Blaine smiled, giving his hand a brief squeeze as they made their way to lunch together Monday afternoon. "I'm sorry, love," he said. "I didn't think we'd end up...well, when I said snuggling, I meant just snuggling. My intentions were originally pure."

Kurt clucked his tongue. "Why do I seriously doubt that?" he said.

"Could we not talk about the two of you being rabbits?" Jeff said, scowling over at them from where he was walking between Kurt and Nick, who was busy flirting with Hanna.

"Oh, don't be bitter because you haven't gotten anything from Gwen yet," Kurt said, pursing his lips.

Jeff's scowl deepened. "I've kissed Nick more times than I've kissed her," he muttered.

"Excuse me?" Kurt said, eyes bugging out of his head.

"Kurtsie, hush, I'm thinking," Jeff said, brow furrowing.

"When did *that* happen?" Kurt said rounding on Blaine.

"Him learning to think?" Blaine said. "Quite recently, actually." Kurt smacked his arm and he laughed. "Oh, you mean them kissing? Yeah, it was last year at some point. It was really nothing, just Jeff being...well, Jeff, I suppose."

"Someone's a little bi-curious," Kurt said, smirking. He sighed. "If only they actually *cared*. This would be perfect blackmail."

"Yeah, they really don't," Blaine said. "Care, I mean."

"Anyway," Kurt said, shaking his head a little, obviously to clear the image of Jeff and Nick kissing, "You owe me. If I fail that Transfiguration assignment, it's your fault."

"I don't remember you complaining about being distracted while I was—"

"Rabbits, please!" Jeff said loudly.

They exchanged a smirk.

The Great Hall was as loud as ever, the ceiling overhead dull grey and dreary, threatening rain but never giving up more than a feeble drizzle since that morning.

"Alright," Jeff said, sounding like he was preparing to wage war. "I'm going in."

Kurt quirked an eyebrow, watching him square his shoulders and stride towards where Gwen was leaning against the Hufflepuff table, conversing with a few of her friends and looking rather bored as always.

"Davison!" Jeff said loudly.

She turned, those around her following suit, eyebrows rising up her forehead.

"Oh Merlin, what an idiot," Blaine mumbled when Jeff's foot caught on the hem of his robes and he stumbled a little. He straightened quickly though, acting as though nothing had happened, though a few girls tittered and the corner of Gwen's mouth twitched.

"Yes?" she said when Jeff had reached her.

"I like you," Jeff said firmly. "I thought I made that clear when I, you know, sang a song to you in front of the whole Great Hall. And I *assumed* that since we went to Hogsmeade together that you liked me, too. But if that's not the case, then I'd like to kindly ask you to stop stringing me along because it's really getting old. So, Gwen, do you want to be my girlfriend or not?"

Gwen pursed her lips and Kurt was sure he saw a few of the Hufflepuffs sitting near her draw back with looks of apprehension.

"Yeah, alright," she said at last, shrugging.

"Really?" Jeff said, looking excited. "I mean..." He cleared his throat and fixed his features into a look of nonchalance, shrugging.

"Whatever. Cool."

He turned around and walked back in their direction, making a subtle gesture of triumph and mouthing, 'Score!'

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Yes, they'll certainly make the perfect couple," he muttered.

Blaine chuckled, pulling him towards the Ravenclaw table to take their seats across from Nick and Hanna. Thad plopped down next to Kurt a few seconds later, a smudge of dirt on his nose.

"Thad," Nick said, smirking. "Did you and Flint stay after in Herbology for 'special lessons' with each other again?"

Thad gave him a dead-panned look, though his cheeks turned pink.

"They were probably studying different types of wood," Jeff said as he sat down next to Nick, a wide grin pasted on his face.

Nick snorted, spraying pumpkin juice across the table as Thad glared at Jeff with look that clearly wished a painful death upon him.

---

Days ticked by slowly, much too slowly for Cole's taste. Every day he wasn't being tutored by Thad he was aching for it to end so that the time would come again that he could see him and talk to him. Friday couldn't come fast enough for him, especially since it seemed that

Thad and Wilson had been back to being all over each other again, making googoo eyes at each other across the Great Hall and cozing up in secluded corners of the library.

At least he'd been able to talk to Thad every now and then in the corridors. On Wednesdays Thad had Runes as his last class while Cole had Charms, the two of which were on the same floor, so he had a few minutes before the bell rang to see him and Thad had actually asked if he wanted to walk to dinner with him.

The only problem was Wilson. He never left Thad's side and would give Cole a faintly threatening look when Thad wasn't watching.

Cole was well aware that Wilson knew that he liked Thad. But he seemed to be confident enough that he wouldn't be able to do anything to come between them. He was practically taunting Cole; on their way to dinner that Wednesday, he'd stopped outside the doors to the Great Hall, grabbed Thad by the elbow and pulled him into the nook behind the Gryffindor hourglass. It didn't take much of Cole's imagination to figure out what they were doing.

Scowling, he'd gone into the Hall by himself.

But it was Friday and Thad had a free period when Cole had study hall—normally it was when the fifth years had Arithmancy but as he didn't take it, he skived off the study period to head up to the Gryffindor tower.

He had to admit, he was rather proud of himself for being able to convince Thad to study in the seventh year boys' dorm.

"If we study there, I'll be right next to my dorm when we're finished and you'll be there to wait for Flint when his Defense class is over," he'd said, feeling a little smug when Thad agreed after chewing on his lip in consideration.

That was the one gesture of Thad's that really got to him, the way he subconsciously pulled his bottom lip into his mouth when he was thinking, worrying it between his teeth until it was lightly bruised and glistening. There was more than one occasion where he'd had to stop himself from openly staring or from leaning forward and kissing him to see what those lips tasted like.

It was...different with Thad than it had been with Blaine, though he blamed the fact that Thad was actually friendly towards him, that he genuinely *cared* about him. He didn't really blame Blaine for not wanting to be around him. He'd been overly obsessive with him. That's why he was being much more careful with Thad. Never clingy, never mean towards Flint, always subtle.

The biggest difference between how he'd felt about Blaine and how he felt about Thad though was literally how he *felt* when he was around

them. With Blaine, it had been like someone had turned him into a puddle or a big pile of jelly.

With Thad...his heart started stuttering in his chest and his hands had actually begun to sweat once when they were studying on Thad's bed and Thad had pressed their shoulders together to lean over Cole's notes and read what he'd written, his face incredibly close to Cole's when he'd turned to give him a wide smile and tell him what he'd done was good.

He had no idea what to make of the strange development though, and was focusing on that rather than his Runes homework when he was sitting across from Thad on Wilson's bed that afternoon.

"Are you stuck on something?" Thad said gently, leaning forward to read his notes upside down.

*You*, Cole thought. "No," he said. "Just thinking."

"What's on your mind?" Thad said, leaning back to his spot against the headboard and popping one of the Every Flavor Beans Cole had brought with him into his mouth.

*You*. "Not much," Cole said, sighing. "O.W.L.s are coming up."

"Are you nervous?" Thad said with a sympathetic look.

"A bit," Cole said with a shrug.

"You'll do fine," Thad said with a smile that made Cole's stomach do a backflip.

"Except Care of Magical Creatures," Cole said, wrinkling his nose. "I'm not very good at that."

Thad laughed. "Well, you won't have to take it next year, at least," he said, patting Cole's knee reassuringly. He popped another bean into his mouth and made a face. "Blech," he said, scrunching up his face and spitting the sweet into his hand. "Dirt."

Cole fought back a laugh and Thad scowled.

"Jerk," he muttered, throwing a bean at Cole, who swatted it away with his book. Thad narrowed his eyes and grabbed a handful of beans, pelting him with them in rapid succession, laughing as he did. Cole let out a shout and shielded himself with his arms. When the barrage stopped, he peeked out cautiously only to be struck in the nose. He yelped, eyes watery as he held a hand to his face.

"Oh my gosh, I'm sorry!" Thad said, half-laughing.

Cole stuck his tongue out at him, grinning. "You're an awful tutor," he said.

Thad smiled, shaking his head. "Let me clean up my mess and I'll get back to actually helping you." He slid off the bed, getting down on his hands and knees and pick up the jellybeans.

Cole scooped up a few off the bed, popping a mint flavored one into his mouth and chewing absently as Thad crawled under the bed.

There was a sharp *thunk* and a cry of pain.

"What's wrong?" Cole said, setting his book aside and leaning over the side of the mattress to see Thad pulling out from under the bed, a fearful look on his face and a dark green t-shirt clutched in his hand.

"Smell this," Thad said, voice shaking as he shoved the shirt under Cole's nose.

Cole recognized the faint scent of the perfume he'd sprayed. Thad seemed to catch something in his expression because his eyes filled with tears. He started breathing rapidly, eyes darting around the room as he raked a trembling hand through his dark hair.

"I can't believe it!" he cried, staring down at the lipstick smeared on the shirt. "No...no, no...I c-can't believe he'd do this to m-me! It can't be r-real... W-why would he do this?" He threw himself down on the bed and sobbed brokenly into his hands. "I l-love him! He said he loved me! He said he wanted to m-marry me! Why would he c-cheat on me? And with a...a *g-girl*."

Cole saw tears splashing down through his fingers onto his knees. He waited for the feeling of triumph, the moment where he realized everything had gone just like he'd planned, the one he'd gotten when he'd broken up Blaine and Hummel but...it didn't come.

Instead he felt a painful knot tightening in his chest, an ache rising in his gut at the sight of Thad crying and hurting.

"Why would he d-do this?" Thad whispered, turning to look at Cole. The pain in his dark eyes made him feel sick. Thad's lip quivered and he clutched his face in his hands again. "It c-can't be real, can it? He...he wouldn't do this, r-right?"

"Thad," Cole said timidly, scooting across the bed towards him. Thad turned and wept into his shoulder. "T-Thad, don't. Don't cry. Thad, stop, please..." He felt a lump growing in his throat and tears welled in his own eyes. "Thad, d-don't. Thad, he didn't...he didn't cheat on you." "I don't want to think s-so either, b-but how d-do you know that?"

Thad said, tears seeping through the sleeve of Cole's robes.

"B-because," he said, heart breaking when he thought of what he was destroying by admitting it. "Because *I* put it there."

Thad stopped crying, sniffed, and slowly looked up at him. "W-what?" he said softly.

Cole hung his head, shame creeping up his neck. "I...I put it there so you would think he did," he said, unable to meet his gaze.

"But...but why?" Thad said, frowning and wiping his eyes.

Cole gulped. "Because...I really like you," he said, voice quivering. "A lot...like, more than...more than a friend."

"R-really?" Thad said, sounding shocked.

Cole nodded, tears slipping free from his eyes down his cheeks. "And I...I wanted you to like me back so I-I told you I needed help with Runes so I could spend time with you." The words tumbled off his tongue before he could stop them. "And you said...you said you liked my letters so I thought...maybe...."

There was a pregnant pause.

"I know you hate me now," Cole muttered. He wasn't angry that he wasn't going to get to see his plan carry out the way he'd hoped. He was suddenly angry at himself for doing something he was sure would destroy what had become one of the few *real* friendships he'd actually had. "It's just...you were like I am. Lonely and...and scared that I won't find anyone. I'm afraid...I'm afraid I'm never have who will love me like W-Wilson loves you." He exhaled shakily, brushing his cheek on his shoulder to clean off his tears.

Thad shifted, sitting up straighter and wiping his eyes. "Cole," he said, surprisingly gentle. "I know sometimes it can be *really* hard being alone. I thought I wouldn't find anyone either and look at me now. I'm...I'm *engaged* to the person I chased after for four years."

Cole blinked in surprise. "Four years?" he said. "R-really?"

Thad nodded a little sadly. "Don't do what I did, Cole," he said, laying a hand on Cole's arm. "Don't build your life around the need to be with someone. I did and I was very unhappy for a very long time. Luckily, it worked out but...you need to let yourself be happy by yourself.

"You're a good person, Cole. You're just...you're a little...*misled*, I think. Trying to force the situation in your favor rarely ends well. If you just acted like yourself, acted like you act around me, you'd be a lot happier. I know you feel bad about what you did with Kurt and Blaine, right?"

Cole nodded at his lap. "I just...I feel like I'll always be alone," he said, feeling stupid saying it. "I...I've never even had a *real* first kiss." He didn't count the one with Blaine. It hadn't exactly been voluntary. Thad's gaze softened, his head tilting to the side as he caught his bottom lip between his teeth.

He suddenly leaned forward and pressed a very brief kiss to the corner of Cole's mouth. Cole stiffened and inhaled sharply, lips tingling, and stared at him.

Thad smiled and shrugged. "Not all that big a deal, now, is it?" he said. "And I'm sure you'll find someone who wants to do that all the time with you. Then you can snog each other senseless."

Cole blushed, ducking his head and smiling. "Thank you," he muttered. "I...I'm sorry about...um, everything..."

"You're not a bad person, Cole," Thad said kindly. "So...stop acting like one."

Cole blinked back tears. "Why are you so nice?" he said, lifting his eyes to Thad, who smiled.

"Because I know how you feel," he said. "The only difference is how we acted on our feelings. You were just...a bit more creative, is all." Cole half-laughed even as tears slid down his cheeks. Thad Conjured up a handkerchief for him. "Thank you," Cole said with a hesitant smile.

Thad hugged him briefly around the shoulders. "You're welcome," he said, briefly ruffling his hair.

Cole ducked out from under his grip with a grin. He glanced at his watch. "I'd better get going," he said. "W—Flint will be back soon. Class ends in a few minutes." He sighed sadly.

"What's wrong?" Thad said as he helped him gather up his things.

"It's just...now you won't have a reason to tutor me," he mumbled.

"Well, you've still got O.W.L.s," Thad said thoughtfully. "I could help you study for that if you need it."

Cole smiled, draping his bag over his shoulders. "Yeah...I'd like that." He felt...lighter. Better about himself. "I'll see you later, Thad."

Thad raised a hand in farewell, pulling his book towards him as Cole left. He thought he'd try and get some work done on his homework for the weekend before lunch since the common room would be mostly empty. He sat near the empty fireplace, shuddering when he saw the sixth year, Derricks, eyeing him from across the room. Cole ignored him and pulled out his Runes homework, suddenly feeling much less alone than before.

---

"Thank *god* this week is over," Kurt said, sighing as they left the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom. "If I have to look at one more thing about Inferi, I'll punch someone."

Blaine smiled, Jeff and Nick sidling away from Kurt discreetly.

"I'm heading back to the tower," Flint said. "Thad's up there with O'Brien and...well, you know."

"Bye," Kurt said, waving as Flint set off at a fast walk. "Don't kill him!" he added as an afterthought.

"Can we go get lunch?" Jeff said, rubbing his stomach as it growled loudly.

"You read my stomach," Nick said, nodding.

A group of Gryffindor sixth years, which included Gwen, walked by, chatting and laughing.

"Oi, Davison!" Jeff cried, grinning.

Gwen turned, quirking an eyebrow at him. She said goodbye to her friends and stopped to let Kurt and the others catch up to her, looking aloof as always.

Jeff held out his hand with a hopeful expression and she took it loosely. Kurt had to fight a laugh at Jeff's dreamy expression. Nick didn't attempt to suppress his loud snort of amusement.

"How're things?" Jeff said, glancing at Gwen.

She shrugged. "I got detention from Aldebrand for calling Marsha Calvin a twat," she said off-handedly.

Kurt exchanged a shocked look with Blaine.

"But she deserved it," Gwen continued. "She was whining about my brother dumping her last month for being the world's biggest bitch. She called him a smarmy git. I couldn't exactly let it slide."

Jeff grinned proudly as they reached the Great Hall.

They passed the Slytherin table, where Jeff's ex-girlfriend, Melody, was sitting at the end with the boy she'd broken up with him for.

"Wow, Jeff," she called out loudly, smirking, "really moving up in the world, aren't you?"

Jeff scowled and made to keep walking but Gwen stopped, green eyes narrowing dangerously at Melody.

"Excuse me?" she said, free hand twitching towards her pocket and, Kurt guessed, her wand.

Melody rolled her eyes dramatically. "Please, Davison, we all know you're the world's biggest prude," she said, a few of her friends smirking. "I'm surprised you're willing to hold his hand. Aren't you afraid you'll get cooties or something?"

A few people laughed appreciatively. Gwen released Jeff's hand and took a few steps towards Melody. Jeff looked vaguely nervous and fascinated at the same time.

"I'm sorry," Gwen said, dark eyes glinting threateningly. "I don't believe I *asked* for your opinion of me."

"Oh, honey, it's not an opinion if it's true," Melody said, expression equally hard, though her voice remained sweet. "Seriously, it doesn't even look like you're dating. Have you even *kissed* him yet?"

Gwen pursed her lips. Kurt could practically see sparks crackling in her eyes. She glanced at Jeff, then back at the smirking Slytherins and Melody. She straightened up, walked back to Jeff and pulled him down by the collar of his robes into a hard kiss.

Jeff looked shocked, eyes widening and hands held back as if he was afraid to touch her. He relaxed after a second or two and kissed her back with a faint grin as Nick wolf-whistled loudly.

Gwen pulled back, wiping the corner of her mouth with her thumb and leaving Jeff looking dazed and punch-drunk.

"And just so we're clear," Gwen said, turning back to a faintly shocked looking Melody. "Just because I don't jump down the pants of every guy I meet like you doesn't make me a prude, you stupid cunt."



There was a collective gasp but she ignored it, turning on her heel and walking towards the Gryffindor table with her head held high, dark hair swaying behind her.

Melody glared after her, huffing and folding her arms across her chest. Jeff watched Gwen with a dreamy expression, half smiling and looking love-struck. "What a woman," he breathed.

Nick snorted.

---

Flint hurried back to the Gryffindor tower. Thad had said he would wait for him rather than head straight to lunch. He hated the idea of Thad being alone with O'Brien in *his* bed but hadn't said anything given how adamant Thad had been about the fifth year's apparent "reformation". He loved Thad more than anything but he was simply too trusting sometimes.

He gave the Fat Lady the password—"sugar quills"—and ran smack into a short, red-haired someone as he tried to climb through the portrait hole.

"Sorry," O'Brien said, giving him a bright smile, blushing faintly, before striding past him down the corridor.

Sure no good could come of O'Brien looking that happy, Flint nearly ran upstairs, rushing past the sixth year Derricks and the few other remaining students. He burst into the dorm, panting lightly.

Thad looked up from his book with a faint smile.

"Hey," he said, marking his spot in the book and setting it down. "How was class?"

"Fine," Flint said. He saw one of his t-shirts balled up on the bed.

"What's that?"

"Ah," Thad said, scooting down the bed. "A clever attempt to make me think you cheated on me."

"W-what?" Flint said. "Thad, what the hell happened? I just saw O'Brien grinning like an idiot. Did he—"

"Flint," Thad said sharply. "Please don't call him that. He told me everything. About him writing the letters and...everything. He's genuinely sorry and I understand that you don't like him but he's quite a lot like I used to be so please don't be mean to him. He's really just very lonely."

He hadn't raised his voice or gotten angry, but Flint could see how serious he was by the look in his dark eyes.

"O-okay, pet," he said, nodding and setting his bag down.

"Now," Thad said briskly, setting his book on the bedside table. "Come here because I missed you and your...um...c-cock." He blushed furiously.

Flint's eyebrows rose up his forehead and he grinned. "Did you now?" he said, slipping off his shoes. "Well, let's fix that, shall we?" Thad's eyes darkened a little as he slid to the end of the bed, his sleeves pushed up to his elbows and his tie loose, to reach up and pull Flint down with a tug on his tie.

Flint grinned as their lips met and he crawled up onto the bed, Thad pulling him back the mattress, fingers still wound in his tie.

Thad nipped at Flint's bottom lip, whining faintly as he sucked it into his mouth.

"Just so you know," he mumbled. "Cole was upset that he'd never really been kissed so I kissed him."

"What?" Flint said, pulling back in alarm.

"It was about a quarter of a second and it really didn't mean anything," Thad said reassuringly. "I was just trying to be nice. And besides...all it did was make me miss kissing you. Mmm, I *really* like kissing you." His tongue flicked across his bruised lips and Flint groaned as he returned to kissing him, his tongue gliding across the back of Thad's teeth and tickling his palette.

Thad whimpered and tightened his fingers in Flint's robes, twisting his body so they rolled over and he was straddling Flint's hips.

Flint closed his eyes as Thad worked his way down his jawline to suck at the side of his neck.

"Mmm," he hummed, smiling. "I love it when you take control."

"Oh, just wait," Thad breathed in his ear, flicking the tip of his tongue across it. He pushed his hips down into Flint's, moaning at the friction.

"Ugh, pet, you're so ho—*WHAT THE HELL!*"

He'd opened his eyes only to find a hooded gaze watching them from the doorway. Thad turned to see what he was looking at and tightened his grip around him.

"*Get the hell out, Derricks!*" Flint said, arms closing protectively around Thad as he slid onto the bed next to him.

Derricks closed the door with a snap. "*Colloportus*," he muttered.

"*Muffliato*."

"*What the hell are you doing?*" Flint shouted. He reached for his wand, but it flew out of his reach along with Thad's with a flick of Derricks' wand.

"I don't think so," the other boy said, voice low and grating. He caught their wands and threw them aside, where they slid out of view under Greg's bed, his own wand pointing where the two of them were lying together.

"Up," he hissed.

"*WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING?*" Flint yelled.

"Too much noise from you," Derricks growled, jabbing his wand in Flint's direction.

Flint clutched his throat, trying to continue shouting only to find he'd been Silenced.

"W-what are you doing?" Thad said, sounding fearful, though he tried to look angry.

"I told you, Jenkins," Derricks said, taking a few steps towards them, wand outstretched. "You throw yourself all over the place and expect no one to react. There are consequences to that."

"It's not like we're in public!" Thad said, voice shaking, "Just leave!"

Derricks grinned, more like a leer than anything, his eyes glinting with a slightly manic look.

"Oh, I'm not going anywhere until you learn your lesson," he growled.

"And Wilson can watch so he knows, too."

Flint's blood ran cold at his words and he clutched Thad so tightly that the other boy gave a squeak of pain. He flashed Thad, whose eyes were filled with fearful tears, an apologetic look.

"Get up," Derricks said sharply.

"No!" Thad said, glowering at him.

Derricks flicked his wand and a shallow gash sliced across Thad's cheek.

Flint released a silent howl of rage, Thad crying out in pain and clutching his wound, blood trickling down his cheek and chin.

Flint leapt up and ran at Derricks, fury pounding through him.

"*Crucio!*" Derricks shouted wildly.

Pain like he'd never felt before erupted across his body, lancing through every muscle. He stumbled and collapsed, twisting and jerking. It was like red hot flames were seeping under his skin and boiling his blood. His whole body was on fire and Thad was screaming like Flint had never heard him scream before. There was a thump and rapid footsteps.

"No! *Incarcerous!*"

The pain subsided suddenly, his very bones aching with the effects of the curse as he panted, sweat beading on his forehead and tears leaking involuntarily from his eyes.

His vision was blurred as he looked around dazedly.

"You don't listen well, do you?" a harsh voice cried from somewhere on the other side of the bed. There was a sharp *smack* followed by a muffled cry of pain.

Flint attempted to crawl forward, his throbbing muscles barely responding.

There was the sound of something rustling and squirming, another smack—the rustling stopped—and the rough scrape of something being dragged over the carpet punctuated by soft whimpers.

Derricks reappeared, tugging Thad into view behind him. Thick robes wrapped around Thad's wrists, ankles and formed a tough gag. His dark eyes were wide and terrified, tears streaming down his face to smear with the blood still flowing from his reddened cheek.

Rage and fear pounded through Flint as he struggled to get to his feet. "*Impedimenta!*" Derricks cried, sneering as Flint flew back and slammed into the wall. Pain exploded across his skull where the back of his head hit the paneling, a silent shout of pain ripping from his throat.

Thad's eyes were practically popping out of his head as he struggled against his bonds, screaming at the top of his lungs.

"Stop it!" Derricks shouted, kicking him hard in the ribs so he doubled over. "*Crucio!*"

Thad thrashed and writhed against the pain, eyes squeezing shut as he wailed and screeched in agony, a long, drawn out scream muffled against the rope filling the closed off space.

The sound cut Flint like a knife. His body refused to listen to him as he tried to stand.

Surely someone, *anyone* would come. But the rest of the Castle was at lunch. And no one would hear them anyway from the Charm Derricks had cast. His roommates would probably just think he wanted time alone with Thad. They were helpless.

Derricks cackled, pulling his wand away so the curse lifted. He looked completely psychotic, face twisted in a look of cruel enjoyment, eyes alight with malice.

"*Crucio!*" he cried again, laughing as Thad shrieked and flailed. He was breathing heavily when he lifted the curse again, licking his lips with a hungry expression.

Thad sobbed and gasped against the gag, blood dribbling from his mouth from where the rough fibers had cut him while he'd been screaming. A dark bruise was blooming around his right eye where Derricks had struck him.

"You see this, Wilson?" Derricks said, hauling Thad up by his hair so Flint could see his tear and blood-smeared face. "I'm going to make him scream even more."

He licked up the side of Thad's face with an obscene moan, Thad barely reacting as he tried to twitch away. He looked exhausted, eyelids drooping and shoulders slumped.

Something warm and wet trickled down the back of Flint's neck as his eyes slid in and out of focus.

"Too bad you won't get to watch," Derricks said, his voice filtering slowly through Flint's pounding brain, muffled and echoing. "But I think you'll still learn your lesson."

He let Thad fall heavily to the ground with a thump and a faint whimper of pain against the gag from Thad. Derricks ran his fingers down Thad's neck, growling low in his throat and palming the tented front of his slacks with his other hand.

Everything was going fuzzy in Flint's mind. He was screaming for his body to get up, to go to Thad, who was dangerously pale, lips white and drawn around the rope, dark eyes barely open as tears slid down from them into the carpet.

He heard Derricks' robes drop to the floor, the clatter of his belt buckle and the rasp of a zipper.

*God, no. Not Thad. Anything but Thad.*

His eyes stung with tears.

Darkness settled over him and he slumped against the wall, unconscious, blood sticky and soaking through his robes.

## Chapter Twenty-Seven

Cole paused at the end of the seventh floor corridor, glancing back at the portrait of the Fat Lady and chewing on the inside of his cheek. He wondered if maybe he should go back and talk to Wilson, to apologize for what he'd done rather than him hearing it all through Thad.

It was only fair. He didn't want Wilson to be upset at Thad.

Wavering on the edge of the decision, he dithered on the spot for a full two minutes before finally turning around and walking back towards the portrait hole.

"Did you forget something, dear?" the Fat Lady said with a quizzical look.

"Sort of," Cole said, "Sugar quills."

She smiled and swung forward to allow him to clamber in into the common room, humming randomly as he crossed the empty room, glad that Derricks wasn't there to leer at him. He was just...*creepy*. He shuddered a little at the thought of what he'd done as he climbed the spiral staircase. He'd had nightmares for a week about it.

He walked down the hall towards the seventh year boys' dorms, heart sinking when he saw the door was closed. Thad was probably being...intimate with Wilson. He had a faint twinge of jealousy but no longer the anger and distaste he'd felt before when he'd thought of them together.

Sighing, he turned, thinking he'd come back later after lunch.

A flash of light bled across the floor from under the crack in the door and he froze, frowning. He approached the door slowly, pressing his ear tentatively to it.

Silence. Complete and utter silence.

He scrunched up his face in confusion and carefully tried the handle. Locked.

Normally he'd assume that it *was* just Thad and Wilson spending time alone together but why on earth would they be using magic?

Something didn't seem right, a faint twinge in his gut like apprehension or...fear.

He pulled out his wand and tapped the keyhole. "*Alohomora*," he said softly. The lock clicked and he slowly pushed the door open, peeking around the corner.

At first he thought the room was empty but then he heard a faint...grunting, maybe...mingled with short whimpers. His eyes fell on Wilson. Slumped against the wall. A smear of blood trailing down the paneling to his head.

He clapped a hand to his mouth.

Thad. Thad was in here somewhere too. Terror rose in his throat and he burst fully into the room, screaming when he saw Thad bound and gagged, pushed facedown into one of the beds, with Derricks working at undoing his belt, his own slacks hanging open in the front. Thad struggled feebly against him, whimpering and crying, eyes fixed on Wilson's still form.

"*What are you doing?*" Cole shouted.

Thad's eyes flicked to him, widening in disbelief as he started screaming against his gag.

Derricks' head snapped around and he sneered, whipping his wand around with the hand that hadn't just slipped down the front of Thad's slacks. "*Expelliarmus!*" he shouted.

Cole's wand flew out of his hand and across the room. He stared at Derricks, who caught his wand and laughed harshly before returning to unfastening Thad's uniform, his hand moving in Thad's slacks and his hips rubbing roughly against his thigh.

Something snapped inside him and the fear bubbling in his gut was replaced by a sudden rush of boiling hate and rage.

"NO!" he shouted, running forward and leaping at Derricks, knocking him off Thad as he punched, bit, and kicked at every inch of him he could reach. "*Don't touch him!*"

They fell to the floor, Cole's limbs flailing as adrenaline slammed through his veins like a drug.

"Get off me, you fucking elf!" Derricks roared, throwing him away bodily.

The air was knocked from his lungs as he hit the floor hard. Derricks scrambled towards their wands, which had flown from his hand when Cole had hit him. He was much closer then Cole, a manic glint in his eye.

Cole crawled backwards towards the bed behind him, glancing around for something, *anything* he could use. His heart skipped as he saw the two wands lying abandoned under the bed. He flipped onto his back and wriggled under the bed, reaching out desperately when he heard Derricks getting to his feet behind him.

His fingers closed around the wands just as a hand clamped down hard on his ankle and yanked him hard out from under the bed, his bare arms tearing roughly across the carpet.

"No you don't!" Derricks yelled, twisting hard and slinging Cole across the floor by his leg, something snapping loudly in his ankle as he did. White hot pain lanced up his leg but he ignored it and struggled to his feet as Derricks raised his wand with a look of crazed fury.

"*Cru—*"

"*Stupefy!*" Cole shouted, pointing both the wands he was clutching at him. Twin beams of red light shot from them, colliding mid-air and slamming into his chest.

Derricks was knocked back a full ten feet, crashing into the post of the four-poster bed behind him with a loud *crack*. He went limp and sagged in a heap on the floor, head drooping to his chest.

Cole stared him, eyes wide and hands shaking, until he heard Thad's cries and whimpers of pain. He turned and hurried to his side where he'd fallen onto the floor, dropping down beside him and attempting to undo the tight knots around his wrists, ankles, and mouth.

His fingers were trembling so badly he couldn't get a good grip and he let out a frustrated sob, only now realizing he was crying.

"H-hold on, Thad," he said, raising one of the wands he was holding. It was the smaller of the two and felt...warmer in his hand. He pointed it at the robes around Thad's ankles, trying to hold it steady. "*D-diffindo*."

The ropes fell away and he severed the ones around his wrists next, Thad's hand immediately clutching his arm, a look of intense gratitude shining in his tired eyes, one of which was bruised and nearly swollen shut.

"One s-second," Cole said, gripping his hand with his free one, the touch calming him very slightly. "*Diffindo*." He pulled away the ropes around Thad's mouth and Thad's jaws creaked open.

"F-Flint," he croaked, attempting to sit up and he reached towards Wilson. "Is he...?" He trailed off, tears pooling in his dark eyes.

"Stay right here," Cole said. Well, *duh*, where was he going to go? He shook his head to clear it. "I'll ch-check."

Disregarding the pain in his ankle, he pushed himself off the ground, giving Thad's hand a reassuring squeeze before stumbling over to where Wilson was slumped. He winced as he sat beside him, trying not to look at the dark blood seeping across the carpet.

"*R-rennervate*," he murmured, pointing the wand he'd found at Wilson's chest.

Wilson's eyes opened slowly and Cole breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank Merlin," he muttered. "Wilson?" he added a little louder.

The other boy turned to him, frowning in confusion. "What...where am...what's going on?" His voice was weak and halting, eyes slightly out of focus.

"Flint," Thad called out weakly from the other end of the room.

Something seemed to click into place in Wilson's brain at the sound of Thad's voice. His eyes fell on Derricks' still form and hate seared behind his vision.



"I'll kill him," he growled. He turned to Cole. "Give me my wand. *Now!*"

Cole tucked Wilson's, and what he assumed was Thad's, wand behind his back. "Don't be thick," he said sternly.

Wilson's eye brimmed with tears. "Oh god...Thad," he said. "He didn't...d-did he..."

"No," Cole said, shaking his head. "Just...hold on."

He got shakily to his feet, limping to the door. He knew there wasn't anyone else in the tower and there was no way he was getting far on his ankle.

"Happy memory," he muttered, closing his eyes and concentrating hard on the feeling he got he was simply *with* Thad, with the first *real* friend he'd ever had. "*Expecto patronum!*" he cried, clutching Thad's wand.

Something small and silvery erupted from the tip of Thad's wand and flitted off down the hall, disappearing around the corner to the spiral staircase. Cole limped back into the dormitory. Thad had managed to crawl over to Wilson and the two of them were simply holding each other, Thad crying into Wilson's shoulder as the other boy held him close and stroked his hair, tears sliding down his own cheeks.

"I've sent for help," Cole said, hobbling to Derricks to fetch his wand. He picked up Derricks' wand as well, stared at it for a moment, and snapped it in half, tossing the pieces at the unconscious sixth year. A sharp stab of pain arched across his leg from his ankle and he suddenly felt lightheaded. He sat down hard on the edge of one of the beds, clutching his head in his hands to try and dispel the nausea settling over him.

"Thank you."

Cole looked up to see Wilson watching him, his bright brown eyes slightly unfocused. His arms were wrapped around Thad, who was simply resting against him now, no longer crying and merely looking broken.

Cole nodded in response to Wilson's words before looking back down at his knees—Wilson returned to whispering soothingly to Thad—and struggling not to pass out from the pain as he waited for help to come.

---

"All I'm saying is that your girlfriend has the mouth of a sailor," Kurt said, shrugging as he hitched his bag higher on his shoulder before taking Blaine's hand.

"I know!" Jeff said, grinning as they climbed the marble staircase. "It's awesome!"

Kurt rolled his eyes.

"I wonder where Thad is," Blaine said, "he never came down. And I don't think Flint ever came back either."

"Oh, I think we all know what *they're* doing," Jeff said, wiggling his eyebrows.

"Oh, wildcat," Nick sighed, shaking his head.

Blaine chuckled softly.

There was a faint whoosh and Kurt looked up to see a streak of silver flitting down the corridor towards them.

"That's a Patronus," Blaine said off-handedly, coming to a halt.

The light stopped, suspended in midair in front of them as it formed into a delicate sparrow and spoke in Cole O'Brien's voice.

*"Derricks attacked Thad and Wilson. We're in the Gryffindor tower. Password is sugar quills. Please hurry."*

The sparrow faded, the four of them staring at the spot in stunned silence. Kurt had heard the words clearly enough but they weren't sinking in. Thad could *possibly*...

Jeff's eyes were wide, all the color draining from his face as he exchanged a fearful look with Nick. He suddenly took off down the corridor like a rocket, Nick hot on his heels.

"Come on," Kurt said, finally convincing his legs to work. He pulled Blaine with him as he ran after Jeff and Nick, fear flooding his brain. They dashed through the corridors in silence, wondering what on earth might have happened.

The portrait hole was still hanging open when they got there, Jeff and Nick well ahead of them. Kurt leapt through it without slowing, Blaine right behind him as they flew across the common room and up the spiral staircase.

*"Let me go, Nick!"*

*"Jeff, stop!"*

*"Campbell, you're not going to help anyone hurting him!"*

*"I'll help myself! Fucking bastard! I'll rip his fucking face off! Let me go! "*

They burst into the room to see Nick and Cole struggling to stop Jeff from getting at Derricks, who was groaning faintly, obviously just waking up from a Stunning Spell. Cole was white as a sheet, a stiff grimace on his features. Kurt saw him favoring his left ankle, sweat beading on his brow from the effort of standing and holding back Jeff.

"Jeff, calm down!" Blaine said, hurrying to grab his arm so Cole could step back and sink onto one of the beds with a relieved look, clutching his ankle, his face faintly green.

Kurt's eyes fell on Thad and Flint, huddled together to the side of the room, blood smeared across the wall and soaking into the carpet. It looked like it was taking all of Flint's willpower to stay conscious.

Thad's dark eyes had a deadened look to them, his skin drawn and grey, a dark bruise surrounding his eye and harsh red marks around his wrists and face. His uniform was rumpled, belt undone and shirt hanging partway open.

"Alright, everyone *shut up!*" he said loudly. Jeff stopped struggling, Blaine and Nick halting their cries for him to calm down. Kurt quickly took control of the situation. "Jeff, chill out, we're all about ready to rip his head off but that's not going to help anything. Nick, go get McGonagall, tell her what happened. She was still in the Great Hall when we left so if you hurry, you can probably catch her."

Nick nodded, gave Jeff a pointed look, and hurried out of the room, wand clutched in his hand.

Kurt turned to Blaine, who was still gripping Jeff's arm loosely. "You're good a healing spells," he said, "Flint's obviously had a concussion and it looks like Cole's ankle is broken. Is there anything you can do?"

Blaine nodded. "I'll take a look," he said, pulling his wand out and moving towards Flint, who clutched a little more tightly to Thad.

"Jeff, make sure *that*," Kurt shot Derricks a hateful glare, "doesn't go anywhere."

"With pleasure," Jeff growled, moving to haul Derricks up roughly by the collar of his partially unbuttoned shirt and slam him against the wall. Kurt realized his pants were undone and suddenly felt sick to his stomach.

He moved to Thad, who'd reluctantly moved back to allow Blaine to look at the gash on Flint's head. He was staring at nothing, face empty and streaked with blood and tears.

"Thad?" Kurt said softly as he sat next to him. "Thad, what did he do to you?" He swallowed back the lump in his throat. "Thad, did he...?"

Thad shook his head and Kurt felt such a sweeping sense of relief that he had to take a moment to breathe. He placed an arm around Thad's shoulder and held him against him, fully expecting him to break down and cry. But he didn't cry. He didn't react at all, simply sat there, eyes blank and vacant.

"I've healed the cut best I can," Blaine said, standing up as Flint ran his hand over the back of his head, looking fractionally better. "But you'll still need to talk to Pomfrey about your concussion."

Flint nodded, turning to look at Thad with a worried and broken expression as Blaine moved to look at Cole's ankle.

"What on *earth*—is that *blood*?"

They all turned to see McGonagall standing in the doorway with Nick and Professors Cooney and Flitwick. Her eyes swept over them, falling first on where Blaine was checking Cole's newly repaired ankle, then

on Jeff, who was still pinning Derricks against the wall, wand pointed at his throat; then lastly on Kurt, Thad, and Flint.

"Explain," she said sharply.

Kurt listened, barely breathing, as Flint haltingly recounted what had happened, how Derricks had locked them in the room and tortured them both with the Cruciatus Curse—Jeff had growled and shoved his wand even harder in Derricks' neck and Kurt had exchanged a horrified look with Blaine—and then all but told Flint he was going to rape Thad before Flint had passed out from the blow to his head.

Cole picked up the story from there, briefly explaining that he'd come back to talk to Flint and felt uneasy about the locked room and managed to Stun Derricks and send for help.

McGonagall looked faintly ill when he'd fallen silent. Her shoulders rising and falling sharply and look of such fury and revulsion glinting in her eyes that Kurt wasn't surprised that Nick drew back a little from her.

"I have *never*," she began, voice shaking with rage, "In more than fifty years of teaching, been so disgusted in my entire life." She looked at Derricks, who cowered under her furious gaze. "There's a special place in hell for people like you, young man. And a cell in Azkaban to boot if I have anything to say about it." Her eyes flicked to Jeff. "Mr. Campbell, kindly bring Mr. Derricks with me to my office. And keep your wand on him."

"Gladly," Jeff growled, shaking Derricks roughly as McGonagall turned to the two Heads of House. "Filius, can you see that Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Wilson get to Madam Pomfrey straight away? I'll be contacting their parents as soon as I've dealt with *that*." She jerked her head in Derricks' direction.

"Certainly, Minerva," Flitwick squeaked, his eyes shining.

"And Artemis," McGonagall continued, turning to Cooney. "I believe Mr. O'Brien has earned not only his Prefect badge back, but his name on the list of Exemplary Students in the Trophy Room, don't you?"

Cooney pushed his thick glasses up his nose, nodding. Cole looked taken aback.

"A true Gryffindor, if I ever saw one," McGonagall said, giving Cole a stern yet approving look. Cole blushed. "Come along, Campbell," McGonagall said, sweeping past Cooney and Flitwick into the hall, Jeff half pushing, half dragging Derricks after her.

"Mr. Hummel," Flitwick said, stepping forward and flicking his wand to Conjure up a stretcher. "If you could help Mr. Jenkins."

Kurt hauled Thad gently to his feet, unable to stop tears from sliding down his face as Thad lay down, eyes fixed on the ceiling, completely void and blank.

"I'm so sorry, Thad," he whispered, clutching Thad's hand as Blaine and Nick helped Flint up. "I am so, so sorry."

"It's not your fault," Thad said dully. "Don't blame yourself." He didn't look at Kurt as he spoke, didn't return the pressure on his hand, simply lay there, looking broken and beaten.

Kurt opened his mouth to speak again but Flitwick had waved his wand and the stretcher was moving away with Thad and Kurt was staring mutely after him.

"I've got him, Blaine," Nick said, arm around Flint's middle to him steady him as they followed after Flitwick.

"Madam Pomfrey ought to check your ankle, O'Brien," Cooney said, looking to Cole, who nodded and stood a little shakily to limp across the room to him. He glanced back at Kurt and Blaine, nodded stiffly, and limped out of the room with Cooney.

Kurt stood in silence with Blaine for a full minute, keeping his eyes averted from the blood smeared across the wall and pooling in the carpet. He had no idea what to do or think, his brain numb and refusing to believe what Flint had told them had happened.

He released a soft sob and Blaine moved to hold him tightly, arms wrapped around his waist as Kurt wept into his shoulder, tears shining in his own eyes as he stroked Kurt's hair and gently rubbed his back.

"*Why?*" Kurt croaked, unable to articulate more than the question burning in his brain.

"I don't know, love," Blaine said softly.

He wanted Blaine to tell him that everything would be alright, that Thad would be fine and life would return to normal. But didn't because he *couldn't* and Kurt didn't push him because he didn't want to hear the lie, no matter how badly he wished it was true.

---

*Gavin,*

*It's been six days since you left. Yes, I've been counting. And it's going to be another seven weeks until I see you again. Seven weeks, Gavin. I feel like one has been a lifetime. I miss you so much it actually hurts, like there's this ache in my chest when I think about you and it won't go away. Merlin, I sound like a huge sap right now, don't I? Sorry. I don't mean to. I just...really, really miss you. It's not even about sex anymore. I just want to be with you. I know you wouldn't be able to hear me but I would tell you I loved you as many times as you wanted if you'd stay.*

*I'm shutting up now because I sound like a big sap.*

*I love you,*

*Leighton*

*Leighton,*

*I like you being sappy. It's cute. I could be just as sappy if you'd like? I miss you loads too, obviously. Been looking for a new job now that Dad's in Azkaban. It's really difficult to get anything since I can't fucking hear. Sorry, that sounded bitter. I'm just really getting sick of it. I want to hear the birds in the morning and the sound of the kettle going off when Mam makes tea way too early and I want to hear the sounds you make when we're together and most of all I want to hear you say you love me.*

*I'm sorry, I shouldn't be complaining to you.*

*I love you,*

*Gavin*

...

*Gavin,*

*I'm here for you to complain to. Complain all you'd like. As long as you're writing me I really don't care what you're writing. You could spend two rolls of parchment talking about Giant Wars and I'd still read every word and keep it with all the other letters you've written me. I like to take them out and read them sometimes. Yes, even the...inappropriate ones. Because I still think about doing that stuff with you. A lot. I really just want to kiss you right now and touch you. I'm suddenly glad I'm by myself in the dormitory. Sorry, I guess I just ruined the moment....*

*Hope your job search is going well. I'm not looking forward to doing it next year but hopefully Kurt can get me a job at St. Mungo's or something. I guess we'll see.*

*Love you,*

*Leighton*

...

*Leighton,*

*You really still think about that stuff? I know you keep telling me you don't care but I really don't understand how you still find me attractive. I look like someone's tanned my skin. It's...it's really hard to get used to. Like...when I get up in the morning to shower and I can't even feeling anything on my side and arm and I keep thinking my hand is just asleep but it's not. Sometimes I get really angry about it and Mam has to stop me from breaking something. It was easier to deal with when you were around. You make everything so much easier to deal with. I hate being away from you.*

*I love you,*

*Gavin*

*P.S. I just got a letter back about a job. I won't say anything since it's not for sure yet but I'm really, really excited about this one. I'll write*

*back as soon as I know for sure. I love you. Don't miss me too much, okay?*

---

The Castle was in an uproar of gossip. News about what had happened to Thad and Flint spread so quickly that Kurt wasn't all that surprised when McGonagall cancelled the last class of the day, knowing no one would be paying any attention anyway.

Kurt waited with Blaine and the others—the rest of the Ravenclaw boys and a few hangers-on and half of Gryffindor tower—outside the closed doors of the hospital wing, waiting until they were allowed to see Thad and Flint.

Jeff and McGonagall appeared, Derricks in tow, soon after they'd arrived, the Headmistress' eyes sweeping over the gathered students briefly before she ordered Derricks into the hospital wing ahead of her, the doors closing behind them with a sharp snap. Jeff sat down with Nick, silent with his jaw set stiffly.

Thad's mother and Flint's parents appeared not long into their wait, Flint's parents pale and anxious and Thad's mother on a warpath. A man Kurt assumed was Derricks' father came in behind them, looking shocked and confused.

An hour after this, a Ministry representative arrived to haul Derricks away, his father following them with his face set in a look of disgust and disappointment.

"Sir," Jeff said unexpectedly, standing and approaching the man.

"Yes?" he said in a clipped tone.

"What's happening to him?" Jeff said, nodding to Derricks, who looked angry and scared.

"He's going to Azkaban," his father said, voice shaking very slightly.

"Why? Were you a friend of his?"

"No," Jeff said, features smooth. "I'm the one they had to hold back to keep from bashing your bastard son's head open."

Mr. Derricks' expression shifted very slightly, unreadable. He gave Jeff an appraising look. "Well, whoever your friends *really* are, they're lucky to have you," he said at last. "I'm not proud of what my son did. I'd like to say he has an excuse for it, that he came from a bad family and that I could take the blame. But that would be a lie. Walter has never had a difficult life and there's no excuse on earth that would make up for what he did to Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Wilson. I can't apologize enough for what happened to all of you or to their families and I fully understand if you don't accept them anyway."

Jeff gave him a searching look, eyes hard. He looked over his shoulder to the Ministry wizard. "Just see you keep him locked up for a long

time." He nodded at Mr. Derricks before moving back to his seat between Nick and Gwen.

Gwen looked mildly taken aback by his words, staring at him for a moment before laying her hand gently on his. Jeff took it without looking at her, eyes hard and fixed on the wall, but Kurt saw his fingers shift as he squeezed hers back lightly.

Time ticked slowly by, silence filling the crowded corridor as they waited. And waited.

The sun was setting, orange and gold light lancing through the windows to cast them all in the fading glow, when Madam Pomfrey finally opened the door. She looked around at the crowd, her eyes faintly red.

"Not all of you can come in," she said. "They're all...okay but they need rest and quiet." Kurt knew that by 'they' she meant Thad. "A few of you can see them now but the rest of you will have to wait."

Kurt moved forward with the other seventh year Ravenclaw and Gryffindor boys, a few fifth year Gryffindors following. Madam Pomfrey looked reluctant to let them all in but sighed and stood back, holding the door open.

Cole was lying closest to the door, sitting up in his bed and casting a worried look across the room to where Thad was lying. He looked shocked when his classmates bombarded him, expressions of awe and admiration on their faces.

Kurt walked across to where Thad and Flint's beds were sitting next to each other. Jeff and Nick running past him to Thad's side, looking pale and scared. Flint's parents were sitting next to Thad's mother between the two beds, his mother crying softly into her hands and his father looking equally broken, though he was not crying. Thad's mother's jaw was set, one hand clenched around her wand and the other gripping Thad's hand on the mattress.

Dan and the other Gryffindor boys gathered around Flint's bed, talking softly as Kurt joined Nick and Jeff at Thad's side.

"How're you feeling, Thad?" Jeff said softly.

Thad didn't answer, eyes trained on the canopy overhead.

"Thad?" Nick said timidly.

"He's stopped talking," Thad's mother said shortly. Her eyes were dry but Kurt knew from experience that this, her exterior of hard disconnect, was the best indication of her caring. The more brusque and rigid she was, the more she was affected.

"Why?" Jeff said in a small voice.

"Doesn't he want us here?" Nick said, equally quiet.

"He's...boys, he's been very...very badly hurt," Thad's mother said, voice tight. "You need to give him time, okay?"



Jeff and Nick nodded, hurt and confused expressions on their faces. Wes and David—who'd shown up after they'd been waiting for fifteen minutes, panting and pale—exchanged a concerned look. Blaine's hand slid into the one Kurt wasn't resting on Thad's arm.

"Will he be alright?" Nick said, looking to Thad's mother.

She cleared her throat, looking down at Thad. "I...I don't know, boys," she said. "I hope so."

Thad didn't react to any of it. It was like he was completely detached from everyone and everything else. If not for the slow shifting of his chest beneath the blankets, Kurt would have questioned if he was breathing. His wounds were healed, the bruises and cuts faded away to leave his skin unblemished, but it was the harm *under* his skin that concerned Kurt the most. He wondered just how deep the scars would go, how tough they would heal over...or if they would even heal at all. Kurt looked over at Flint, who was barely talking to his friends, his gaze affixed to Thad, features taut with worry.

They'd barely been there for twenty minutes when Madam Pomfrey was telling them that Thad and Flint needed rest. Kurt hesitated a moment before leaning over Thad and giving him a hug.

"We all love you, Thad," he said when his mouth was next to Thad's ear. "When you're ready, we're here to help."

Thad remained silent and still and Kurt pulled back, blinking away tears. He hugged Flint briefly, giving his arm a comforting squeeze before going to Cole, who was currently being half-strangled by Nick and Jeff. He looked somewhere between frightened and pleased.

"You saved our bunny," Jeff said when they released him.

"Thank you, Sparrow," Nick said. "If you ever need anything nicked from the kitchens or...or you fancy someone *not* in a relationship, we'll help."

"Um, thanks," Cole muttered, blushing. They patted him on the back before leaving, talking softly.

Kurt approached his bed with Blaine and Cole tensed slightly.

"Thank you," Kurt said, struggling to keep his voice steady. "You...you saved my best friend. You may have saved his life. I—thank you so much, Cole."

Cole looked taken aback but nodded, muttering a quiet 'of course' and blushing faintly.

Kurt sniffed, patted his arm a little awkwardly, and walked from the wing with Blaine, glancing back over his shoulder at Thad, who was a still and quiet as he'd been since they'd arrived, not reacting to his mother talking softly to him.

They walked back to the Ravenclaw tower in silence, where Jeff and Nick were already waiting for them in the dormitory, sitting on Thad's bed and wearing abashed looks, Acorn meowing at them expectantly. "Do you think he'd mind if we stayed here for a little bit?" Jeff said. Kurt was surprised when Acorn rubbed against his hand and Jeff reached out to scratch behind his ears after a moments' hesitation. "We don't want to think about his bed being empty," Nick said, fiddling with the hem of Thad's duvet. "We thought we could trade off until he's better again or something."

Kurt felt a pang of affection for the pair of them, for their naivety and intense care for Thad, despite their constant, joking jabs at him. They were truly two of the most thoughtful people he'd ever met. "I don't think he'd mind at all," Kurt said, giving them a reassuring smile.

They smiled sheepishly back, Nick hugging one of Thad's pillows to his chest and Jeff allowing Acorn to climb into his lap and curl up, purring loudly.

---

The hospital wing was dark and silent. Their parents had left not long after Kurt and the others, leaving Flint alone with Thad and O'Brien, who was already asleep at the other end of the ward.

His mind and body were exhausted. He'd refused to take a sleeping potion as Thad had done the same and Flint did not want to fall asleep before him. Thad was, as he'd been for the past several hours, staring blankly up at the canopy overhead. He hadn't spoken a word since their parents had first arrived and he'd given a few short answers to Madam Pomfrey about what Derricks had done to him.

Flint felt such a rush of hate when Thad had told them that Derricks had touched him, touched him in a way that had taken months and months for Thad to allow Flint to do, that he'd actually seen red. He'd wanted to hold Thad, to brush his fingers through his hair and kiss his pain away, but he'd been forced to stay in his own bed as he listened to Thad tell them in a dull tone that Derricks had told him that he was going to teach him a lesson about 'flaunting himself all over the Castle'.

The thought made him sick to his stomach. He kept running it over and over in his mind, wondering just what would have happened had O'Brien not stopped Derricks. Tears stung his eyes and he tried not to think about it.

Thad's hand was resting on the mattress, his fingers curled around his palm loosely and his wrist still faintly red where it had been healed from the binds.

"You know this isn't your fault, don't you?" Flint said, reaching across the space between their beds to take his hand.

Thad nodded, though the deadened look in his eyes didn't fade. He hadn't cried since they'd been taken to the hospital wing; he seemed past the point of showing...anything.

"You know I still love you, Thad," Flint said, throat tightening when Thad's dark eyes finally met his own, the light that had always been there extinguished like a candle by a gust of wind.

"I know," he said in a hollow voice. "I know you do."

"And you still love me?" Flint said, clutching his hand.

"Of course I do," Thad replied in the same empty tone. He returned to staring at the ceiling, hand limp in Flint's and expression blank, like all the color had been drained from him and he was simply black and white while the world around him was mockingly as vivid as ever.

"Can I...can I come over there?" Flint said hopefully. "Can I lie down with you?"

Thad didn't answer, simply releasing his hand and scooting to the far end of the mattress to allow him room.

Flint's bed creaked as he stood and walked silently to Thad's, crawling under the blankets and pulling the hanging shut so they were unseen. Thad didn't look at him as he draped an arm tentatively around his waist.

"Is this okay?" Flint said. He knew it would take a long time for Thad to want to be touched again and he wasn't about to press him into anything.

Thad nodded.

"Can I kiss you?" Flint asked, watching him closely.

Thad nodded again.

Flint leaned over and kissed his hair softly, breathing in the scent of sandalwood and squeezing him gently. "I love you so much," he said.

"I am...I'm *so sorry* I didn't stop him, Thad. I'm a horrible fiancé. I couldn't even protect you. I can never protect you."

"It's not your fault," Thad said tonelessly. "You were hurt, too."

"Are you mad at me?" Flint said, eyes pooling with tears at Thad's utter lack of emotion.

Thad shook his head.

"Tell me what to do, Thad," Flint whispered, brushing his hand over Thad's cheek. "Tell me what I can do to make this better. I'll do anything you want. Anything, Thad. I swear, I would take all this pain and feel it myself if I could."

Thad simply blinked. "I know," he said.

Flint was crying steadily at this point. He couldn't take it, seeing Thad so completely broken. It killed him inside, felt like someone was

twisting thumbscrews into his heart. It was a thousand times worse than the torture Derricks had put him through because this didn't stop. It wouldn't end, the curse couldn't simply be lifted away. It was lasting. Though he prayed it wasn't permanent.

"You don't need to stay with me," Thad said.

"W-what?" Flint said, frowning and wiping his eyes.

"You don't need to stay with me," Thad repeated monotonously. "I understand if you don't want me anymore."

"Thad," Flint said, moving closer to him so their bodies were pressed together. "Thad, of *course* I want you. I love you. I love you more than anything."

Thad's eyes brightened with tears. "But I'm used," he whispered, showing emotion for the first time in hours. "I'm used and broken and...and you deserve someone new and whole."

"Thad, I don't want anyone but you," Flint said, wishing Thad would just look at him. "I don't want anyone but you ever again. I want to marry you, Thad. I hate what he did to you but I'm not about to leave you because of it. I'm going to be right here, helping you ever second. And I don't even care if you never want me to touch you again, I don't care as long as I get to just be *with* you, Thad. I love you. Please believe me."

"I know you love me," Thad said, a tear slipping down the side of his face. "But you could love someone better."

"There *isn't* anyone better," Flint breathed. "I don't want anyone else. There's no one else compared to you."

Thad swallowed and closed his eyes, tears sliding onto the pillow from them. Flint kissed the corner of his eyes gently.

"Will you stay with me?" Thad said, barely a whisper. "I just...can you just hold me like you always do? I understand if you don't want to."

"Of course I'll do it," Flint said. "I'll do anything you want, pet."

Thad turned on his side away from him and Flint scooted closer, holding him against him and nuzzling his ear. "I love you," he whispered, clutching Thad's hand against his chest. "I will *a/ways* love you, Thad. No one else would ever come close to you. You're perfect." "I love you, too," Thad said, his voice returning to that awful, flat tone. Flint bit back tears and held him a little tighter, kissing his ear and listening to the sound of Thad's breathing. Even when Thad finally fell asleep, Flint stayed awake, whispering soothingly in his ear when he started to whimper or toss against him.

It was past one when he finally fell asleep as well, his mind full of horrible images of Thad screaming and thrashing as Derricks tortured him while he watched helplessly. He woke up in a cold sweat, moonlight streaming through the windows. Thad was sitting up next to

him, his arms wrapped around his legs and his chin resting on his knees, tears streaming silently down his face.

"Thad?" Flint said, touching his thigh gently.

Thad twitched at the touch and Flint pulled his hand away.

"Did you have a nightmare too?" Flint said quietly.

Thad nodded.

"Come here," Flint said gently, holding the blankets back for him to lie down again. Thad hesitated a moment before sliding down the mattress next to him, allowing him to wrap an arm around his waist. "I love you," Flint whispered. "I'm right here, okay? I'll always be right here next to you, Thad."

Thad pressed back against him, sighing shakily. It took him another hour to fall back asleep and again Flint waited as long as he could to calm him down when he got restless. Eventually, sleep took him again and he fell back into broken nightmares.

---

Sun lanced through the hangings of his bed and he rolled onto his side, expecting to find Thad lying there as he had been the night before only for his arm to hit the empty mattress. He propped himself up on one elbow, pushing the curtains aside to look at Thad's bed. It was empty.

"W-where's Thad?" he said, turning to Madam Pomfrey, who was busying changing the linens of the bed O'Brien had been in for his brief stint in the wing.

"His mother took him to St. Mungo's," she said, eyes overbright.

"What?" Flint said, sitting up so fast his head spun.

"Well, what did you expect?" she said, halting in her fluffing of the fresh pillow. "He's been traumatized. The boy needs to see a Healer. He's undergoing psychiatric evaluation."

Flint stared at her, shock hitting him like a brick wall.

She seemed to hesitate for a moment, lips pursed and brow furrowed.

"He...he left you something," she said at last, voice shaking as she nodded to Flint's bedside table before bustling back to her office, wiping her eyes.

Flint felt a jolt of apprehension as he turned.

His heart stopped beating. His mind went completely numb, every cell in his body seizing up as his throat closed off at the sight of the little white gold band lying on the table, the starbright diamonds glinting in the sunlight.

"Thad," he choked, tears already coursing down his face. "No."

There was a note under the ring. He picked it up, heart aching at the sight of the barely readable handwriting that was nothing like Thad's usual, neat script.

*Flint,*

*I'm sorry. I have to do this. I can't put you through what I'm dealing with right now. Please understand. I won't ask you to wait because I can't tell you how long you'll be waiting and that's not fair to you. I understand if you want to move on with your life and find someone who's not broken. I meant everything I said last night.*

*I love you,*

*Thad*

Tears smeared the untidy scrawl, soaking through the parchment as he broke down, sobbing almost silently as his entire world was suddenly ripped apart around him.

He'd never felt something so painful in his life. He thought he might be sick. He thought of how horrible he'd felt when Thad was in the hospital in Lima and he didn't know which was worse, the possibility of Thad being taken from him or the idea of him leaving him voluntarily. He understood, knew that Thad was suffering and that he would need time to heal, but he wanted to *help* him heal, not sit back and wait silently for things to be repaired and simply have Thad handed back to him when he was better.

"I'll wait," he said softly, reading through Thad's letter again. "I'll wait for the rest of my life if I have to."

He thought of all the wedding plans Thad and Kurt had gone through together and fresh wave of anguish hit him hard. He gripped his face in his hand, Thad's letter clutched in the other, and simply cried until there was nothing left in him.

When he'd finally calmed himself down enough to think straight, he convinced Madam Pomfrey to let him go, insisting he was fine and simply wanted to sleep in his own bed, and went back to the Gryffindor tower, Thad's ring and letter in hand.

The common room fell silent when he entered but he ignored everyone in it, going straight up to the dormitory instead. Someone had cleaned his blood from the floor and wall and the bed on which Derricks had attempted to rape Thad had been replaced. Flint moved to his own bed, sitting on the edge and staring at the floor.

The door opened a few seconds later and he recognized the footsteps as Dan's. The mattress sank next to him, their shoulders brushing together, and Dan's arm came to rest against his back. It was chillingly familiar, only the last time this had happened it had been Flint's own fault, he'd been the one to cause the pain.

"Thad left," Flint said, holding out Thad's engagement ring, voice hollow and toneless. "His Mum took him to St. Mungo's. I don't know how long he'll be there."

Dan nodded, arm tightening around Flint's shoulders. He inhaled audibly. "I'm..." he stopped, taking a deep breath. "I'm so sorry, Flint." Flint felt himself trying to cry, his red eyes burning and his throat contracting, but there was literally nothing left in him.

Dan seemed to sense this, because he stood up and poured a glass of water from the pitcher on the bedside table, forcing it gently into Flint's hand. Flint drank without really thinking about it, body working automatically at this point, reminding him to breathe, telling his heart to beat and blood to pump when it felt like the largest part of him had died and withered away.

Everything he had was connected to Thad. There wasn't a single aspect of his life that didn't involve him. He thought of his smile and his laugh, of the way his dark eyes peered up at him nervously when he bit his lower lip.

Dan's hand had returned to his back and Flint was crying again without even realizing he'd started. He clutched his face in one hand, the pressure of Dan's arm possibly the only thing keep him from breaking down completely.

"I'm sure he'll be back," Dan said, his own voice shaking. He'd come to see Thad like something of a little brother—though Thad was actually a few months older than him—since he'd started dating Flint and was fiercely protective of him.

"You think so?" Flint said, looking up at him hopefully.

Dan nodded, his bright green eyes shining with unshed tears. "He loves you, Flint," he said. "He really, *really* loves you. If you're willing to wait for him, he'll be back."

"I am," Flint said softly. "I would...Dan, I'd wait forever for him. I love him."

Dan smiled sadly. "I know."

---

"Leigh, are you *sure* you don't want to come to the lake with us?"

Grant said, glancing back at him from the doorway where he was about to leave with Scott and Brian.

"I'm sure," Leighton said, not looking up from where he was lying on his bed, absently tossing and catching the Quaffle he'd borrowed from Grant.

Grant sighed. "Alright," he said. "See you later then."

"Mhmm," Leighton replied, still throwing the Quaffle over his head and catching it deftly.

He waited for the door to close and their retreating footsteps, stilling the Quaffle in his hand and listening closely.

When he was sure he was alone, he tossed the Quaffle away and sat up, pulling open the drawer of his bedside table.

He sifted through the letters from Gavin until he found the one he was looking for. It was wrinkled and torn from the number of times he'd read it. He didn't really *need* it, but Gavin's words didn't exactly hinder his imagination.

He was mildly ashamed that he was doing it, getting off on Gavin's letters when the drama of Kurt's friends had happened only a week before, but, well...he *was* a teenage boy separated from his boyfriend. His gorgeous, amazing, delicious—

He spread the letter out on the bed, glancing at the door as he popped open the button of his shorts, pulling down the zipper and sighing with relief.

"*Fuck,*" he groaned as he slid his hand down his boxers and gripped his half-hard cock, eyes quickly finding the words Gavin had written him after Easter break that Leighton had read...well, he'd lost count how many times he'd read them.

*I know you won't be ready for this yet, Leighton, but one day I'm going to fuck you. That's right. I said it. I'm going to make you scream and beg for more. I'll start out gently, just kissing you and touching you and telling you how amazing you are until you're groaning and panting. God, the sounds you were making where we were in the shop. I almost lost it.*

Leighton pumped his hand steadily, swiping his thumb over the head of his erection and smearing the gathering pre-come. He closed his eyes, imagining Gavin's vivid blue eyes and the way they clouded with lust, the words he'd all but memorized filtering through his brain as if Gavin was the one saying them.

*Once I've got you begging me to touch you, I'll take off your shirt. Slowly. And lick every inch of you. God you taste good. You're so delicious. I could do this all day.*

*You'll be screaming for it, squirming and trying to touch yourself but I won't let you. I'll get you out of the rest of your clothes and start sucking your cock. You like when I do that, don't you, Leighton? God I bet you're thinking about it right now, aren't you?*

"Yes," Leighton groaned, imagining Gavin's warm, wet mouth around him now instead of his hand.

*I'm thinking about it. Dammit, you taste so good. But I won't let you finished yet. You'll be so close, though. You'll beg me to finish you off but I'm going to fuck you and you won't finish until I do.*

"Oh god," Leighton moaned, breath stuttering as something started to tighten at the base of his spine. He'd only read the rest of the letter once as the idea of what Gavin had written still scared him a little. But having Gavin write out everything he wanted to do to him was so hot



he'd had to hurry from breakfast to the bathroom to take care of himself before class.

And he was *so close* now. The fringe of his hair was damp with sweat, the air hot and thick with his heaving panting as he got closer with every jerk of his hand—

There was a sharp knock at the door.

"Leighton?"

"God fucking dammit, shit, *fuck!*" He threw a silent tantrum as he yanked up his shorts and tumbled off his bed onto the floor, cursing softly and stumbling to the door, where a fifth year girl with straight blonde hair was standing in the hall, arms crossed, when he cracked it open.

"Yes?" he said, trying not to snap.

She took in his flushed and sweaty face and lifted an eyebrow.

"There's someone in the common room who wants to see you," she said. "They told me to come up and tell you."

"Really?" Leighton said, suddenly curious. "Who?"

"Why don't you go downstairs and find out for yourself?" she said, tossing back her blonde hair and striding off down the hall.

"Gee, thanks, Ellie!" he called after her, scowling as he withdrew into the room again. "Can't believe there're two of you," he muttered, thinking of her Ravenclaw twin, Jaimie. "*Why don't you go downstairs and find out for yourself?*"

He grumbled as he went into the bathroom to splash cold water on his face and neck, toweling off roughly and packing away Gavin's letter before going into the hall.

He stomped down the stairs to the common room, ready to give whoever it was that needed to see him a piece of his mind.

"Alright, what's so bloody impor—"

He froze as his gaze fell on the same pair of bright blue eyes and perfect lips he'd just been thinking about so inappropriately. He blushed faintly.

"Hey," Gavin said, moving towards him and grinning.

"What are you doing here, Gav?" Leighton said, frowning. "Oh...sorry, I mean..." He signed his question and Gavin's smile widened.

He pulled Leighton into a tight embrace, resting his chin on his shoulder and kissing the side of his neck. "I love you," he said.

"I love you, too," Leighton said, smiling as his lips brushed his right ear.

"Mmm, say that again," Gavin mumbled.

"I love you," Leighton repeated. He froze, Gavin chuckling at the change in posture. Leighton pulled back to stare at him. "Gavin...can you...?"

Gavin nodded. "A bit," he said. "It started coming back yesterday. I still can't hear much but I went to the Healers and they said that I could get about fifty percent hearing back in the right ear within the next few weeks." He brushed his fingers over Leighton's cheek, smiling. "God, it's good to hear you say that."

"I love you," Leighton blurted out. "I love you, Gavin. I can't say it enough." He kissed him hard, gripping his face in both hands and not caring that a dozen of his Housemates were in the room. It took all his self-control not to take things further, especially given what he'd been doing not five minutes before.

Gavin beamed when they broke apart. "I have some other news, too," he said excitedly.

"Yeah?" Leighton said, frowning and wondering what on earth could be more exciting than Gavin's hearing returning. "What is it?"

"Can we...go upstairs?" Gavin said hopefully. "It's kind of a secret."

"Um, sure," Leighton said, shrugging and leading him up to the dormitory he'd just left. He sat down on the edge of his bed, unable to keep the wide grin off his face.

"Alright," he said, turning to Gavin, who looked flushed and excited.

"What did you want to tell me?"

"You won't have to worry about only seeing me on Hogsmeade weekends next year," he said, beaming.

"What?" Leighton said, frowning. "Why not?"

"McGonagall offered me a job," he said in a rush.

"Excuse me?" Leighton said, half laughing.

"McGonagall offered me a job," Gavin said.

"W-what?" Leighton said, heart skipping excitedly. "What job? You're not working with Filch are you?"

Gavin laughed, shaking his head. "No, thank Merlin," he said. "Say hello to the new Hogwarts History of Magic Professor. I wrote McGonagall about it after I left. I mean, Binns is obviously a total bore and I had top marks in the subject plus I did a ton of research and study traveling with Mam. So, McGonagall looked over some of my research and told me to come see her if I started getting my hearing back and I did so here I am! I'll have an office and private quarters and everything!"

Leighton stared at him, jaw slack and eyes very nearly bugging out of his head.

"Well say something, you boffin," Gavin said, laughing.

Leighton continued to stare at him for a moment before lunging at him, pushing him back onto the bed and kissing him furiously.

"Oi! I'm being attacked by a student!" Gavin shouted, laughing.

"Merlin, Leigh, this isn't some kink of yours is it?"

"Shut up, *Professor*," Leighton said, grinning as he sat up to yank his shirt over his head.

"I could give you detention for that, Cross," Gavin said, smirking.

"Trying to seduce a teacher."

"Like you *need* to be seduced to do this," Leighton muttered, lowering his lips to Gavin's neck to suck below his earlobe as Gavin ran his fingers over his back across his ribcage and the ridges of his spine.

"Too true," Gavin said, nodding and groaning as Leighton licked a wide streak up his neck before biting down gently.

"Mmm, you'll never guess what I was doing before you interrupted," Leighton mumbled, his fingers deftly flicking open the buttons on Gavin's shirt.

"What's that?" Gavin said, closing his eyes and smiling as Leighton kissed across the marked skin of his collar and shoulder.

"You remember those letters you wrote me?" Leighton said, nipping at his earlobe. "The ones that said all the things you wanted to do to me?"

"Mhmm," Gavin said, opening one eye to look at him.

"Well let's just say," Leighton breathed in his ear, "They're very good inspiration."

He smirked when Gavin's mouth fell open in surprise. He scooted down to sit on Gavin's thighs, taking off his belt and undoing his slacks.

"W-what are you doing?" Gavin said, throat bobbing as he swallow.

"Taking off your trousers, you tosser," Leighton said with a laugh.

"W-why, though?" Gavin said, looking anxious and faintly excited.

"Leighton...you're not..."

"No," Leighton said, shaking his head. "We're not doing *that*. But I have to congratulate you, don't I, *Professor*. I don't want detention."

He smirked, Gavin grinning as his eyebrows rose up his forehead.

"Yeah, you wouldn't want to lose any points for your House, would you?" Gavin said, catching on.

"Exactly," Leighton said, slipping his hand down Gavin's pants.

Gavin closed his eyes at the touch, sighing and pushing his hips up into Leighton's grip. "Oh my god," he breathed slowly, licking his lips and swallowing. "Mmm, I could definitely get used to this on a more frequent basis."

Leighton laughed and Gavin grinned in response, eyes still closed as Leighton moved his hand steadily around his now full erection.

"Leighton," Gavin said, lifting his head off the pillow to look at him.

"Hmm?" Leighton said, glancing up.

"Do you want to maybe...try something?" Gavin said, a faintly hopeful look in his eyes.

"Depends," Leighton said, narrowing his eyes suspiciously.

"Trust me," Gavin said. "You'll like this."

"Okay," Leighton said a little nervously as he freed his hand and sat down next to Gavin, who kicked off his shoes and slipped out of his slacks and boxers. Leighton blushed faintly, still unused to the idea of being sexual with another guy. Not that he didn't enjoy it. It was just still...odd.

"Here," Gavin said, smiling as he pushed Leighton back down onto the mattress before unfastening his shorts and pulling them down with his boxers over his bare feet. "Relax," he said, catching Leighton's apprehensive expression. "I'm not going to hurt you."

Leighton gave him a nervous smile and Gavin winked before ducking his head down and wrapping his lips around Leighton's cock.

"Oh, *fuck*," Leighton groaned in a strangled voice. Yes, the real Gavin was *much* better than the one in his imagination. "God, Gavin, mmm." His legs shook as he pushed up into Gavin's mouth, breath coming in halting gasps.

Gavin pulled away and Leighton whined in protest. Gavin winked reassuringly and climbed onto the bed, straddling his thighs. He licked his own hand, coating his palm in saliva with far too much enjoyment before wrapping it around his own cock and pumping it gently.

He groaned softly, dropping his head back, and Leighton made a noise of impatience, twitching his hips up.

Gavin grinned, wetting his lips with the tip of his tongue before moving up towards Leighton's hips.

"What're you—*oh god*," he gasped and moaned as Gavin rolled his hips, their slicked up cocks rubbing against each other. It was mind-blowing, sending waves of pleasure rocketing up from his groin to every last nerve in his body.

Gavin groaned against his neck, his breath catching as he rocked against him again, his tongue lapping him the sweat beading on Leighton's neck.

"I can't believe you've been getting off on my letters," Gavin said, the smirk clear in his voice. "You know that's unbelievably hot, don't you?"

"Y-you're unbelievably—*ah*—hot," Leighton gasped.

Gavin chuckled. "Smooth, Leighton," he mumbled.

"Shut up," Leighton said, grabbing his hips roughly and grinding up into him, smirking in satisfaction when Gavin shivered and moaned loudly. He wrapped his legs around Gavin's waist, forcing him closer and biting gently on his earlobe.

"You should—ugh—come up with ideas like this more often," Leighton gasped into his ear, sure to speak into the right one.

Gavin made a sound halfway between a laugh and a groan as he rolled his hips down again. "G-gladly," he said.

Leighton pulled away from his ear to kiss him messily, their tongues moving wildly together and teeth hitting roughly as they panted into each other's mouths. The heat coming off them was so intense he was shocked they didn't simply catch fire.

"God, I'm gonna...*fuck, Leighton!*" he shouted the last word, long and drawn out as he shook against Leighton and wet warmth spread across his hip.

He dropped his head, panting for a moment before sliding down Leighton's body and taking his cock in his mouth again with a satisfied moan.

Leighton swore, groaning and gripping one hand in Gavin's hair, the other fisting in the sheets beside him. Gavin was moving sloppily in his sated state, his tongue sliding around Leighton's cock and lapping up the mix of spit and his own come.

"God that's hot," Leighton murmured, staring down at him. "*Dammit, Gavin, I'm so close.*" His head fell back on the mattress as he closed his eyes, allowing the heat to build in his gut. A loud moan built in his chest and radiated out from his throat as he came, hips stuttering up towards Gavin's mouth.

Gavin grabbed his thighs to hold him still, swallowing around him and humming low in his throat. Leighton tilted his head to the side to watch him running his tongue over his thighs and hips to clean him off.

"God, Gavin," he mumbled. "That's just not fair."

Gavin grinned and pushed his shirt up his stomach to kiss across the sensitive skin before crawling up to capture his lips in a slow, sleepy kiss.

"Mmm," he groaned, planting a final, soft peck on his lips before lying down neck to him and pulling the side of the blanket over the lower halves. "That was...pretty brill."

Leighton laughed. "Yeah, I'd say," he said. He leaned against him, resting his head in the crook of his neck and smiling when Gavin bite down playfully on the top of his head before kissing the spot.

"I love you," Gavin said, slipping an arm under him and holding him close. "So much. I'm so glad I'll get to see you all the time next year. And not just because of this stuff, either."

Leighton smiled, lifted his head to speak near Gavin's right ear. "I love you too," he said, kissing the side of his neck in a gesture that had become something they shared specially between them. He curled against him, one leg finding its way to rest between both of Gavin's.

"Do you think it's going to be a problem? A teacher dating a student?"

Gavin shrugged. "Suppose it might be," he said. "But you're of age and I'm only two years older than you anyway. It's not like we're going to be having sex in the classrooms or anything."

"Well...maybe," Leighton said, smirking.

"Oh, is that so?" Gavin said, giving him a faintly surprised look. "Well, I'm *definitely* taking the job then. Plus we'll have my whole office...and bedroom...and bath."

"We're going to be busy," Leighton said off-handedly.

Gavin chuckled. "God, I love you," he said, squeezing him.

"You too," Leighton mumbled, yawning. "I'm going to sleep now."

"You do that," Gavin said, not sounding nearly as sleepy. "I'll just watch you...okay, that sounded creepy but you know what I mean."

Leighton nodded. "Mhmm," he murmured. "Don't try and touch me in my sleep," he added as an afterthought.

Gavin laughed. "I'll try to contain myself," he said. "But no promises."

Leighton smiled, scooting closer to him on the bed and enjoying the proximity that he knew wouldn't last for long as he drifted off to sleep.

---

Hogwarts wasn't the same without Thad. In the morning when Kurt woke up, on those days where he was feeling talkative or just wanted to be with his best friend, he'd look over at Thad's bed, now occupied in turn by either Jeff or Nick, and feel a pang in his chest.

He'd been gone for a full week now and none of them had gotten anymore word than the brief letters Flint received from Thad's mother saying that there was very little change in him. From what he'd told Kurt, Flint had tried to visit Thad the day of his departure, pleading with McGonagall to let him go to St. Mungo's. McGonagall had told him, eyes overbright, that Thad had left specific instructions not to let anyone from the Castle, including Flint, to see him.

They'd all been writing Thad, long letters of support and sympathy, though none of them expected anything back after what Flint had told them. He was, without a doubt, taking it the worst. He was losing weight and sleep, a constant, drawn look to his features. His grades were dropping dramatically and he spoke very little, only replying to any of their attempts at conversation when it was absolutely necessary, though even then his words were short and impersonal.

Kurt was having his own trouble concentrating on classes, if he was perfectly honest. On the nights when Blaine had patrol or practice—night he'd often spent with Thad when he wasn't with Flint—he couldn't bring himself to work on anything, couldn't deal with the sight of Thad's empty seat on the couch next to him. Even with his N.E.W.T.s approaching, he simply couldn't study when he thought of

the idea of Thad lying in St. Mungo's, silent and broken and refusing any of their help.

He was waiting for Blaine to get back from Quidditch practice the weekend after Thad had left, the sunlight spilling through the arched windows of the common room. His Charms homework was laid out in front of him, barely started, and Acorn was curled next to him on the couch. The cat had been just as bad as he'd been in Lima when Thad was in the hospital, constantly meowing and searching for Thad, only truly calm on the occasions where Flint visited them.

Just as he was thinking he might go down to the dungeons to visit Leighton, the door swung open to reveal Flint clutching a roll of parchment and smiling very faintly.

"He wrote me back," Flint said, holding up the parchment.

Kurt sat up hopefully, closing his Charms book.

"It's...well, he wrote it at least," Flint continued, moving to sit next to Kurt. "You can read it."

"Are you sure?" Kurt said, hesitating. "If it's personal..."

"It's fine," Flint said, placing the letter in his hands. "You're his best friend."

Kurt smiled and unfurled the pages. The script across it was neat and measured, though the words were occasionally uneven, as though the hand holding the quill had trembled.

*Flint,*

*This is Thad. I think I'm finally ready to write again. I hope you're not mad at me for not writing before or for keeping you all away. I just really need to work on myself by myself, I think.*

*The Healers have been talking to me a lot and helping me. They said I suffer from something called Behavioral Self-Blame. I don't understand it much but they said it means I blame myself for what happened, which...I do. I mean...I did. I thought it was my fault that he did what he did, that I shouldn't have been so open with our...relations in public, that I was encouraging him without realizing it.*

*Talking to the Healers has...well, they've gotten me to talk about some other things I never told anyone else before. I think I should probably tell you know though, you have a right to know. I've never told a soul—other than Mum and the Healers now—but in my fifth year I was...Flint, I wanted to kill myself—*

Kurt gasped as he read the words, which were almost illegible. He could imagine Thad writing them, hands shaking so badly he couldn't hold the quill straight. He forced himself to continue reading.

*—I was so lonely and I just couldn't take it anymore. I mean...I had friends but I wanted someone like you, Flint. When you told me you almost hurt yourself last year I was so scared because I knew what it*

*was like to feel that bad. That's why I was so kind to Cole, I know what it felt like being so alone and I didn't want him to try and do anything bad.*

*I swear I never actually did anything to myself and I've never even thought about it since then, especially since you were willing to be with me and love me. You always made me happy, Flint.*

*Returning to the subject of my "illness"—they keep calling it this and it sounds odd because it makes me feel like I'm sick—the Healers have been making me see that I'm not to blame for it or for other things I've blamed myself for like my Dad's death and things like that.*

*They've also been helping me with being more confident. They said "years of emotional suppression and depression have caused deep emotional scars" that make me so self-conscious. They keep telling me there's nothing wrong with me—though it feels like there is, honestly—that my brain just works a little...differently than others. Hopefully, I'll be better when I see you again. They've been giving me different Potions that make me feel much better and Mum was so happy yesterday because she said it was the first time I smiled since it happened.*

*It's lonely here and I feel like a rather interesting museum exhibit with everyone watching me all the time. My room is lovely though, with big windows and lots of sunlight and everything is clean and white.*

*No doubt Kurt would have some input into colorful accents that would complement my skin tone. Oh goodness, did I really just write that? Kurt, if you're reading this I'm only joking! Oh no, I started laughing and I've spilled my ink. Oh well... It didn't think something as simple as laughing would feel so good!*

*I miss everyone dearly. Wes and David and their codependence, Blaine's kindness, Kurt's—what's he call it? Awesomeness? Yes, that sounds right—even Jeff and Nick's insanity. But don't tell them that! They'd never let me live it down.*

*But I mostly miss you, Flint. Every time I wake up from a nightmare, I hold the necklace you gave me and think of your smile. I like your smile, Flint. It always gives me pixies in my tummy even though I've seen it a million times before. Hopefully it will be up to a million and one times soon.*

*The Healers want to keep me for another week, though, for "observations"—again I find myself feeling like a museum piece. It's so dull here but I understand. Mum has gotten my homework for me after I begged her to so I have something to do. N.E.W.T.s are only a month away! I don't want to fail!*

*I have all of everyone's letters by my bed now. They make me feel a little less lonely when Mum has to go to work. I've also got the picture*



*of me and you that Mum usually keeps on her desk. I keep it by my bed and kiss it every night before I go to sleep. Is that odd? I just miss you lots I guess....*

*This is getting quite long, isn't it? I don't mean to ramble.*

*I want to see you but I don't think I should until I'm all better.*

*Hopefully next week I'll be back. I certainly hope so. I really miss you.*

*When we are together again, I may just spend an hour looking at you.*

*Merlin, I sound quite creepy, don't I?*

*I'm getting near the end of the parchment now so I ought to finish this up. The Healers are going to be here with my Calming Draught soon.*

*Tell everyone I miss them.*

*I miss you. Your eyes and smile and how warm you always are and your strong arms around me. Soon, again, I hope.*

*I love you,*

*Thad*

*P.S. I understand if you're not but if you are still interested in marrying me I'd still say yes.*

*So...will you?*

There were a few Runic symbols along the bottom of the page that Kurt couldn't read but he assumed said "I love you" as he recognized one of them as the symbol that Thad wore around his neck.

He looked up to see Flint smiling sadly with him. It was bittersweet.

On one hand, Thad was recovering. On the other hand, neither of them had known just how badly Thad had suffered before he'd started dating Flint. He'd never known just how lonely Thad had been and felt a stab of guilt at the thought of what seeing Kurt dating Flint must have done to him.

"I can't believe..."

"Neither can I," Flint said, taking the letter back. "I had...I never knew...I never knew it was so bad." Kurt saw his own guilt reflected in Flint's eyes.

"He seems to be doing better at least," Kurt said. "At least...at least he's getting the help he needs."

Flint nodded absently, carefully tucking Thad's letter in his pocket.

Thad's engagement ring was hanging around his neck from a sturdy silver chain as it had been since Thad had left.

"How are *you* doing?" Kurt said, laying a hand on his arm.

Flint sighed, staring into the empty fireplace. "Better, I guess," he said at last. "I still...I wish I could be with him. I wish he would have *told* me."

"Me too," Kurt said, nodding. "But at least he still wants to get married, right?"

Flint nodded, though it didn't seem like he was really absorbing what he'd said. His eyes welled with tears.

"Flint?" Kurt said apprehensively.

Flint sniffed and blinked, a tear slipping down his cheek.

"What if he never recovers, Kurt?" he said, turning to him. "What if he never wants me to touch him again? I don't care about sex, I *don't*. I was just as happy before we started doing that stuff. But the thought of him never getting back to the way he was...of him never getting adorable and nervous and sweet while we're together makes me sick, to think he'll never stop thinking about what he did...of him being afraid...god, *I hate it!*" He slammed his hand on the arm of the couch and Kurt jumped, Acorn hissing faintly at the sound.

"He doesn't deserve it!" Flint said, voice breaking. "After everything he went through because of *me* and then I couldn't protect him from Karofsky or that...*thing* and now...god, I'd give anything to make sure he was happy." He broke, crying quietly into his hand.

"I know," Kurt said, hand still resting on his arm. "Flint, I *know*. We all know you love Thad. None of us knew he was hurting as badly as he was. I hadn't even *met* him at the time.

"Don't blame yourself. Just...be there for him. I'm sure given enough time he'll be better. Maybe not back to exactly how he was but he'll get better. Thad is...he's tough for a little guy."

Flint smiled through his tears, nodding.

"He is, isn't he?" he said. He lightly touched Thad's ring where it rested on his chest. "That's one of the reasons I love him."

The door opened and Blaine, Jeff and Nick trooped in with the rest of the team as well as, surprisingly, Gwen, who was smirking faintly. Flint hastily wiped his eyes.

"Bloody *brilliant*," Jeff said, eyeing Gwen with a mix of pride and awe.

"Sticking Filch's filing cabinet to the ceiling," Nick said with an equally admiring expression. "*Genius*."

Hanna rolled her eyes, smiling.

"Flint!" Jeff crowed upon spotting him, looking excited.

"Have you heard from the wildcat yet, lion?" Nick said as he and Jeff sat down next to each other with matching expectant looks.

"I have," Flint said, smiling and handing them the second page of Thad's letter, the page without his admission of his previous suicidal thoughts. Kurt knew if they found out they would lose their heads completely. They put their heads together to read, Blaine scanning the letter over their shoulders.

"Wildcat misses us!" Jeff said excitedly. "We miss you, too, bunny!"

"And he wants to marry the lion again!" Nick said, face lighting up. "Should we throw a party for when he comes back?" They looked to Flint with bright smiles.

"I think he'll probably just want a nice, quiet tower when he gets back," Flint said, smiling at their enthusiasm."

"You heard him!" Jeff barked at a pair of third years giggling in the corner. "He wants it quiet!"

They looked alarmed and fell silent.

"Jeff," Kurt said with a tone of amusement. "He won't be back for a week."

Jeff narrowed his eyes at a pack of chattering sixth years as they passed.

"Alright," he muttered reluctantly. "But I'll cast Silencing Charms on all of you if you're not quiet when he comes back."

Blaine rolled his eyes as he sat next to Kurt, unstrapping his armguards as he did.

"Oh, Jeff, we should make him welcome back posters again!" Nick said excitedly.

"Brilliant!" Jeff cried, beaming. "Knew there was a reason I talked to you on the train first year!"

They hurried towards the stairs, stopped, ran back to Gwen and Hanna and hauled them to the dorms with them.

"In the words of Thad, 'they're mental'," Kurt said.

Blaine chuckled, resting his boots on the table to untie them, scattering clumps of dirt and grass over the polished wood.

"Honestly," Kurt said, clucking his tongue and pulling out his wand to clean up the mess. "I hope you're prepared to take those off in a box when we move into our apartment."

Blaine smiled and kissed him on the cheek. "Whatever you'd like, love," he said, shedding his blue robes.

Flint stood up, Thad's letter in his hand. "I'm going to go write him back," he said. "I'll let you know if I get anything from him."

"Thanks," Kurt said, smiling. "Send him lots of love from us. And don't worry too much, okay?"

Flint raised his hand to acknowledge the request before disappearing through the door to the spiral staircase.

"How're you holding up?" Blaine said, sliding an arm around his shoulders and pulling him back against his chest.

"Alright," Kurt sighed. "I miss him, though."

Blaine kissed the top of his head. "I know you do, love," he said, hugging him closer. "We all do.... Did you get any homework finished?" he added, nodding to Kurt's books.

"Not really," Kurt said, pulling a face. "I've been so worried, you know? But now he's feeling a little better I think I'll be able to get some done. It's such a load off my mind."

"I'm glad," Blaine said, kneading his shoulders gently. "You've been so stressed out about it. I was worried."

"Mmm, I'm okay," Kurt said, closing his eyes and leaning into his touch. "you know, *I* should be the one rubbing *your* shoulders given you're the one who's been practicing."

"I like doing this, though," Blaine said, smiling and kissing the back of his neck. "It's like you're melting under my fingers. Besides...you can pay me back later, I'm sure."

Kurt smiled sleepily. "I'll figure something out," he murmured, tilting his head back to kiss the underside of Blaine's jaw.

Blaine smiled, angling his head down to catch his lips against his own, his arms sliding around him to hold him close against his chest. "Love you," he mumbled against Kurt's lips.

"Love you too," Kurt replied, smiling as they exchanged short, slow kisses that never failed to make him feel warm from the inside out.

"How's your mom been?" he said when they broke apart and he settled back against Blaine again.

"Good," Blaine said, sighing. "She's been stopping by the flat every now and then to check on it. She said she's been moving some of my stuff over for me so I don't have to worry about it after graduation."

"That's nice of her," Kurt said, smiling. "Dad said he's planning on shrinking as much of my stuff down to bring it with him when they all get here in June. I think he's still a little sad I'm moving here but...with all the money you'll be making from the Tornadoes, I'm sure we can afford to visit them or pay for their Portkey."

"Taking my money already?" Blaine said, laughing. "I'll have to keep my Gringott's vault locked up, won't I?"

Kurt hit his leg lightly. "You know, *I'll* be making money too at St. Mungo's," he said. "Sure, Junior Potioneers in training don't make a lot but I could survive on my own if I absolutely had to."

"Well, I'll just have to make sure you can't leave then, won't I?" Blaine said, grinning. "I'll have to hunt down Flint and get him to help me find a ring."

Kurt stiffened, inhaling sharply as Blaine chuckled.

Blaine realized he wasn't moving and looked down at him in concern.

"Everything alright, love?" he said.

Kurt, whose heart had just started skipping in his chest, swallowed nervously. "You don't...you don't mean that, do you?" he said in a quiet voice.

"Mean what?" Blaine said, frowning.

"About...about getting a ring?" Kurt said softly.

Blaine gave him a steady look, the laughter gone from his face now.

"Why?" he said quietly. "Would you take it if I got you one?"

Kurt searched his eyes, the warm hazel radiating love like they had for so long, and nodded. "Would you?" he whispered. "Take one from me, I mean?"

Blaine's face split into a wide grin. "Of course," he said, giving him a tight squeeze and kissing his forehead.

"I mean...I'm not ready yet," Kurt said hastily. "I...I love you and I want to be with you but that's...that's a hell of a step."

Blaine smiled and leaned against him. "I know," he said. "I'm not ready for it either but...one day, right?"

Kurt nodded, happiness swelling inside him like a balloon. "One day."

There was a shout of laughter from upstairs followed by a shuddering *thump*. The door slammed and Jeff came sprinting down the stairs, Gwen at his side, both of them laughing.

Kurt cocked an eyebrow at Blaine, who shrugged. Jeff dashed past with Gwen and ran from the tower as Nick appeared on the balcony overhead.

Kurt clapped a hand to his mouth to keep from laughing as Nick spat out a mouthful of glitter, shaking the sparkling substance from his eyes and hair, Hanna giggling into her hand behind him.

"Gwen invented a new spell," Nick said, making a face as he scraped glitter from his tongue.

"I can see that," Kurt said, keeping his voice steady as Blaine shook with silent laughter against him.

"Why did I ever agree to help him go out with her?" Nick grumbled, scowling as he turned back to the dorm, leaving a cloud of blue and bronze glitter in his wake as Hanna followed him, giggling uncontrollably.

"Oh my god, she really is a female Jeff," Kurt said when he heard the door shut.

"Hogwarts will never survive this relationship," Blaine said, shaking his head sadly.

---

The sudden upswing in the number of friends he had after saving Thad and Wilson was slightly overwhelming for Cole. There were times when he had to actually sneak away from the crowd just to try and get some work done.

He'd been writing Thad, though he hadn't gotten anything back but several heartfelt thank you letters from his mother. He felt a sort of fierce protectiveness towards the older boy. Though he still felt a faint disappointment that he would never be with him as more than a

friend, he thought maybe the reason he'd been attracted to Thad in the first place was that he was simply willing to *be* his friend, that he understood just how alone he'd felt for so long.

Wilson, Hummel, and the rest of their group had been exceedingly kind to him since the incident nearly two weeks before. They'd gone out of their way to defend him any time someone made a jab about his height or something else when they were around. The two Beaters—Nick and Jeff—had actually threatened to throw one seventh year Slytherin into the lake if he called Cole an elf again.

It was nice, he thought, having all his new friends, but he missed Thad and he had an inkling that once the novelty of what he'd done had worn off that he would find himself with a much shorter list of admirers.

Not that he minded. Thad would still be his friend and there were a few Gryffindors that had always been kind to him.

He was sitting in the library Friday afternoon the day before Thad was set to come back from St. Mungo's, doodling absently on the corner of his Runes homework and thinking he should really be studying for his O.W.L.s when a boy with bright turquoise hair sat down at the next table over, glancing briefly in his direction and grinning faintly.

Cole recognized him as one of the Chasers on the Hufflepuff Quidditch team—it was difficult *not* to notice him with that hair—but had never spoken to him before. He was spoiled by his famous family, from what Cole had heard and was used to getting anything he wanted, incredibly popular for a fourth year and often surrounded by a crowd of friends.

Cole found it a little odd that he would be alone in the library, studying, when he was usually making a lot of noise and throwing parties in the Hufflepuff common room that Cole had never been invited to.

Shrugging, he turned back to his Syllabary and forced himself to concentrate again, turning his quill over in his fingers and reading through the long lines of Runic text.

A parchment airplane sailed over to him and came to rest on his notes. He looked up, frowning, to see the Hufflepuff—Lupin he thought his name was—looking at him.

"Open it," he mouthed, nodding to the parchment. His eyes were an almost garish color of purple.

Still frowning, Cole set down his quill and opened the slip of parchment, scanning it absently.

*Are you single?*

Cole stared at the words for a full minute, not one hundred percent sure if he was reading them right.

A second folded parchment hit his notes and he pulled it open.

*Well?*

Cole turned slowly to look at the other boy, giving him a look of confusion.

"Is that a no?" Lupin said, cocking a blue eyebrow.

"No," Cole said, completely puzzled as to *why* he was asking him in the first place.

"Bummer," Lupin said, shrugging and standing up. "Who're you dating?" he asked, pausing at the row of shelves and glancing back at him.

"No, I mean...I *am* single," Cole said. He almost wanted to look away, his eyes were so strange looking.

"Oh, really?" Lupin said, perking up a little.

"Yeah," Cole said, still perplexed. "I'm sorry...could you...your eyes are really bright." One thing he *did* know about the boy was that he was a Metamorphmagus.

Lupin grinned and scrunched up his face in concentration. His eyes faded to a soft brown and he moved to sit at the table with him.

"So," he said, drumming his fingers on the tabletop absently and rocking his chair back on two legs. "You're single."

"Obviously," Cole muttered, pulling a face as he turned back to his homework.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Lupin said, giving him a mildly confused look.

"Um, who the *hell* would want to date me?" Cole said, asking the question he'd been asking himself for fifteen years.

"Me," Lupin said, shrugging.

Cole stared at him. "Don't you have a *girlfriend*?" he said slowly.

"Did," Lupin said unaffectedly. "She was a bit dull."

Cole couldn't help but laugh at this. "And I'm supposed to be more exciting, am I?" he said, shaking his head. Obviously it was yet *another* joke someone was playing on him. He snatched up his quill and turned back to his homework, scowling.

"What can I say?" Lupin said, sighing heavily. "I've got a weakness for redheads."

Cole scoffed. "No thank you," he said, not looking up at him.

Lupin shrugged and stood up, tapping Cole's book with his fingers. "Let me know if you change your mind, I guess."

"Yeah, I'll do that," Cole grumbled angrily, still not looking at him.

"I'm Teddy, by the way," Lupin added before striding off through the shelves.

Cole glared at the crumpled pieces of parchment with Lupin's handwriting on them, balling them up and throwing them in the bin with a sound of disgust.

Annoyed and angry, he went back to work on his homework, wondering just when people would stop making fun of him and start to take him seriously.



## Chapter Twenty-Eight

Friday.

Tomorrow was the day Thad was returning to Hogwarts.

After two long, horribly lonely and anxious weeks he was *finally* going to see him again.

It was such a wonderful thought he barely slept at all that night. The only reason he managed to get any sleep was the fact that Jeff and Nick had practically begged him to stay in Thad's bed.

"We don't want it to be empty," Jeff had said with a smile.

"But it's better if you stay there rather than one of us because Thad always says he likes the way you smell so his bed will smell like you," Nick said matter-of-factly.

"When did he tell you that?" Kurt said, looking surprised.

They looked faintly nervous.

"He didn't *tell* you, did he?" Blaine said, looking amused.

"Alright, fine," Jeff said, sighing. "We found his journal."

"It was too hard to resist," Nick said sheepishly.

Kurt rolled his eyes, shaking his head as Blaine gripped his face in his hand.

"We just wanted to make sure he was okay," Jeff said defensively. "We didn't want to...you know, make fun of him or anything."

"We were just worried about him," Nick muttered, hanging his head.

Flint made sure to get the leather-bound journal from them before he went to bed, feeling odd sleeping in the Ravenclaw tower rather than his own but loving the fact that this was the bed where Thad slept at night. He couldn't wait until they were able to share a bed every night.

"Goodnight, lion," Jeff said, grinning at him from the bed on the other side of Nick's.

"Have lots of happy dreams about the wildcat," Nick said, lying on his side and facing Flint with a faint smirk. "But nothing like that!" he added, wide-eyed.

Kurt rolled his eyes, Blaine chuckling from where the two of them were cuddling on Kurt's bed, reading.

"Go to sleep, you two," Kurt said. "Thad will be back tomorrow."

Jeff let out a squeal of excitement and snuggled under his covers happily, grinning at the ceiling. Nick grinned and lay down as well.

"The faster we sleep the sooner we see Thad, right?" Jeff said before squeezing his eyes shut.

"Right," Nick said, nodding and closing his eyes as well.

"You're both mental," Kurt muttered.

"Kurtsie, be quiet, we're sleeping!" Jeff said, opening one eye to glare at him. Flint saw Wes and David exchanged a roll of their eyes, though they were smiling.

Blaine laughed and returned to his book, covering Kurt's mouth to keep him from retorting. Kurt peeled his hand away, scowling playfully at him before kissing his jaw.

"Well, goodnight," Flint said, smiling as he pulled the hangings shut around his bed, the rest of them calling out replies.

He lay down, staring at Thad's journal. He was tempted to read it, to see what was going on in Thad's brain that he'd been keeping to himself. Jeff and Nick had read part of it...he didn't think Thad would mind if he looked at it too. He trusted Flint...he loved Flint. Surely he wouldn't be upset. Right?

He convinced himself that it was the truth and say back up against the headboard, heart beating a little quicker than normal as he cracked open the thin, leather-bound book.

*This work of literature belongs to Thad Jenkins. If found, please return posthaste to the Ravenclaw tower. Thank you.*

Flint smiled at the neat script, loving how incredibly sweet and adorable Thad was even before they'd met. He flipped to the first page, dated sometime five years earlier when they were in second year.

*I've never kept a journal before, but Grandmum bought this for me for my birthday so I feel I should use it. I certainly don't want it to go to waste. What do I write exactly? I suppose I'll start out by saying I'm Thad Ryan Jenkins, second year Ravenclaw at Hogwarts School. I've just turned thirteen—as stated, I received this for my birthday—and I'm hopelessly in love with Flint Wilson.*

*Well...not in love I suppose. But I can't stop thinking about him.*

*He's...he's amazing. He's popular and he plays Quidditch and he's got this smile...gosh, I feel like I'm creepy talking about him like this when he doesn't even know I exist. He asked me for a quill in Herbology a few months ago and ever since then I just get pixies in my tummy when I think about him.*

*But he likes girls—oh, yes...I'm...I'm gay; I've never told anyone else...Wilson made me realize it, maybe that's why I like him so much even though I felt horrible when I first "found out"—so I have no chance with him anyway.*

*It's nice to have a place to put this all down. I just hope Jeff and Nick never read this. They would never let me live it down. They don't like Wilson because Jeff is on the Ravenclaw team and Flint is on the Gryffindor team. They're very overinvested in their Quidditch, it seems. I don't really like it all that much though. I didn't know*

*anything about it before school started. I used to play football with Dad before he died but...that was a long time ago. Time for bed I think.*

Thad wrote in the journal once a week it seemed, jotting down little thoughts he had about classes and how Jeff and Nick annoyed him. Flint felt a jolt every time he saw his own name when Thad made little notes like "*Wilson smiled at me today. I was too scared to smile back. I'm an idiot*" and "*Why do I let myself feel this way about Wilson? He'll never like me back. I need to stop but I can't. He's everywhere I go and he doesn't even see me.*"

He could see the slow decrease in Thad's self-confidence, the change from him as a hopeful, relatively happy second year to the nervous, withdrawn and scared person he'd been when Thad had first kissed him. It broke his heart seeing Thad's suffering written out for him to see, especially when he knew he was the cause of so much of it.

He reached an entry sometime in their fifth year. The parchment was wrinkled, the ink smeared and the handwriting so shaky—going back and forth between English and Runes—that he could barely read it. *I don't know what to do. I thought about...about killing myself today. I almost did it. I had my wand ready and everything but I couldn't. I'm a coward. I'm too weak to even get rid of myself. And Wilson...he talked to me today and he saw me crying. He saw me crying! He didn't know it was about him but...god I'm such a baby! I hate this! I hate him! I hate myself! I CAN'T TAKE THIS!*

There was a smear of ink and a rip in the page as if Thad had slammed the quill against the parchment in anger. Flint could imagine him throwing the book across the room in disgust. His own tears dripped onto the page where Thad's had fallen two years before.

"Oh, Thad," he whispered, touching the pages lightly. "I would have fixed this...I would have loved you if I'd known how perfect you were." He wiped his eyes and turned to the next page. Thad must have given up on writing because the next entry wasn't until November of their sixth year.

*Wilson is gay. He's dating the new transfer student from America, Kurt. What's the point in trying anymore? I'm rubbish. I'm rubbish and he'll never notice me. I want to try and talk to him but I'm sure he'll never find me interesting. He's with Kurt anyway so it will never matter.*

There were a few brief entries after this, short and impersonal, in which Thad mentioned classes and Nick and Jeff. There was a brief one about Kurt that caught Flint's eye when he saw his own name.

*Kurt is so popular. I wish I could be like him. And not just because of Wilson. Jeff and Nick love him and I'm pretty sure Blaine likes him.*

*How come he gets Wilson and Blaine and I get no one? Not that I want Blaine...I just...I want someone to hold my hand in the hallway and...and tell me they love me. I really don't think it's ever going to happen, though. I just...I guess I'm not meant to have someone.*

Flint sniffed softly, scrubbing his eyes with his palms. He couldn't believe Thad had suffered so much, had been through so much pain because of *him*. It killed him.

*Wilson and Kurt broke up. Not that it matters for me anyway. I think Kurt is going to start going with Blaine sometime.*

The next entry was two weeks later.

*Blaine and Kurt are together. Wilson talked to me today. He's...he's nice. But it hurts talking to him because he'll never want me. No one will. I wish I could stop caring.*

Flint had to bite his tongue to keep from making any sound as tears slid down his face. He knew the time was coming soon when Thad had kissed him. The next entry was dated two months later in mid-March.

*Wilson looks so sad sometimes. It makes me want to talk to him. I don't know if it's because he's not with Kurt anymore or something else. I don't like seeing him sad because I know what it's like to feel sad a lot but I'm scared if I talk to him he'll figure out that I like him. And he would just think I'm a freak or something. I'm so boring. I'm just a...a pale, quiet bookworm and he's popular and funny and...and gorgeous. Why do I do this to myself?*

There were a few empty pages and then it looked like something had exploded on the page, smears of ink and Runic symbols scrawled across the parchment. The next page was legible, though the words were roughly written as if Thad's hand had been shaking when he wrote it.

*I KISSED FLINT WILSON. I KISSED HIM! I can't even think straight right now! I have no idea why I did it! Kurt and Blaine had a row and we had to go look for Kurt and oh goodness, I told them I wanted to look with Flint and he was so nice to me and he told me how he felt, about how he'd been afraid about being gay and that people would think there was something wrong with him and I told him there wasn't anything wrong with him and I KISSED HIM! AND HE WASN'T MAD! HE ASKED ME TO GO TO HOGSMEADE WITH HIM AFTER EASTER!*

*I'm so happy I'm shaking. The pixies in my tummy are going crazy right now. I don't know how I'll ever make it through the holidays! I can't wait!*

Flint smiled, touching the page lightly. Thad had been so shy and nervous around him. He'd found it absolutely adorable how quiet he was, always blushing and biting his lower lip. The entries became decidedly brighter after this, Thad gushing about Flint, though there

was still the odd entry about Jeff and Nick and now some about Kurt and occasionally Blaine. He could still see the doubt seeping through his happiness, with the occasional *"I hope he doesn't see how boring I am"* or *"I'm scared Flint might want to do things I'm not ready for and I don't know what to say"*.

He paused at an entry written completely in Runes, struggling a little to translate it.

*I told Flint I loved him today and he said he loved me back! I can't stop crying I'm so happy! I'm such a baby! But Flint LOVES me so who cares? I can't believe he really loves me! I want to scream but Jeff and Nick are doing homework in the room so I'll just be quiet even though I'm screaming inside! I love him. I love him, I love him, I love him!*

Flint ran his fingers over the symbols. "I love you too, Thad," he whispered, kissing his fingertips before touching the page again. He closed the journal, already feeling a little ashamed about invading Thad's privacy and not wanting to do any more than he already had. He slipped the journal under Thad's pillow before lying down, smiling at the thought that he was going to see Thad the next day and get to tell him in person again just how much he loved him and how he always would.

---

Kurt yawned, glancing over at the sleeping forms of their roommates and scooting down a little where he was lying against Blaine's side.

"You want me to go back to my own bed, love?" Blaine said, adjusting his reading glasses and kissing his hair.

Kurt shook his head and snuggled against him closer. "Why don't you just sleep here?" he said, yawning again. "I like sleeping with you."

"Mmm, soon you'll get to do it all the time," Blaine said, smiling as he buried his nose in his hair.

Kurt smiled and closed his eyes, setting his book aside and flicking his wand to close the hangings and cast *Muffliato*. He rolled over so he was laying on his stomach, back arched, his upper half propped up on his elbows.

"I thought you wanted me to *sleep* here," Blaine said with a faint grin.

"We can do other things too," Kurt said, trailing his fingertips down Blaine's thigh. "You know, you look very sexy with glasses."

Blaine chuckled. "You think?"

"Mhmm," Kurt said, gently forcing him to straighten his leg and draping his own across it, his knee sliding up the inside of Blaine's thigh. "And with your hair all curly and loose. You're like a...sexy librarian or something."

Blaine laughed. "Oh god," he groaned, pulling a face, "now I'm thinking about Madam Pince. She's definitely *not* a sexy librarian."

Kurt smiled, tilting his head up to brush his lips across Blaine's neck. "Mmm, I'd check out *your* books any day," he breathed, grinning when Blaine snorted into his hand. "But I'd rather just check you out instead. Is there a waiting list?"

"Love, you're going to make me wake everyone else up," Blaine said, clutching his side as he tried to stay silent.

"Alright I'll stop," Kurt said, on the verge of laughter himself. He kissed Blaine's neck, curling his leg up so his knee brushed Blaine's groin.

Blaine stopped laughing immediately and groaned softly, eyes closing and lips parting. Kurt smiled, kissing up the sensitive skin of his neck and brushing over the faint stubble on his jawline, his knee rubbing Blaine's groin gently. He kissed the spot below his ear at the crook of his jaw and Blaine seemed to melt a little into the pillows, moaning low in the back of his throat.

"Love, you know that any time you want something from me I'll never be able to resist you because you'll just start kissing that spot and I'll be helpless," Blaine mumbled.

"Mmm, good," Kurt muttered, flicking his tongue over the spot and sucking gently. Blaine groaned a little louder, pushing his hips up against Kurt's knee.

He tilted his head to the side to give Kurt better access to his neck, sighing when Kurt slid one hand under his shirt and across the warm skin of his stomach.

"Kurt...you are just..." He groaned as Kurt pushed his knee a little harder against him. "You're just incredible, you know that?"

Kurt smiled, pulling the neckline of his shirt down to nip across his collarbone.

"Alright, come here, you," Blaine said, wrapping an arm around him and pulling him onto of him.

Kurt giggled and squealed a little in surprise, lowering his head again to pay attention to the other side of Blaine's neck as Blaine splayed his fingers across his lower back, sliding them up his shirt and over the ridges of his spine and ribcage.

"You've honestly got to be part veela or...or nymph or something," Blaine mumbled. "Humans aren't this perfect."

Kurt laughed lightly. "You know, *you're* perfect too," he said, lifting his head to look at him.

"Yeah?" Blaine said, smiling as he rubbed his back gently.

Kurt nodded, swirling his fingertips across Blaine's chest as he sat back on his hips. "You're smart and you're a huge sap, which I *love*, and you've got the greatest hair ever—" he ran his fingers through Blaine's soft curls, Blaine closing his eyes briefly at the touch, "—and you've

got an *amazing* body that I can barely keep my hands off sometimes. You're patient and one of the nicest people I've ever met. You're eyes are like...fire or something. Sometimes they're just warm and gentle like they are now and sometimes they're almost crackling like when you're angry or when we get really...crazy. And you love me. And I love you. You're just...you're perfect."

Blaine smiled softly, one hand moving out from under his shirt to brush over his face.

"I love when you talk like that," he said. "It always makes me love you even more."

Kurt leaned into his hand, closing his eyes and turning his head to catch the tip of his thumb in his mouth. He flicked his tongue over the pad before moving to Blaine's fingers, gripping his wrist lightly and taking each digit into his mouth, one at a time, to suck on them gently.

Blaine let out a soft groan of longing, rubbing his ring finger across Kurt's tongue as he lapped at it, pulling it in and out of his mouth and releasing soft whines of satisfaction.

"Tease," Blaine said, pouting playfully when Kurt released his hand and let it fall back on the bed.

Kurt cocked an eyebrow as he moved down the bed to sit between Blaine's knees, pulling his loose pajamas and boxers down to his thighs.

Blaine made a soft "oh" of realization, his hips twitching upward as Kurt kissed across the sensitive skin of his hips, moving his lips everywhere but his erection. Blaine whined in impatience, shifting his hips and running his hands through Kurt's hair.

Kurt grinned and licked a wet streak up the underside of Blaine's cock before taking him as far in his mouth as he could, gripping the base with one hand and slowly moving his mouth and tongue as Blaine released a long moan of pleasure.

"God, love, that's...*ugh*, that's amazing," he groaned, closing his eyes and pushing his fingers through Kurt's hair, gripping lightly.

Kurt looked up at him, his hazel eyes clouded with lust even as they drooped with the need for sleep. He hummed around Blaine and sucked hard before pulling off with a loud *pop*. Blaine let out a small whimper of objection.

"You really think I'm just going to leave you like this?" Kurt said, pursing his lips and giving him a dubious look.

Blaine stuck out his lower lip in a pout and Kurt rolled his eyes as he crawled up to kiss him again, propped up on his knees so he could pull his own pajamas down. Blaine pushed his shirt off one shoulder and kissed across the pale skin, sucking on his collarbone before swiping

his tongue across it. His hands slid down Kurt's lower back to rest on his ass, squeezing gently and forcing Kurt to lower himself down on top of him.

Kurt sighed when their hips connected, tilting his head back as Blaine continued to work across his neck and over his other shoulder.

Blaine lifted one hand from him to grope for his wand on the bed. Kurt heard him muttered against his neck and he bit his lip in anticipation, jerking his hips forward when Blaine's slick fingers rubbed against his entrance.

He stilled, mewling and whimpering as Blaine pressed one finger inside him, bending and twisting it until Kurt let out a loud shout of pleasure when he hit his prostate.

"Hush, love," Blaine mumbled, catching his lips in a slow kiss as he added a second finger. Kurt groaned into Blaine's mouth with short, desperate sounds rising from his throat.

"Blaine...god yes...please, I w-want you."

Blaine hit prostate again and he gasped and moaned, pushing back against his fingers.

"Come here, love," Blaine whispered, pushing Kurt's pajamas further down his legs with his free hand. He pulled his fingers free to allow Kurt to strip the clothes off his lower half, smearing his cock with the remaining lube.

Kurt bit his lip hard to stay silent, wincing at the burn as Blaine gripped his hips to guide him down around him.

"*Oh my god*, love...you—*ah*—you feel so good." Blaine closed his eyes, hands still holding Kurt's hips as Kurt rolled down into him, aching back with a low groan and tightening his legs around Blaine's sides. Blaine's hands skimmed up his sides, pushing his shirt up his torso before helping Kurt pull it off over his head.

"I love watching you do this," Blaine said a little haltingly as Kurt rocked his hips steadily, hands splayed across Blaine's chest. "You look...incredible. You *are* incredible."

Kurt smiled, gasping lightly with each movement of his hips. Blaine moved his hand to wrap his fingers around his erection, pumping steadily, his eyes never leaving Kurt's and his jaw tight to keep himself silent.

The air was thick and silent around them, close and overheated in the closed off space inside the hangings. Pleasure shot up his spine with every jerk of his hips, its long fingers reaching across every nerve in his body until it felt like it was trying to break free from his skin.

"Love," Blaine said in a tight whisper. "Kurt, I'm...god, I'm so close, love."



Kurt nodded, closing his eyes as he felt the heat building inside him as well. Everything was searing skin and heavy air filling up his lungs; it was like something was boiling inside him. All at once it simmered over and his spine curved back, his head dropping back towards his shoulder blades as he came across Blaine's fingers with a silent shout. Blaine groaned at the site, pushing his hips up into him until wet warmth flooded inside him and Blaine let out a stuttering cry, fingers digging into Kurt's hips so hard Kurt thought he might draw blood. Kurt winced as he pulled off him and lay down on his stomach beside him, breathing heavily into the pillow. Blaine kissed his ear tenderly before sitting up to find his wand. He cleaned them both off and pulled both their pajamas back up before lying down next to Kurt, one arm draped across his shoulders and his mouth next to his ear.

"I love you," Blaine murmured, kissing his ear again.

Kurt turned to look at him, smiling and touching their foreheads together. "I love you too," he said, wrinkling up his nose as Blaine kissed the tip of it.

Blaine chuckled softly, holding him a little closer. "So...did you really mean what you said last week?" he said, tracing Kurt's hairline at the nape of his neck with his finger.

"What did I say?" Kurt said, frowning.

"About...about the possibility of us getting...engaged one day," Blaine said, sounding a little anxious.

"Of course I meant it," Kurt said, smiling. "I love you. I'm...I'm not ready for it right now though. I'm sorry if you are..."

"No...no, I'm not either," Blaine said, shaking his head. "We had a rough patch and we need to take plenty of time to get back on solid footing before we think about that, I think. Not everyone's relationship is as perfect as Thad and Flint's."

Kurt smiled, "They are cloying at times," he said, though he hoped they would be able to be the same almost sickening levels of sweet they'd been before when Thad got back.

Blaine shifted a little next to him. "Just...as long as you know I want to do it someday," Blaine said, brushing his fingers through Kurt's hair.

"M-marry you, I mean."

Kurt melted a little at how nervous he was saying it. "You don't need to be scared saying it," he said softly. "I want it, too, Blaine. If anyone should be scared, it's me."

Blaine frowned. "Why would you say that?" he said, fingers stilling in Kurt's hair.

"Well," Kurt said, chewing the inside of his cheek. "I...screwed up. I mean, we both agree we *did* need a break but a lot of problems could have been avoided had I just told you about what had happened. I

don't want to keep secrets from you, Blaine. You're the last person I should do that to. And, yeah, it was blown out of proportion by both of us but...it's not a habit I should have let myself get into. No more secrets."

Blaine smiled fondly. "Deal," he said, kissing his forehead.

"So," Kurt said, heart beating a little faster than usual. "I've...I've got a secret for you."

"Yeah?" Blaine said, grinning. "What's that?"

Kurt pushed himself up, rolling over so he could reach through the hangings and open the drawer of his bedside table. "Um, I don't know if this is your sort of thing or not but...I think you should have something since...since I've got my necklace and everything."

Blaine sat up, giving him a curious look. "What's this, love?" he said, accepting the neatly wrapped box Kurt handed him.

"Why don't you open it and find out?" Kurt said, grinning.

Blaine chuckled and pulled the ribbon loose from the small package before lifting the lid off and setting it aside. His expression softened into a loving smile and he looked up at Kurt.

"Do you...I mean, is that something you'd wear?" Kurt said anxiously as Blaine lifted the black and silver ring from the box with a wide smile. "I owl ordered it after what you said last week. It's, um...in America we have these things called Promise Rings. I don't know if you do those here or not." He watched Blaine turn the ring over in his fingers. "It's tungsten and carbon fiber so it's, um, sturdy and stylish. God, that sounds awful, doesn't it? I'm sorry I just want to make sure you li—"

Blaine silenced him with a kiss, grinning against him and cupping his cheek in his hand.

"Of course I like it, love," he said as he pulled back, running his hand through the fringe of hair around Kurt's ear. "It's lovely. I'm glad I'll have something to wear so everyone knows I'm taken."

Kurt sighed in relief, smiling as Blaine slipped the ring on and admired it. "Very manly," he said, nodding his approval.

Kurt laughed, leaning forward to hug him and feeling incredibly warm and light inside. "I'm glad you like it," he said as he sat back again.

"I love it," Blaine said, lying down and gesturing for Kurt to lie next to him. "I love *you*. I'll wear it every day. Just like you wear this." He touched Kurt's diamond pendant lightly where it rested against his bare chest. "And every time I look at it I'll think about you and smile because I'll get to come home and see you at the end of every day."

Kurt made a noise of contentment. "Sounds good," he said, closing his eyes as he snuggled against him. He yawned. "Love you."

"I love you, too, Kurt," Blaine said, kissing the top of his head gently. "Now get some sleep. Thad's coming back tomorrow and I'm sure the two of you will have a lot to catch up on once Flint's done with him." Kurt smiled, feeling a swell of excitement in his chest at the thought of getting his best friend back again. "Okay," he mumbled sleepily. "Night."

"Night, love," Blaine said, leaning against him and holding him close in a familiar gesture that suddenly had so much more meaning behind it.

---

*Leighton,*  
*Been getting the (few) things I still own packed up. Not much left that wasn't destroyed in the fire. It's going to take me years to get back all the books I lost. You know some of those were first editions? Oh, well....*  
*McGonagall said I could move in after term ends. I think I'm going to just to get out of this flat. I love Mam but it's too crowded! But I swear I'll come visit you loads over the summer. If you'd like, maybe we can go on a trip of something. It'd be nice to spend some time just me and you, don't you think? Just a thought.*  
*See you in just over a month!*  
*Love you,*  
*Gavin*

...

*Professor Connolly,*  
*Rolls off the tongue nicely, doesn't it? I think so. I bet you're just dying to give me a ton of detentions. Or private lessons. For my 'academic advancement,' of course.*  
*A trip would be fun. I'd love to get away once I've got my Apparition License. Or we can take the motorbike! (Bet your heart just stopped, haha!) Did you have anywhere in mind, Professor. I'll never get tired of call you that and laughing.*  
*Miss you. Love,*  
*Leighton*

...

*Leighton,*  
*Yeah, yeah, laugh it up. Just don't forget I can dock you House Points! And I'll be giving you a lot of detentions if you keep that up.*  
*As for our trip (is it happening then?) we are NOT going anywhere on that death trap. It was alright in Kenessey but I don't trust it in the Muggle world. I was thinking we could go to Spain. They're some really fascinating historical sites I'd like to see to study for work (crazy thinking about it!) and I think we'd have a lot of fun. It's so nice and*

*warm there, too. Barcelona was amazing when I went with Mam year before last.*

*Plus we could go to a nudist beach. And I could fuck you there. Just an idea.*

*Gavin*

*...*

*Gav,*

*You had to say that, didn't you? Jerk. And who says I'm going to let you do that? Maybe I don't want to do that. My body is not your Quidditch pitch. You can't just be flying your broom around it willy nilly.*

*Spain sounds lovely.*

*Leighton*

*...*

*Leighton,*

*The noise I made when I read that made my mother very concerned. You're adorable, you know that? And I'll 'fly my broom' wherever I please. I'd let you do the same to me, you know. But seeing as I'm older and wiser, I think I should get the first shot. Besides, you'll change your tune about not wanting to do it once you let me. My Quaffle, your goalpost, it's happening.*

*Spain it is.*

*Gavin*

*...*

*Gavin,*

*YOU NEED TO STOP. My friends think I'm mental now thanks to you. You're lucky I love you is all I can say. Older and wiser? Really, Gav? The fact that you would use that as a reason is in and of itself a contradiction to the statement.*

*And your Quidditch analogies are awful.*

*I can't wait. For Spain I mean not for...well, you know what I mean. I wrote my parents and they said I could go. They trust you, Gav. Don't tarnish it by taking their only son's innocence.*

*Love you,*

*Leighton*

*...*

*Leigh,*

*I think I took your innocence when I had your cock in my mouth in the back of my workplace. So don't even try and pull that one.*

*I'll start looking into a few things for our trip. Now I've actually got some money.*

*Love you too,*

*Gavin*

---

"Jeff, shut *up*, we all know to be quiet!"

Flint bit back a grin as Kurt glowered at Jeff from where he was sitting with Blaine near the entrance to the tower, Blaine holding his guitar and sporting a handsome, silver and black band on his hand that Kurt had apparently given him the night before.

"I'm just making sure that it's peaceful for Thad," Jeff said, barely a whisper as he continued to move around the room to check for anything that might cause excessive amounts of noise.

"Don't make us Silence *you*, Kurt," Nick said, giving Kurt a look from where he was standing on top of a bookshelf, removing the mechanism from an old cuckoo clock.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "You realize that Flint is going to be making a lot more noise singing to Thad than most of the stuff you're trying to prevent," he said as the two Beaters finished their sweep of the room and sat next to each other on the couch.

"But that's a good noise," Jeff said as if it was obvious.

"Thad will like that," Nick said, nodding.

"I hope so, at least," Flint said nervously.

"Of course he will," Kurt said, smiling. "It's the sort of thing that will make him go all smiley and start blushing."

Flint smiled to himself. He hoped Kurt was right. His biggest fear was that Thad would arrive back from St. Mungo's a completely different person, withdrawn and empty. He'd never been so nervous to see him before.

"He should be here any minute," Blaine said, checking Kurt's watch before dropping it back in his pocket.

As if on cue, the door to the Ravenclaw tower—which was empty save for the five of them thanks to Jeff and Nick and their threats of tossing people in the lake—opened. Flint found himself holding his breath as Kurt leapt up and ran to hug the dark-haired boy that had just stepped into the room, his bag draped over his shoulder.

He caught the signs Jeff and Nick had hung around the room—one of which hung from the banister, stretching from one end of the room to the other and reading "Welcome Home! We missed you, bunny!"—and frowned a little in confusion.

"Surprise!" Jeff and Nick whispered loudly in unison, hurrying to hug a bewildered looking Thad as well.

"W-what's going on?" Thad said, blinking and looking at Kurt. "Why're you all in here instead of outside with Wes and David and everyone else?"

"To welcome you back of course," Kurt said, smiling.

"We missed you," Jeff said happily.

"A lot," Nick added in a serious tone.

Thad blushed faintly, looking pleased. His eyes traveled from Kurt to Jeff and Nick—who were beaming so wide it looked like their faces might split in two—to Blaine, who smiled, and finally to Flint. His gaze softened and Flint felt an overwhelming sense of relief seeing all the raw love that was still there.

"Hey," Thad said, letting his bag slide off his shoulder to the floor. Flint smiled. "Hey," he replied, walking a little shakily towards him. It was crazy, finally seeing him after he'd been gone for a full two weeks. "I missed you."

Thad smiled faintly as Flint stopped in front of him. "I missed you, too," he said, his hand coming to rest on Flint's chest over top of where his engagement ring hung against his shirt.

"Would you like it back?" Flint said, reaching up to unfasten the silver chain from around his neck.

"Yeah," Thad said, nodding and smiling a little wider as he looked up at Flint, his dark eyes lighting up. "Yeah, I think I would."

Flint smiled, pulling the little ring off the chain and slipping it onto Thad's finger as Jeff and Nick clapped and bounced around silently beside him.

Thad rested his hand against Flint's chest again, watching the little diamonds sparkle in the midmorning light flooding the room through the arched windows. "I missed it," he said, glancing up at Flint again.

"It felt like something was...missing, you know?"

Flint nodded, tentatively reaching out to cup his cheek gently and feeling another surge of relief as Thad closed his eyes and leaned into the touch. "It's how I feel every time you're not around," Flint said truthfully.

Thad smiled faintly, looking up at him with a fond expression. "I love you," he said softly.

"I love you, too," Flint said, so heartfelt that Thad blushed again. "I missed you so much."

"I missed you too," Thad said, his hand sliding up from Flint's chest to fiddle with the hair at the nape of his neck. He bit his lower lip in the wonderfully familiar gesture. "You can kiss me," he said softly.

"Are you sure?" Flint said hesitantly. "I don't...I want to make sure—"

"Just kiss me," Thad said, smiling.

Flint grinned and lowered his head to press their lips together. His heart stuttered in his chest and everything else melted away. It was simply him and Thad. He could have *sworn* time stood still, stretching across long moments of breathless sensation.

Thad was careful and slow like he always was, but there was a sense of confidence behind it that had almost never been there before. Flint

allowed him to control the kiss, knew he'd be letting Thad control everything like this for a long time until what had happened was nothing but a blemish in their past.

Thad deepened the kiss, pulling Flint close with the hand on the back of his neck. He gasped and sighed when Flint slid an arm tentatively around his waist. After a few more seconds, Thad pulled back gently, giving him another short, sweet kiss, like a promise that there would be more. Thad wrapped his arms around Flint's neck and hugged him tightly.

Flint readily returned the gesture, savoring the sweet smell of him and the surprising strength behind his hold.

"I love you, Flint," Thad whispered. "I'm sorry it took me so long to come back."

"I don't care," Flint said. "As long as you're back and feeling better." Thad smiled against his cheek. "I am feeling better," he said as he pulled back, arms still draped around his neck. "But it will...it'll take some time for me to be ready for...certain things again."

"I know," Flint said, nodding. "Thad, if you *never* want to do that again I'll understand and I'll still be just as happy because I'm with you."

Thad hugged him again. "Thank you," he said softly. "I love you."

"I love you, too," Flint said. "I've got something for you."

"Really?" Thad said curiously when he stood back again.

"It's nothing you can touch," Flint said, leading him to the couch and sitting him down gently, Jeff and Nick immediately claiming the seats on either side of him as Kurt returned to his spot next to Blaine.

"What is it?" Thad said, tilting his head to the side.

"I want to sing to you, pet," Flint said a little nervously as Blaine plucked his guitar in a random melody.

Thad's eyes widened a little in surprise and his cheeks dusted with pink. "R-really?" he whispered.

Flint nodded. "I...I don't know how good I am but I want to show you just how much you mean to me. And how glad I am that you're back."

Thad smiled. "Okay," he said, settling back on the couch. "I'd like that." He giggled as Jeff and Nick scooted closer to him with matching grins.

\*Flint took a deep breath and nodded to Blaine, who smiled and picked a gentle tune out of the strings, Kurt resting his head on his shoulder as he did. He was sure to keep his eyes locked on Thad's as he sang, a little anxiously at first.

*Look at the stars,  
Look how they shine for you,  
And everything you do,  
Yeah, they were all yellow*

Thad smiled, looking touched and faintly teary-eyed as he listened, Nick and Jeff grinning and leaning against him happily.

*I came along,*

*I wrote a song for you,*

*And all the things you do,*

*And it was called "Yellow"*

Flint knelt down in front of Thad, taking his hand where it was resting in his lap and holding it tightly.

*So then I took my turn,*

*Oh what a thing to have done,*

*And it was all "Yellow."*

Thad laid his other hand on top of Flint's, stretching his delicate fingers to cover as much of them as possible.

*Your skin*

*Oh yeah, your skin and bones,*

*Turn into something beautiful,*

*You know, you know I love you so,*

*You know I love you so.*

Thad lifted his hand to brush it over Flint's cheek gently with a loving smile, a tear sliding slowly down his cheek. "I love you," he mouthed. "I love you, too," Flint mouthed, feeling tears well in his own eyes. It wasn't sadness that brought them to the surface, but the fact that they had suffered through so much and still ended up here, loving each other all the more for it, that there was nothing that would tear through them. No matter how hard the world tried to break them, they would always love each other.

*I swam across,*

*I jumped across for you,*

*Oh what a thing to do.*

*Cos you were all Yellow,*

Flint laced their fingers together, looking up into Thad's wide, dark eyes so full of trusting love it almost took his breath away.

*I drew a line,*

*I drew a line for you,*

*Oh what a thing to do,*

*And it was all Yellow*

Tears slipped silently down Thad's face, a small smile on his face. It was like when they'd kissed again for the first time; everything else in the room seemed to dissolve, fading away into the background.

*Your skin*

*Oh yeah, your skin and bones,*

*Turn into something beautiful,*

*And you know*



*For you I'd bleed myself dry*

*For you I'd bleed myself dry*

Flint leaned into Thad's hand as it came to rest on his cheek again and he swiped away his tears with his thumb. He tried to keep his voice from shaking, gripping Thad's hand in his lap tightly.

*It's true, look how they shine for you,*

*Look how they shine for you,*

*Look how they shine for,*

*Look how they shine for you,*

*Look how they shine for you,*

*Look how they shine.*

*Look at the stars,*

*Look how they shine for you,*

*And all the things that you do*

There was a space of a few seconds when the room was silent and they simply smiled softly at each other.

"Thank you," Thad whispered at last, leaning forward to kiss his forehead before touching the spot with his own forehead. "I love you."

"I love you," Flint said, "And I'll do anything to make sure you *never* feel alone again. I'd snap my own wand in half and live like a Muggle for the rest of my life if it would make you happy."

Thad smiled. "I know you would," he said, his dark eyes warm and gleaming inches away from Flint's where their foreheads were pressed together.

Flint angled his head to kiss him briefly, hurrying to wipe his eyes as he remembered the others were still in the room. He looked around to see Jeff and Nick smiling gently at Thad; Blaine was smiling as well, his guitar resting between his legs and one arm around Kurt's shoulders. Kurt's eyes were shining with tears, covering his mouth lightly with his fingertips.

Thad brightened a little, sighing and smiling as he looked around at them all. "It's good to be back," he said happily.

---

Having Thad back made everything much more enjoyable for Kurt. He was still medicated, receiving Calming Draughts and Cheering Charms a few times a day to help keep his stress levels down given how much work they were getting from their teachers, but he took it all in stride, looking genuinely happy and smiling more than Kurt had ever seen him.

He supposed getting everything off his chest about what he'd been through before he and Kurt had met must have lightened his mind considerably. He was still relatively quiet, but it wasn't the nervous, withdrawn quiet that he'd often had about him, simply a comfortable

silence they could carry when they shared tea in the morning or studied together in the library. It was like someone had drained all his self-conscious fear away and it was incredible to see the transformation.

That along with the fact that Blaine had agreed to wear the ring he'd bought him made the next week one of the best he'd had all year. He was sitting in Double Defense on Wednesday morning with Blaine and the others, chatting about the Quidditch Final, which was a week and a half away, and waiting for the bell to ring when Professor Cooney decided to make an announcement.

"As you're all aware," he said, raising his voice a little above the din; they quieted. "As you're all aware, your N.E.W.T.s are two and a half weeks away—"

"*What?*" Jeff and Nick cried in unison, the cards they were playing with flying everywhere. A few people sniggered.

"Yes, you two," Cooney said, pushing his glasses up his nose and running a hand through his flyaway hair. "Now, as you'll be leaving Hogwarts after your exams, it's time for you to consider what careers you'll be getting into if you haven't already.

"You've all—save Mr. Hummel, of course—had career counseling with your Head of House from prior to your O. so *hopefully* you've got general ideas as to what field you'll be entering into. For those of you who *don't*," he gave Jeff and Nick a pointed look, "There are booklets in your common room for you to peruse. They include contact information for said employers and I suggest you all take the matter seriously as you may be choosing a lifelong career. As always, myself and the other Heads of Houses are here to help you should you need it."

Nick and Jeff simply stared at him, mouths agape, as though the thought of entering the world of the employed was truly terrifying. The bell rang and everyone scrambled to gather their things to leave.

"Come on, you two," Blaine said to Jeff and Nick, who'd remained frozen in their seats with matching expressions of horror. "You can't sit here all day."

"Yes we can," Jeff said, clinging to his desk desperately.

"We'll never leave Hogwarts," Nick said with equal fervor. "They can't make us!"

"I'm pretty sure they could," Kurt muttered, rolling his eyes as he swung his bag onto his shoulder. "Now get up."

They stood reluctantly, pouting and slouching out of the room.

"They're so weird," Kurt muttered.

"We've been over this, love," Blaine said, grinning. "That's actually quite calm for them. They'll start freaking out come the end of exams."

Kurt sighed. "I can hardly wait," he said, shaking his head as they left. "I've got to go finish up a Herbology essay," Blaine said, glancing into his bag and making a face. "I'll find you at lunch, okay?"

"See you in a bit," Kurt said, giving him a brief kiss and watching him go with a small smile. He thought about doubling back to walk with Flint and Dan when he spotted Thad with Cole O'Brien up ahead and jogged to catch them.

"Thad!" he called. "Wait up!"

Thad turned, smiling brightly at his approach as he paused with O'Brien, who smiled faintly, looking a little nervous. Thad turned back to the red-haired boy with a kind look. "If he's bothering you so much, Cole, you should probably tell a teacher or something," he said gently. "It's not all *that* bad," Cole said, sighing. "He's just...I dunno, it's not very nice that he's trying to make a joke of me."

"Yes, well, popular boys can be rather thick-headed sometimes," Thad said, flashing a grin in Kurt's direction.

"Yeah, it took Flint four years to snatch up Thad," Kurt said, returning the grin. "What are we talking about?"

"Teddy Lupin," Thad said with a sigh. "He's been pestering Cole to go out with him and Cole's quite sure it's just a big joke."

"Lupin," Kurt said, frowning in concentration as he searched his brain for the name. "Blue-haired kid?"

Thad and Cole nodded.

"Try ignoring him, Cole," Thad said a little sadly. "And if that doesn't work tell him he's being a prat. Maybe he'll leave you alone."

"I hope so," Cole muttered, scowling at his shoes. "Thanks, Thad. I'll see you later."

"Bye," Thad said smiling as Cole disappeared through the crowd. "So how was Defense?" he said, turning to Kurt as they set off together for break until Kurt's Transfiguration lesson started.

"Not bad," Kurt said, shrugging. "Cooney mentioned careers and Jeff and Nick about had a panic attack."

Thad giggled. "Yeah, I've been reading through some of the booklets." He held up a white and gold book with a large, embellish 'G' on the front cover over several Runic symbols. "Gringotts," he said excitedly. "You think I've got enough Runes experience for them to hire me?"

"Thad," Kurt said as they walked to the courtyard together.

"If *you* don't have enough Runes experience, no one does."

Thad giggled, clutching his books close to his chest. "I hope they do," he said, a slight spring in his step. Kurt guessed he had just had his

Cheering Charm for the morning. "Hire me I mean. I'd love to do it. I'm a bit frightened of goblins though. I know they're not supposed to be violent but they're quite intimidating, don't you think?"

"Yeah," Kurt said, smiling at his happiness as they stepped into the sunny courtyard and sat together on a stone bench in the corner where dark ivy climbed the cracked masonry.

"But I'll get to study Runes and go home every day to see Fli—" he froze, eyes widening as the color drained from his face.

Kurt glanced in the direction he was staring; there was nothing but a blank stretch of dark wall. "Um, Thad?" he said, trying to meet his eyes. "What's wrong?"

"Kurt," he said in a hoarse whisper.

"What?" Kurt said, now seriously concerned. Could his Cheering Charm have been off?

Thad turned to him with a stricken expression. "Three months, Kurt!" he said, sounding faintly panicky. "Oh my goodness, I'm getting married in *three months*."

"Thad, calm down," Kurt said, concealing a laugh as Thad dithered on the spot. "There's no reason to freak out."

"*There're a thousand reasons to freak out!*" Thad said with a manic look, tugging at his own hair.

"Thad," Kurt said, laying a hand on Thad's shoulder. "Calm down. No stress, remember?"

The touch seemed to bring him back to his senses and he blinked, shaking his head a little.

"Sorry," he said sheepishly. "It's just...*married*. *I'm getting married*. If you'd have told me a year and a half ago that I'd be marrying Flint Wilson in three months I'd have told you to stop taking crazy pills."

Kurt laughed and Thad grinned.

"I'm just nervous I suppose," Thad said with a sigh, staring at nothing.

"But you're excited, too, right?" Kurt said, watching him.

Thad smiled. "Yeah," he said, nodding. "I'm...I'm really excited." He bit his lip and made a tiny squeal in the back of his throat, giggling.

"I'm *really* excited."

"Good," Kurt said, knocking their shoulders together lightly. "Me too."

"Really?" Thad said, sounding mildly surprised. "I'd have thought you'd be quite sick of it by now."

"Not at all," Kurt said, crossing his legs absently and tilting his head back to soak up the sunshine. "Weddings are like a drug to me. I love planning them."

"Bet you can't wait to plan your own," Thad said, the sly smile clear in his voice.

Kurt opened his eyes to look down at him and catch his knowing look. "Yeah," Kurt said, smiling as he closed his eyes again. "Yeah, someday."

"I'd be sure to keep Jeff and Nick away from you," Thad said, leaning back as well. "And make sure you have an adequate stock of tea to sustain you."

"Thank goodness you're my best friend," Kurt said, grinning as Thad giggled next to him.

There was a beat of silence in which they savored the warm May sun and the soft sound of birds and rustle of the Forbidden Forest.

"Is it weird to say you love someone if it's not...romantic?" Thad said suddenly, a little anxious.

Kurt shrugged. "I don't think so," he said, thinking of how Leighton had told him he loved him for their friendship. "People say it for their families and stuff all the time. And friends." He turned curiously to him. "Why?"

Thad chewed his bottom lip for a moment. "Cause I'd say I love you, Kurt," he said at last, smiling. "You're like...like the brother I never had or something." He shrugged, looking down at his feet as he kicked them absently, blushing. "It's...it's nice."

Kurt smiled. "Love you, too, Thad," he said, smiling a little wider as Thad looked up, beaming.

He coughed as the air was knocked from his lungs as Thad hugged him tightly.

Catching his breath, Kurt hugged him back, laughing a little. "So I'm your brother," Kurt said thoughtfully, as Thad released him and sat back. "I guess Nick and Jeff would be our crazy cousins then?"

Thad laughed. "I'd say." He sighed happily. "I'm glad you came to Hogwarts, Kurt," he said a little softer, smiling.

Kurt nodded, staring across the breezy courtyard as he patted Thad's hand. "Yeah," he said, smiling faintly. "Yeah, me too."

---

The days slid by in a blaze of sunshine and a riot of color bursting across the gardens. Wildflowers bloomed along the banks of the lake, bright reds, vivid yellows, and delicate blues mixing together like swirls of paint on an artist's palette.

Thad had been back for nearly a week, a wonderful week of gentle smiles and soft looks that Flint knew he would never tire of. Even without his Potions and Charms, he was happier than Flint had ever seen him and it made his heart nearly burst with joy to watch.

The Saturday after he'd returned, a week before the Final, they were taking their usual path around the lake, the Ravenclaw Quidditch team a blur of blue flying over the pitch in the distance.

"I'll miss this, I think," Thad said, looking a little sadly across the grounds as they walked hand in hand through the swaying grass, their bare feet silent against the soft ground.

"Me too," Flint said, closing his eyes briefly as he breathed in the scent of sedge and cloudberry growing around the bankside. "I'm sure we can find a nice park or something in the city though."

"I suppose," Thad said with a sigh. "Not really the same."

"I know," Flint said, squeezing his hand. "But we'll make it work, right?"

Thad smiled. "Right," he said, glancing over at him.

The lake churned ten feet out and they turned to watch a pair of young mermaids wrestling playfully, their high laughter echoing across the water as they flipped and dove back below the surface, green-gold tails flashing in the sunlight.

They watched the ripples fan out and fade away, a faint splash reaching them as the pair broke the surface much further out.

Thad smiled. His eyes lit up as they fell upon the flowers growing up ahead. "Oh, those are lovely," he said, releasing Flint's hand to pad down the bank to the clump of peonies.

He bent over to pick some of the sweet-smelling blooms, closing his eyes and inhaling deeply as he held them to his nose.

"They won't have *these* in the city," he said sadly as Flint reached him.

"We don't have to live there forever," Flint said, slipping his arms around Thad's waist from behind and kissing the top of his head.

"Maybe someday we'll get a little house by the beach or something. I know you love the water. Little fish. I thought wildcats hated water?"

Thad grinned over his shoulder at him, face still buried in the pink and white blossoms clutching in his hands.

"You mean it?" he said, dark eyes reflecting the vibrant colors of the flowers. "About not living in the city forever?"

"Of course I do," Flint said. "Whatever makes you happy, pet." He closed his eyes briefly, smiling. "Mmm, I can see it now. We'll have lots of flowers in the front garden and a big shade tree we can sit under while you read and I watch you and Acorn will chase gnomes around. And we'll have Kurt and Dan and the others over on weekends and you'll scold Jeff and Nick for eating too many sweets. And then we'll make dinner together every night—"

"But I'm a terrible cook," Thad interjected, scrunching up his nose.

"Me too," Flint said, laughing. "We'll learn together and laugh when we burn it horribly. And when you get a little smudge of sauce on your nose, I'll lick it off and then kiss you silly."

Thad giggled and Flint grinned as he continued.

"And in the winter we'll drink hot chocolate—well, you'll have tea—by the fire and decorate a big tree for Christmas and one day we'll help our little girl get packed up for their first time at Hogwarts and I'll still want to kiss you silly even when we have fights and it'll just be...perfect."

Thad smiled as he finished, eyes brimming with tears.

"How's that sound?" Flint said, brushing a hand through Thad's dark hair.

"Perfect," Thad sighed softly, tilting his head up to kiss him and letting the flowers fall as he turned in Flint's arms to face him.

Flint sighed, tightening his arms around Thad's middle as the other boy laid his hands gently on his chest, winding his fingers in the fabric of his shirt. Thad squeaked in surprise when Flint lifted him off the ground a few inches and turned him around, grinning when Thad started to giggle.

"Flint!" he cried through his laughter as Flint spun him around. "You're going to make me sick!"

Flint laughed and stopped spinning, stumbling a little as dizziness hit him and he toppled to the ground, Thad landing on top of him with a faint *oomph*.

Flint groaned, half-laughing as he tried to catch the breath that had just been knocked from him. Thad was giggling with his face buried in Flint's neck.

"That's what you get," he said matter-of-factly, folding his arms across Flint's chest and giving him a stern look. "You should be more careful." Flint grinned and flipped them both over so he was on top of Thad, who yelped at the change. "And *you* shouldn't scold me when I can do this," he said, propping himself up on his arms as Thad scowled playfully.

Smiling, Flint leaned down to kiss him, the grass rustling softly around them as Thad reached up with one hand to cup his cheek, spreading his fingers back over Flint's ear before sliding them down his neck with fiddle with the hair at the nape.

Thad whined in the back of his throat and Flint felt a rush of desire flood through him. He fought the urge to tack things further, keeping the promise he'd made to himself to let Thad control this aspect of their relationship completely.

Thad pulled back, letting his head drop into the grass again, his pupils wide and dark. "Flint," he said, voice barely audible over the swaying grass and rippling lake. "You can..." he trailed off, blushing faintly.

"Are you sure?" Flint said. "I'm fully prepared to wait for you to ready."

"I know," Thad said, smiling. "Maybe not...um, you know...s-sex." He blushed a little deeper. "But we can...fool around." He was still looking at Flint when he finished saying it, though his voice was small and faintly nervous.

Flint smiled and kissed his forehead. "If you're *sure*," he said softly.

"But I'm taking care of you, okay, pet?"

Thad gave a small nod.

Flint kissed him gently before moving down across his jaw and neck, nipping gently at the soft skin. Thad shivered and made a soft sound of contentment, tilting his head back in the grass as Flint pushed aside the collar of his shirt to kiss his collarbone, his other hand sliding up Thad's waist, the muscles fluttering beneath his fingertips.

He shifted to move down and push Thad's shirt up his stomach, kissing across the faintly tanned flesh and sucking gently at the hollow of Thad's hip. He closed his eyes, savoring the sweet taste of his skin that he'd been missing so much. The heavy scent of warm grass and flowers soaked the air.

Thad let out a breathy whimper and Flint smiled, looking up and expecting to see him with the usual look of bliss on his face. He froze when he saw tears sliding down Thad's cheeks into the grass as he bit his lip hard.

"Oh my god, Thad," Flint said, hurrying to tug Thad's shirt back down and move off him to give him space.

"I'm sorry," Thad said, sniffing and wiping his eyes as he curled into a ball. "I'm s-sorry, Flint. Every time I try and think about that sort of thing I think of...of him and I *hate* it."

"Oh god, Thad, don't...don't be sorry," Flint said, feeling awful for even *attempting* to try anything, even though Thad had told him it was fine. He should have known he wouldn't be ready yet. "Thad. Oh, Thad..."

Thad curled against him, sobbing into his side and gripping him tightly. "Shh," Flint soothed, pulling him up gently into his lap and holding him close, stroking his dark hair and letting him cry into his shoulder as tears welled in his own eyes. "Shh, pet, I'm not angry. I'm not upset. Okay? Whenever you're ready. I'm willing to wait, I promise, okay?" Thad nodded against him, kissing the side of his neck where his tears had wet the skin.

"Just...don't be sorry, okay?" Flint said. "Remember, this wasn't your fault. You didn't do anything wrong, right?"

Thad nodded again, quieting a little. He sniffed and pulled away from Flint neck, giving him a short kiss. "Thank you," he whispered. "Thank you for understanding and...and for loving me as much as you do."



Flint smiled and brushed his tears away with the backs of his fingers. "I'll *a/ways* love you this much," he said, holding him close and allowing him to rest against his chest. "More, even if that's possible." Thad snuggled closer to him, smiling a little. "I know I love *you* more all the time," he said quietly.

Flint kissed his temple. "Yeah...me too," he whispered. "Want to head back to the tower? We can look through that Gringotts information together if you'd like."

Thad nodded. "I would," he said, pushing himself up from Flint's lap and brushing off his rolled up jeans. "That'd be nice."

Flint stood next to him, plucking up a white peony and tucking it in the pocket of Thad's jeans with a smile. He held out his arm to allow Thad to walk against his side, wrapping his arm around the smaller boy's shoulders and kissing his hair softly.

He'd wait for Thad even if it meant never doing anything other than kissing him for the rest of his life.

He would *a/ways* wait for Thad.

---

Teddy Lupin was infuriating.

Ever since Cole had rejected him—well, who wouldn't when he was just playing a stupid prank?—in the library, he hadn't left him alone. It was if his lack of enthusiasm towards the Hufflepuff had simply spurred him on, encouraged him in some twisted way. He kept popping up everywhere he went even though they had completely different schedules and none of the same friends.

He'd show up when Cole was studying, surrounded by a group of friends who made far too much noise and watching Cole out of the corner of his eye when he made a joke or did something that was apparently supposed to be impressive.

It was a little pathetic how obsessed some—no, *most*—of the other students were with him. They positively fawned over him. Apparently the teachers did as well as Cole had learned—from Lupin himself when he was bragging about it—that he had relatively good marks even though Cole had never actually seen him studying in the library. Normally he wouldn't see this as odd but given the number of times he now saw the Hufflepuff in any given day, he wondered how he was doing it.

On one particular Saturday a week after Thad had gotten back, Cole was attempting to work on his Care of Magical Creatures homework when the chair across from him was suddenly occupied by a turquoise-haired, purple-eyed someone.

He sighed in annoyance, refusing to look up and hoping he would simply get the hint and leave him alone.

"*Pst*, O'Brien."

Cole ignored him, scribbling out an answer to a question on hippogriffs and flipping a page in his book.

"O'Brien," Lupin said a little louder.

Cole sniffed and bent lower over his paper.

"*Ginger!*" Lupin threw a balled up piece of parchment at his head.

"*WHAT?*" Cole shouted, looking up at him with an expression of extreme annoyance and distaste.

Lupin grinned. "That got your attention," he said, his heliotrope-colored eyes shining with amusement.

Cole made a noise of disgust and returned to his homework, grumbling.

"Aren't you going to talk to me?" Lupin said, propping his feet up on the table and tousling his turquoise hair absently. "That's rather rude, you know."

Cole stared at him. "*I'm* rude?" he said incredulously. "Who's the one...*parading* around the library with a bunch of his fans and interrupting me trying to study? Who's acting like a total...*numpty* and pretending to ask me out so he can laugh it off later with his friends? Hmm? Not me."

He huffed and returned to his worksheet.

"I'm not *pretending* to ask you out," Lupin said, the smirk clear in his voice. "I'm asking you out. Go on, O'Brien. Would it kill you?"

"Probably," Cole muttered, scowling.

Lupin laughed. "You're cute when you're angry, you know," he said, rocking his chair back off the floor and twirling his wand between his fingers. "And when you study."

Cole released an irritated sigh. He really was maddening.

"Why do you hate me so much, then?" Lupin said curiously, reaching across the table to turn Cole's book towards him so he could read it.

"Because you're a self-centered ass," Cole snapped, snatching his book back with a glare in the other boy's direction. "And I don't *hate* you. I just...considerably dislike you."

"'Considerably dislike' me?" Lupin repeated in an entertained tone.

"Well that's a new one."

"Not everyone's a member of your fan club, you know," Cole said, refusing to look at him.

"I could *make* you a member," Lupin said, tapping his foot absently on the tabletop. "Initiation's not too difficult."

"Yeah?" Cole hissed, starting to get seriously annoyed. "What is it? Worshipping you? Carving you idols out of soap?"

Lupin laughed. "No," he said, sliding his feet off the table and leaning across it towards him. "Kiss me. Come on, O'Brien. You know you want to."

Cole looked at him at last, give him a haughty glare. "No," he said firmly. "I most certainly *don't*."

Lupin pouted. "Come on," he repeated in a whining tone. "I cross my wand I won't tell anyone. We'll keep it our little secret." He wriggled his eyebrows suggestively.

Cole rolled his eyes, returning to ignoring him.

"Give me one good reason why you won't kiss me," Lupin said, still leaning across the table towards him.

"Because you—are—an—*asshole*," Cole said, punctuating each word with a tap of his palm on the table.

"But I'm a pretty asshole," Lupin said in a voice obviously intended to be charming.

Cole snorted in spite of himself, Lupin pausing to frown as he thought about what he'd just said; it looked like it was causing him quite a lot of pain, thinking so hard. He recovered quickly, though. "Come on, Ginger," he said, making a kissing noise. "Do it."

"I said *no*," Cole said angrily, slamming his book shut and shoving his things in his bag.

"Where're you going?" Lupin said, sounding disappointed as Cole stood and swung his bag over his shoulder.

"Away from you," Cole said, flashing him a glare before striding off through the shelves, back straight.

He heard Lupin stumble as he stood and smirked.

"Come on, Ginger," Lupin pleaded, jogging to catch up with him. "I swear I'll be a gentleman! I won't even feel you up until the second date."

Cole gave him a disgusted look. Who the hell did he think he was anyway?

"Third date?" Lupin offered hopefully.

"Oh, you're too thoughtful," Cole said sarcastically, rolling his eyes and wishing the idea of what Lupin had said hadn't made him blush.

"Seriously, you must get *all* the girls."

"I do," Lupin said, shrugging. "*And* all the boys. But I don't want them. I want *you*, O'Brien."

"Yeah, right," Cole muttered, picking up his pace as they left the library.

"I'm serious!" Lupin said insistently. "Come on, Ginger, you're pretty hot. And like I said...I've got a thing for redheads. We could totally be the next Hogwarts power couple. Like...like Merlin and Guinevere."

"Didn't Guinevere marry *Arthur*?" Cole said, thinking back to his History of Magic lessons.

"Oh yeah," Lupin said thoughtfully, Cole rolling his eyes next to him. Lupin hastily reverted back to the original subject. "But that doesn't matter, O'Brien, what matters is that *you* need to say yes to *me*."

"No, I don't," Cole snapped, glowering straight ahead.

"*Come on*," Lupin whined, stepping in front of him to block his path. "I promise I'll be good."

Cole scoffed, trying to get around him. "Would you just stop?" he said. "*Move*. And leave me alone."

"Not until you agree to go out with me," Lupin said, grinning and continuing to stand in his way, stepping everywhere Cole tried to step. "I can do this all day, O'Brien. I've got nowhere to go."

"You can't follow me to the Gryffindor tower," Cole said triumphantly.

"Course I can," Lupin retorted proudly. "You think I don't know every password in this place? I've got *connections*, Ginger."

Cole snorted. "*Idiot*," he muttered. "And if you follow me into the tower, I'll give you detention."

"Oh, using your power as a Prefect to get rid of me?" Lupin said with a smirk. "I'm impressed and unexpectedly turned on by this."

"Oh my god, just *leave me alone*!" Cole said, throwing up his hands.

"Not until you said yes," Lupin sang, grinning as he backed Cole up towards the wall slowly. "Come on, Ginger."

"No!" Cole snapped, stumbling a little as he stepped back from him.

"And stop calling me Ginger, you...you *wanker*."

"Oh look at you getting a mouth," Lupin said, chortling. "I like it. It'd be better connected to mine though."

Cole felt himself blushing as his back hit the wall and he was suddenly staring into a pair of fuchsia eyes that sparkled with mischief. He gulped, drawing away from Lupin as far as he could. He was at least half a foot taller than Cole.

"Come on," Lupin said, resting one hand against the wall beside Cole's head and trailing the index finger of the other down Cole's chest. "I promise I won't disappoint you." His eyes flicked down to Cole's lips and he made the tiniest sound of longing in the back of his throat. Cole's eyes widened and he froze up as Lupin lowered his head and closed his eyes.

A split second before Lupin kissed him, Cole ducked out from under his arm to leave him puckering his lips at nothing. Cole set off at a brisk walk again, heart beating rapidly in his throat.

Lupin let out an exasperated sigh and hurried after him. "That wasn't fair," he said, giving Cole a reproving look. "You should've let me kiss you, O'Brien. You'd have liked it."

Cole ignored him as they turned down the seventh floor corridor towards the Gryffindor tower.

"You know, most people in this school would beg to be in your position," Lupin said in a would-be casual voice.

"Well I'm *not* most people," Cole said with a sniff.

"You're certainly not," Lupin muttered, eyeing him appreciatively.

"Please just...stop pestering me," Cole said, feeling faintly hurt in combination with his annoyance. He was really starting to go too far with this joke.

"Alright, *fine*," Lupin said, stopping with an affected sigh. "But this isn't over...*Ginger*."

Cole rolled his eyes, glowering as he continued towards the portrait of the Fat Lady.

"You'll come 'round," Lupin cried as Cole mumbled the password to an amused looking Fat Lady and clambered through the portrait hole.

"They always do!"

Cole scowled and stomped across the room, passing by Thad and Wilson without even realizing it.

"Cole?" Thad said, sitting up with a concerned look as he set down the booklet he'd been looking through with Wilson. "What's wrong?"

"Teddy Lupin, *that's* what wrong," Cole said, casting an aggravated glare at the portrait hole.

"He's still bugging you?" Thad said sympathetically.

"Yes," Cole said crossly. "*Git*."

"You know...he might be serious," Wilson said, shrugging. "I mean...I don't know a lot about the kid but he's going a bit overboard if this is just a prank."

"That's because he's a git," Cole said, folding his arms across his chest.

Thad smiled faintly. "Maybe you should give him a chance, Cole," he said kindly. "You never know. Sometimes who you end up with can surprise you." He smiled lovingly at Wilson, who kissed his forehead and held him close.

Cole sighed, allowing his arms to fall at his sides. "Maybe you're right," he said. "But he *is* a git," he added as an afterthought, grinning as Thad giggled.

---

The next week was a haze of homework and reviews. Kurt could barely believe their N.E.W.T.s were just over a week away. He took the Friday afternoon the day before the Final to study outside with Blaine underneath the sweeping beech next to the lake carved with their initials.

Blaine was lying on his stomach, his chin propped on his fists and his Arithmancy book in the grass beneath him, number charts stretched across the grass. Kurt leaned back against the rustling tree, smiling faintly as he looked up from his Charms homework to see Blaine kicking his feet absentmindedly, humming as he referenced one of his charts before scribbling something down in his notes. He seemed to notice the lack of Kurt's quill scratching out his essay because he glanced over his shoulder at him after a minute or two, smiling.

"What?" he said, taking in his grin.

"Nothing," Kurt replied, shrugging. "Can't I look at you?"

Blaine chuckled. "Admit it," he said. "You're just checking out my ass."

"It is very nice," Kurt said, nodding and grinning a little wider as Blaine laughed.

Blaine pushed himself up and moved to sit next to him, leaning against his shoulder and kissing his cheek. "This is nice," he said, looking up at the canopy of dark leaves overhead. "I like being out here with you. It's...peaceful."

There was a sudden cry of laughter from the distant Care of Magical Creatures class gathered around the Game Keepers hut and Kurt saw two figures—one blonde and one brunette—sprinting away from the cottage at top speed.

"Well...it's peaceful *here*," Blaine amended, rolling his eyes.

Kurt smiled, sighing and tilting his head back to touch Blaine's. "I'll miss it," he said, looking around the familiar grounds.

"Me too," Blaine said softly. "A lot." He was silent for a moment before Kurt heard a faint sniff and turned to see Blaine frowning, eyes a little overbright.

"Hey," Kurt said, setting his book down. "What's wrong?"

"I know it's stupid," Blaine said, eyes fixed on nothing. "I just...I'm going to miss it. It's just a school but...it's...it's my home, you know?"

Kurt nodded. He'd only been at Hogwarts for a year and a half and he was going to miss it horribly. He couldn't imagine what it was like for Blaine, who'd spent nearly seven years of his life in the Castle.

"It's not stupid," Kurt said softly. "Hogwarts is...Hogwarts isn't just any school. I know I don't feel the same way about it as I did about McKinley. Hogwarts is special."

Blaine nodded, still staring into space. "It is," he said. He smiled.

"There's just...there's a lot to miss, you know?"

"Definitely," Kurt said, thinking of the Ravenclaw tower where he'd spent so many evenings with Blaine and Thad and the others, the classrooms and corridors, the Great Hall, the village...everything.

"I guess I'll always have a soft spot for the place," Blaine said.

"Of course you would," Kurt said, touching his hand lightly. "It's where you grew up."

Blaine turned to look at him with the familiar fond expression. "It's not just that," he said, taking Kurt's hand. "It's where I met you."

Kurt smiled, the swelling sensation he got so much when he was with Blaine expanding in his chest.

Blaine leaned forward to kiss him gently. "I love you, Kurt," he whispered, touching their foreheads together. "And one day I'm going to come back here. When we're older and our kids are graduating—I want kids, by the way—"

Kurt laughed.

"I'm going to bring them to this old tree and show them that I was just as in love with you when we were sixteen as I will be then. Because I know I'll still love you then, Kurt. I knew I couldn't stop the second I started."

He smiled, kissing away the tears slipping down Kurt's face.

"I love you, too, Blaine," Kurt said. He wondered if he'd ever get tired of saying the words. Or hearing them for that matter. Sitting here, looking into Blaine's warm hazel eyes and feeling the love radiating from every word and touch and gaze. He didn't think it was possible.

---

The corridors were quiet as Cole strode through them with the fifth year Slytherin prefect he was patrolling with. They hadn't talked much since they'd met up in the entrance hall an hour before but they'd never been close friends and rarely patrolled together. Not that she wasn't nice, they just didn't have many of the same friends.

Cole didn't mind the silence though, it gave his mind a chance to wander. And lately, it'd been wandering to Teddy Lupin. The fourth year had been just as persistent about trying to get Cole to agree to go out with him as he had been for the past few weeks. It was incredibly annoying and yet...he found himself enjoying the attention in spite of the fact that he was doing his best to ignore the other boy. He was inappropriately flirty and overly confident, an arrogant prat if he ever saw one but...well, he was very good looking. Aside from his tastelessly colored hair and eyes, he was tall but not overly so, with leanly muscled arms and a casual air that looked much too good on him to be unpracticed.

And the looks he gave Cole.... He shivered a little at the thought, at the way Lupin would tone his eyes down to the soft brown that positively smoldered with his faint smirk when he eyed Cole across the room.

No. No, he couldn't be thinking about Lupin like that. Not when he was just being an egotistical idiot and trying to either play a joke on Cole

or just turn him into his latest conquest, which he was *not* interested in becoming.

He wanted someone who cared about him, someone who could actually put their own overblown head aside long enough to concentrate on someone other than themselves. Because Cole knew *he* used to be that way and he didn't want to deal with someone like that anymore.

"Are you commentating tomorrow?" the other Prefect, Ellie, asked off-handedly, yanking Cole from his reverie as they turned the corner to the corridor leading to the kitchens.

"Huh? Oh, er, yeah, I suppose," he said, shrugging. "Don't think I'll do it next year though. Not really a huge fan of it."

"Me neither," Ellie said. "I don't mind watching it but I'm not fussed about playing. My sister, on the other hand...she's trying out for Keeper next year."

Cole nodded absently. He found it odd how very different the two twins were given that they looked so identical he would be constantly confusing them if not for their different uniforms.

Their footsteps echoed around the cheerily decorate and warmly lit corridor, which was lined in painting of food that made Cole suddenly hungry. Ellie stopped suddenly just as Cole was about to ask her if they could swing by the kitchens.

Cole stopped with her. "What's wrong?" He said when she drew her wand, eyes narrowed.

She held a finger to her lips and stepped slowly towards the alcove up ahead past a painting of a banquet table that Cole thought led to the Hufflepuff dorms. He could hear faint rustling and wet smacking sounds that were, unfortunately, familiar to him for all the wrong reasons.

Ellie rounded the corner to the alcove and made a triumphant noise, flicking her wand and sending out a jet of pale sparks into the darkness. Someone Cole couldn't see yelped.

"You're out past curfew, Calvin," Ellie said sternly. "You too, Lupin. Twenty points from Gryffindor *and* Hufflepuff."

Cole's heart skipped and clenched at the sound of Lupin's name as a sixth year girl with curly brown hair appeared from the alcove and hurried past him, her cheeks flushed and her lips kiss-bruised.

Lupin stepped out from the shadows, his turquoise hair rumpled, his robes loose and a smug smirk on his face. There was a harsh purple hickey on the side of his neck.

"Hey, Collins," he said, winking at Ellie as he leaned against the wall coolly and folded his arms. "Fancy a go?"



Ellie made a disgusted noise. "Not on your life," she muttered. "Now get back to your dorm before I take another twenty points."

"Alright, alright, cool your wand," Lupin said, laughing lightly. "I'm going."

He turned, grinning, and his purple eyes fell on Cole. His smirk faded and the color drained from his face, his hair and eyes paling to a dull brown. He gulped nervously.

"Shit," he muttered.

Cole glared at him, shaking his head in disgust. He turned on his heel and set off down the corridor, trying to suppress the feeling of betrayal and hurt rising in his chest that threatened tears in his eyes.

"Ginger, wait!" Lupin shouted, ignoring Ellie's threats and running after him. "*Ginger!* O'Bri—Cole! Stop!"

"Piss off!" Cole snapped.

"Aw, come on now, don't be like that," Lupin said, falling into step next to him. "You can't be ma—"

"Don't tell me what I can and can't be," Cole said, blinking back furious tears. "I'll be whatever I damn well please."

"Don't be mad at me, Ginger," Lupin said, sounding anxious. "Come on, it's not like she *means* anything! I was bored and you weren't budging. You can't blame me for needing *something*. You know I like *you*, Ginger."

Cole laughed harshly, his voice cracking as he did.

"I *do*," Lupin said insistently as they entered the entrance hall. "I like you a lot, I just...I'm easily tempted. I have...urges, you know? But you're the one I *really* want, Ginger! Cross my wand and hope to kiss the giant squid."

He seemed to hope this would make Cole smile and his face fell in disappointment when Cole flashed him a glare and turned up the marble staircase. Lupin hastened to follow after him, stumbling on his robes as he did.

"Come on, Ginger," Lupin pleaded when he'd gained his footing again.

"I swear I'll change. I'll never touch another bird again, promise. Never again. Please go out with me?"

"No!" Cole shouted, turning on stairs to glower down at him. Lupin looked taken aback by his level of anger and by the tears streaming down his face. "You're an arrogant, self-centered *asshole*, Teddy Lupin! You can't just go around screwing one person and expect me to think you're seriously interested in me!"

Lupin half-smiled. "I wasn't screw—"

"I'm not finished!" Cole shouted. Lupin clamped his mouth shut tightly.

"You go around like you own this damn school when all you are is a stupid—" he poked him hard in the chest, forcing him down a step, "—"

conceited—" he poked him again, stepping down after him, "*—prick!*" He was breathing heavily when he finished, no longer crying as disgust overshoot his hurt. "You're a prick and a...a *slut*. You're a slut, Teddy Lupin, and that's all you'll ever be!"

Lupin looked faintly hurt by this but Cole ignored it. "Now get back to your dorm before I give you detention for the rest of the year."

Lupin stared at him in shock for a moment, swallowing nervously.

"I...I'm sorry," he said softly. It sounded genuine but Cole wasn't about to trust him. "I didn't mean to hurt you. I'm sorry, Ginger."

"Well, good for you," Cole snapped. "Whatever helps you sleep at night."

"Gi—Cole," Lupin said, surprisingly gentle. "Please don't...I really *am* sorry. I *really* like you. I...I can change."

"Congratulations," Cole snapped before turning back up the stairs and striding away as Ellie appeared at the end of the basement corridor.

"Cole," Lupin said, barely audible above Cole's footsteps. "Please...I'm sorry."

"Ten more points from Hufflepuff," Ellie said as she approached Lupin.

"Now get back to your dormitory."

Cole turned at the top of the stairs to wait for her, looking down at Lupin with cold eyes. The other boy opened his mouth to speak, a dejected look in his brown eyes. He caught Cole's glare and shut his jaw; he swallowed, sighed, and turned to leave, head lowered.

"What," Ellie said as she walked up the stairs to him, glancing back at Lupin as he disappeared down the corridor after he threw another miserable look in Cole's direction. "Was *that* all about?"

"Nothing," Cole muttered, shaking his head. "Let's...let's go. We've still got the History of Magic corridor to patrol."

She nodded, looking mildly concerned but not pressing the matter.

Cole turned his head to wipe his eyes on his robes, wishing he hadn't felt as hurt as he did by what Lupin had done and wishing even more that he could stop caring what he thought altogether.

## Chapter Twenty-Nine

A scrum of white, fluffy clouds skidded across the periwinkle sky when Kurt made his way down to the Quidditch pitch with Thad and Leighton Saturday morning, Blaine, Flint and the others having already gone down to change into their Quidditch robes and Wes and David already doing their usual job of saving their seats for them.

"Are you sure you want to sit with us?" Kurt said, glancing over at Leighton. "You can sit with your friends instead."

"You're my friend," Leighton said, grinning. "And it's the last match you'll be here for. Course I want to sit with you."

Kurt smiled, glancing over at Thad, who was wearing Flint's oversized Tornadoes practice shirt and clutching a folded banner that read "*My Lion's a Tornado*" in flashing red and gold letters. "Doing anything special for Flint's birthday tomorrow?" he said, touching his arm gently.

He knew Thad was still having trouble returning to the point he'd been with Flint in the physical side of their relationship. They'd of course talked about it, they talked about everything, and Thad had confessed that every time he let Flint try and do something, he got flashes of what had been done to him.

"I got him a new pair of Quidditch boots," Thad said, fiddling with the corner of the banner he was holding.

"That's not what I mean and you know it," Kurt said, speaking softly so Leighton couldn't hear. "How are you doing with...with everything? You know Flint isn't going to expect you to do anything, right? I just don't want you to...to think you're obligated to or something just because it's his birthday."

Thad smiled. "I know I'm not," he said. "I'm just going to try and...and see what happens, I suppose."

"Alright," Kurt said with a sigh. "As long as you don't put pressure on yourself. I don't want you thinking you have to."

"I won't," Thad said, smiling a little wider. "Thanks, Kurt."

Kurt patted his arm. "I'm here to help," he said. He turned to Leighton, who'd been humming randomly. "How are things going with Gavin, then?"

"Brill," Leighton said, grinning. "I can't wait for exams to be over." He sighed. "I miss him."

Kurt smiled sadly. "I know what you mean," he said sympathetically.

"Last year was awful over the summer. But you'll see him all the time come fall. I'm sure you'll have plenty of, erm, private lessons with him."

Leighton grinned a little broader. "That's what he keeps saying," he said. "Somehow I doubt he's talking about my education."

Kurt snorted and Thad giggled as they reached the pitch, fighting a little to get through the crowd towards the stairs.

"Um, I'm going to go talk to Flint," Thad said, stopping at the base of the stands. "Wish him luck."

"You already did that," Kurt said, thinking back to breakfast when Thad had given Flint a tight hug and brief kiss before he and the rest of the Gryffindor team had left the Hall.

"I know," Thad said, looking sheepish. "I just...I want to talk to him if that's okay?"

"Of course it is," Kurt said hastily, accepting the banner from him.

"We'll go get our seats alright?"

Thad smiled. "Thanks, Kurt," he said. "I'll see you both in a bit." He hurried off through the crowd back towards the Gryffindor changing rooms.

"He alright?" Leighton said, watching after Thad as he was swallowed by the throng.

"Yeah," Kurt said, sighing as they climbed the stairs to the stands.

"He's still trying to...get back into the swing of things I guess."

"I can't believe what that...*troll* did to him," Leighton said, shaking his head. "It's...it's awful. I mean, I don't know what I'd have done if it had been Gavin. Thad seems to be everyone's target, doesn't he?"

"Unfortunately," Kurt said with another sigh. "He comes off as so vulnerable even though he could work circles around anyone else in this school with his wand. He's...better, I suppose, now that he's out of St. Mungo's."

"That's good," Leighton said as they made their way towards the bench Wes and David were sharing. "I'm...I'm really going to miss you next year, Kurt."

Kurt stopped on the stairs, turning to look at him and taking in his sheepish look and small frown. "I'll miss you too," he said, smiling.

"We can write and...if you're interested you can always try and get a job and St. Mungo's. I told you I'd put in a good word for you."

Leighton smiled. "I'd like that," he said, nodding.

"Kurt, Cross, come on," Wes called from his seat, sounding faintly panicky. "Someone's going to take your seats if you don't!"

Kurt rolled his eyes, adjusting the banners in his arms. "Come on then, let's sit down before Wes has an aneurysm," he said, continuing down the stairs towards the other two boys.

Leighton laughed and followed after him, shaking his head and grinning.

---

"Gwen, you'd better not go easy on them just because your *boyfriend's* on their team."

A few of the team gasped, Flint pausing from putting on his boots as Gwen narrowed her eyes at their Keeper. "I wouldn't dream of it," she said. "And just because you can't get a date to save your life doesn't mean you have to be jealous, Calvin."

The girl blushed and glared at Gwen, who ignored her and returned to strapping on her armguards.

"Listen, I know you two aren't getting along but can we please just concentrate on Quidditch?" Flint said, looking between the two of them. "Keep your personal problems off the pitch."

The girls exchanged another haughty glare but stayed silent.

"Yeah, you two," Justin Braxton said. "We need to win this for Flint. It's his last year."

"And they you go off to be a big, bad, professional Quidditch player," one of the Beaters said, grinning.

"And he's getting married," another Chaser piped up. Everyone "aw-ed" loudly.

"Speaking of," Gwen muttered, eyes affixed to the doorway.

Flint turned to see Thad smiling as he walked towards Flint, somehow managing to look both adorable and incredibly sexy in a too-large t-shirt of Flint's. "Hey, pet," Flint said. "I thought you were going to sit with Kurt and the others?"

"I am," Thad said, blushing a little. "I just...I thought...can we talk for a minute? Um...outside?"

"Sure," Flint said, setting down his broom. "You lot be good, I'll be back in a bit," he added, looking sternly around at his team before leading Thad outside to the back of the changing rooms under the stands. "So, what's up?"

Thad didn't answer, simply gripped Flint's face in his hands and kissed him, slow and sweet, his thumbs brushing over Flint's cheekbones and his warm body pressing flush against his own.

By the time Flint had regained enough sense to react, Thad was pulling away with another gentle peck on the lips.

"W-what was that for?" Flint gasped, staring at him as his brain slowly kicked back into gear.

"I just wanted to wish you good luck," Thad said, blushing faintly.

"Without...without everyone watching. I love you."

Flint smiled. "I love you, too, pet," he said running the backs of his fingers over Thad's cheek.

Thad smiled, biting his bottom lip and looking down at where he'd placed his hands on Flint's chest.

"Is there anything else you needed?" Flint said, eyeing him curiously.

Thad took a deep breath, exhaling a little shakily as he looked back up at him. "You...you remember how I wished you good luck...I-last year?" Flint smiled faintly. How could he forget? That had been the first time Thad had ever touched him. He'd definitely changed since then. "I remember," he said softly. "But...pet, you don't have to do that. I know you're not ready to start do that sort of thing again." "I...I think I am," Thad said in small voice. "I, um...I'm going to take care of you so...that's not really the same anyway, right? I'll be alright."

"Pet," Flint said gently. "You don't need to do anything. I'm fine, really. I don't want you—*ahh*." He gasped as Thad's hand slid down his torso to cup the front of his Quidditch pants. "P-pet...Thad, don't—"

"Don't you like it?" Thad whispered, kissing up the side of his neck as he rubbed gently, his other hand trailing down Flint's arm.

"Thad, you k-know what I—*ah*—mean," Flint said, thighs shaking when Thad's thumb started kneading at the slit through his pants.

"I know," Thad said, nipping at his earlobe. "You remember how back during Christmas break I told I'd...practiced?" Flint groaned in reply.

"Well...after what happened last week I've been...*practicing* to make sure that *you're* the only one I think about whenever...well, you know." Flint stared straight ahead in disbelief.

"I'm not ready for sex but...you can touch me if you want," Thad breathed against his neck.

The two sides of Flint's brain—the one that told him that he needed to wait just in case and the one that was sending all the blood south to where Thad's fingers were massaging where he was now straining in his clothes—warred silently with each other.

"I want you to," Thad said softly, kissing the tender spot behind Flint's ear and blowing a stream of air over it.

Flint groaned, his self-control dissipating completely. He ran his arms down Thad's sides to hook onto his thighs, lifting him. Getting the hint, Thad wrapped his arms around his neck and his legs around his waist, whimpering when Flint turned them around and pushed him lightly against the wall, rolling their hips together.

"Flint...Flint, yes, please don't stop.... So good." Thad dropped his head back onto the stone side of the building, eyes closed and throat bobbing as he swallowed.

"So," Flint said as he gently dragged his hips against Thad's. "You were touching yourself?"

"Mhmm," Thad said, biting his lip to stay silent.

"You know I'm the only one who's supposed to do that, right?" Flint murmured, pressing wet, open-mouthed kisses over the other boy's

jaw. "But I'll let it slide because...that's really sexy...thinking of you doing that. Maybe you'll let me watch sometime."

Thad shivered at the suggestion, legs tightening around Flint's middle to force their hips closer together.

"Is that a yes?" Flint said, pulling Thad's earlobe into his mouth and sucking gently.

"M-maybe," Thad whispered. "If you're g-good."

Flint smiled and caught Thad's lips in a slightly messy kiss, sure to be careful with each movement and touch so as not to trigger any of the bad memories both of them had been working so hard to push aside. He pulled back, resting his forehead against Thad's and staring into his wide—currently lust-blown—dark eyes.

"I love you," he said softly.

Thad smiled. "You too," he whispered, planting a short kiss on his nose. His eyes fluttered closed again as Flint pushed their hips together. "Flint...I'm so close," he gasped.

"Me too," Flint said, returning to kissing along Thad's jaw and neck. He'd been close for a few minutes. It *had* been over a month since he'd done anything like this. He simply didn't feel right even thinking about...taking care of himself when Thad wasn't comfortable with being touched yet.

Thad whined in the back of his throat, thighs squeezing at Flint's waist so hard it almost hurt. Short, sharp breaths passed over his lips; his fingers dug into the back of Flint's neck, scraping over the skin and gripping at the collar of his robes.

He gasped suddenly, eyes flying open as a low, halting moan built in his throat. Flint kissed him to capture the sound and Thad responded hungrily, gripping the back of his head and pulling him closer as he trembled.

Flint let himself go a few seconds later, arms struggling to hold Thad as his legs shook beneath him. He swore into Thad's mouth, groaning; hot air passed between them as they stilled, Thad with his legs still wrapped around his waist as he slumped back against the wall, tilting his head back and breathing heavily.

Flint kissed his neck softly, tasting the tang of sweat on the warm skin. A small groan from Thad vibrated across his lips and he lifted his head to look at him.

He looked wrecked, eyes glazed, dark hair disheveled and cheeks flushed; the fringe of his hair glistened with sweat and his lips were red and swollen, Flint didn't think he looked much better.

Thad slowly untangled his legs and Flint let him down gently, kissing the top of his head as he did.

"How are you feeling?" he said, watching him closely and brushing his dark hair back.

Thad made a small noise in the back of his throat, blinking slowly and stumbling a little as he tried to stand on his own. Flint placed his hands on his waist to steady him.

"Good, huh?" he said, smiling faintly as Thad nodded, a wistful smile pasted on his lips. "You're adorable, you know that?"

Thad nodded again, resting against his chest and snaking his arms around him. "Mmm, don't go," he mumbled. "Just stay with me."

Flint smiled and held him close. "You want me to skip the match?" he said, nuzzling his hair. "I'd do that for you, you know?"

Thad sighed a little as he pulled back, smiling up at him. "I know," he said, rocking on his toes to kiss him. "I'm alright though. Just...let me..." He pulled out his wand and flicked it, the uncomfortable sensation disappearing from Flint's boxers as he did.

"Thanks, pet," he said, resting his hand under Thad's chin so he looked at him. "I love you. And I swear if you need to stop doing this sort of thing, I won't think any less of you. I'm here to help you. I'll wait."

Thad smiled. "I know," he said softly, resting one hand on the side of his neck and giving him a slow kiss. "I should probably let you go," he said thoughtfully as he pulled back. "I think it starts soon and Kurt will be wondering why I'm taking so long."

"Alright," Flint said, planting a kiss on his forehead. "I'll see you after the match."

"Okay," Thad said, smiling brightly and kissing him on the cheek before hurrying off around the changing room, glancing back over his shoulder at the corner and blowing him a kiss.

Flint smiled, leaning against the wall and watching the spot he'd disappeared. He could hardly believe that he was going to be marrying him in less than three months. He still wasn't sure how he managed to get so lucky.

"Are you decent?" Gwen's voice came from around the corner.

Flint laughed. "Yeah, I'm coming," he said, turning and walking back to the side of the building where she was leaning against the doorframe, lips pursed. "Sorry," he said a little sheepishly.

She grinned and patted him on the shoulder. "It's alright, Captain," she said as they walked back inside together. "As long as you pull out a win, we'll forgive you."

"Oh, is that all?" Flint said, laughing again as he shouldered his broom and looked around at the other crimson-clad players. "You all know the drill," he said. "We've been here enough times before. Gwen—"

"Yeah, yeah, catch the Snitch," Gwen said with a smirk.



Flint grinned. "Alright, let's go," he said, striding out onto the pitch to loud cheers and boos from the stands.

Blaine and the rest of the Ravenclaw team were already waiting at the center of the field, where Madam Hooch stood next to the ball crate.

"Captains, shake hands," she said, though Blaine and Flint were already clasping hands and grinning at each other.

"Good luck," Blaine said, nodding.

"You too," Flint said with a smile.

"Don't go easy on me, Davison," Jeff piped up from where he was standing next to Nick. "We want to beat you on our own."

Gwen smirked. "You wish, Campbell," she said, Jeff laughing as he swung his leg over his broom.

Madam Hooch released the Snitch and Bludgers as they all gripped their brooms tightly. "Alright," she said, holding the Quaffle in one hand and her whistle in the other. "Keep it clean."

Flint exchanged a grin with Blaine as she blew two short blasts on her whistle and threw the bright red Quaffle up and fifteen brooms shot into the air.

---

Kurt cheered along with the rest of the crowd at the two teams rose up over the pitch, Flint quickly snatching the Quaffle from mid-air and shooting off towards the goal hoops where Blaine had just turned to face him.

There was a scream of delight from the Gryffindors as the Quaffle soared through Blaine's fingers into the middle goal hoop and Flint punched the air in triumph.

"Thad's back," Leighton said off-handedly.

Kurt turned to see Thad struggling to get back to their seats in middle of the row, apologizing as a few students were forced to stand, grumbling, to let him through.

"Sorry I'm a bit late," Thad said as he sat down on Kurt's other side, hair messy and lips slightly reddened. "I was, erm—"

"Wishing Flint good luck?" Kurt said, lifting an eyebrow.

Thad blushed faintly and nodded.

"And you're *sure* you're alright?" Kurt said, touching his leg gently.

Thad smiled and nodded again. "Yeah," he said brightly. "I'm doing better."

"Good," Kurt said, patting his knee and smiling before turning back to the match, where a penalty had just been called on Gryffindor. They watched Hanna score easily before the match picked up again, Gwen and Ethan circling the pitch overhead in search of the Snitch.

"*That's thirty-ten to Gryffindor,*" Cole O'Brien's voice rang out over the stands. He sounded faintly bored. "*And it looks like Justin*

*Brickston...no, Braxton is going to score again. Nope, blocked by Blaine Anderson. And now Tonya Greyson has the Quaffle. She just dodged a Bludger. Good for her."*

"Wow," Leighton said, half-laughing. "He *really* doesn't want to do that, does he?"

"He's not a huge fan of Quidditch," Thad said, leaning forward to look at him. "I'm not really, either but...Flint likes it."

"'Likes' is a bit of an understatement," Kurt said, Leighton laughing beside him as Thad giggled.

*"And now it looks like Hanna Thompson is going to score. Yep. So that's thirty-twenty still to Gryffindor,"* Cole said, sighing a little into the microphone. *"And—oh, look, someone's walking onto the pitch."*

Kurt leaned forward to look down onto the stretch of grass, where a lone figure with bright blue hair was striding purposefully towards the center of the field.

*"Oh god, not him,"* Cole muttered. A few people laughed as he sighed in exasperation. *"Lupin, get off the pitch."*

But the blue-hair boy shook his head and stopped at the very center of the pitch, pointing his wand at his throat and saying. *"Sonorus."*

The situation was horribly familiar to Kurt, though he didn't think anything Lupin was going to do would be like what Penelope had done to him and Leighton. A few people were tittering, apparently the Hufflepuff was something like a celebrity from what Kurt had heard.

"I've got something to say," Lupin said, voice echoing around the stands. "About Cole O'Brien."

*"Oh, Merlin, no,"* Cole groaned. *"Someone shut him up!"*

The players had stopped flying to turn to look at Lupin, a few of them looking vaguely confused. Nick and Jeff were leaning against each other in mid-air, laughing.

Lupin seemed to steel himself, nodding stiffly. "I fancy Cole O'Brien," he said. "And I promise not to touch another bird or bloke until he agrees to go out with me."

Cole groaned in embarrassment. Kurt could almost hear him blushing. A few people sounded shocked, others were laughing, two girls a few rows in front of Kurt burst into tears.

"I think Hooch is going to shut him up," Leighton said, on the verge of laughter himself as he pointed to where Madam Hooch was flying towards Lupin, shaking her head.

"So any of you who wanted a piece of this," Lupin said, gesturing to himself. "It's not going to happen."

"Cocky blighter, isn't he?" Leighton said, still grinning. Thad was giggling into his hand on Kurt's other side.

"I'm swearing off all of you," Lupin said. "Because I don't want anyone other than O'Brien. I'm willing to wait until he's ready to let me suck his—"

His mouth kept moving but nothing came out and he turned to see Madam Hooch, who'd cast the Silencing Charm, striding towards him with a stern look. Lupin took one look at her and sprinted off the pitch at top speed to laughter from around the stands.

"*I'll kill him*," Cole mumbled. "*Oh look at that! Gwen Davison caught the Snitch. Brilliant. Gryffindor wins the Cup.*" There was the loud clunk and the whine of feedback as if he'd knocked the microphone off the table as he stood.

Everyone turned to see Gwen clutching the winged Snitch triumphantly by the Gryffindor goal posts, Ethan flying away looking dejected. There were a few seconds in which everyone seemed to process the abrupt end to the match, and then the red and gold-clad Gryffindor supporters erupted in applause and screams.

Thad squealed and leapt up, clapping excitedly and waving to Flint, who was grinning as his teammates surrounded him, laughing and hugging each other happily.

"Oh, Merlin, I have to tell Gav about this," Leighton said, chuckling.

"He'll love it. I'll see you around, Kurt, Thad."

"Bye," Kurt said as Leighton stood and rushed off through the dejected Ravenclaw crowd.

"Poor Cole," Thad said, though he was grinning faintly. "He's quite persistent isn't he? Lupin, I mean."

"Looks like it," Kurt said, waving to catch Blaine's attention as he searched the crowd for him. "You and Flint going to the party tonight?"

"I think so," Thad said with a small sigh. "I'm not really one for parties, though."

"You had fun last year," Kurt said, smirking as Thad blushed. "Come on, let's go get our boys." He pulled Thad up with him and set off through the chattering throng, one hand gripping Thad's forearm. Thad ran off towards Flint the second they got to the bottom of the stairs and Kurt smiled as Flint swept him up in a tight hug.

A pair of arms slipped around his waist from behind and he jumped, yelping in surprise.

"Easy, love," Blaine said, chuckling as he kissed the back of Kurt's neck. "Just me."

"You can't keep doing that," Kurt said, scowling playfully at him.

Blaine grinned and rubbed his nose against Kurt's. "Sorry," he said, squeezing him. "I just like catching you off guard. You're so cute when you're surprised."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Jerk," he muttered. "Sorry you lost," he added as Blaine took his hand and they set off towards the changing rooms. Blaine shrugged. "I'll be alright," he said. "I still get to play for the Tornados. And Gryffindor deserved it."

"Hard to believe that's coming from the man who didn't want me to even be *friends* with Flint because he was on the House team," Kurt said, glancing over at him.

Blaine laughed. "Yeah, I guess my priorities are a bit different now."

Kurt smiled as they stopped outside the changing room. "I'll wait for you, okay?" he said, loosening his grip on Blaine's hand and expecting the other boy to mirror the action so he could change out of his Quidditch robes. But Blaine simply wrapped his other arm around Kurt's waist and pulled him close, kissing him gently.

He smiled faintly when they broke apart. "You look good today," he said softly. "You always look good but...you know what I mean."

Kurt nodded. "Thank you," he said, lying one arm around Blaine's shoulder and twirling the curls at the nape of his neck around his fingers. "You look good, too."

"Oh, don't lie, I know I'm gross," Blaine said, laughing.

Kurt smiled, leaning into him a little for another kiss.

"Alright," Blaine said, forcing himself away and sliding his arms free.

"I've got to change. Then we'll get some lunch and watch Jeff and Nick mope until it's time for the party, okay?"

"Sounds good," Kurt said. "Love you."

Blaine paused at the doorway, looking back at him fondly. "Love you, too," he said. He watched him for another moment before ducking into the changing rooms, broom in hand.

Kurt leaned against the wall, looking up into the vibrant sky. It suddenly hit him that this was it. He'd be leaving Hogwarts for good in three weeks. No more Quidditch matches or meals in the Great Hall, no more early mornings of waking up and sitting and talking with Thad while they drank tea or laughing at Jeff and Nick's shenanigans in class.

He sniffed, suddenly realizing there were tears in his eyes, which he hurriedly wiped away.

"What's wrong?"

He turned to see Blaine walking towards him wearing jeans and a Ravenclaw T-shirt, looking concerned.

"Nothing," Kurt said, shaking his head. "I just...I don't want to leave. I don't want it to end."

Blaine's gaze softened and he wrapped an arm around his shoulders.

"Oh, love, I know," he said. "Neither do I but...we'll have plenty of adventures of our own in London, right? It'll be alright."

"I know," Kurt said, staring across the sloping grounds. "It's just...it's going to be an adjustment."

"Well...it was an adjustment when you first came here, right?" Blaine said, rubbing his back gently.

Kurt nodded.

"So, we'll be okay," Blaine said, smiling. "We'll have each other. And Thad and Flint will be close and I'm *sure* Jeff and Nick will be over all the time because I know for a fact they can cook their way out of a paper bag."

Kurt hiccupped and laughed.

"There you go," Blaine said, smiling and kissing him on the cheek.

"Come on. Let's head to lunch. We'll get something delicious and horrible for you and you're eating it all."

Kurt smiled and leaned against him. "Okay," he said, wrapping his arm around Blaine's waist as they set off back to the Castle together in the warm June air.

---

Cole couldn't *believe* what had happened at the match. He'd locked himself away in his dorm, fuming about Lupin for half the day, wondering what in the world could have possibly driven him to act like such a complete...*wanker*. He was ridiculous.

He didn't know what to think of Lupin anymore. He was over the top and loud; crude and crass but...there were moments when he wasn't smirking or giving Cole's suggestive looks, when his eyes were soft and his smile warm. It was so confusing and he was at a loss as to how to interpret him anymore.

He'd been pacing back and forth around the room, occasionally throwing himself on his bed to glare at the dark canopy.

Sometime in the evening, when the sun was setting across Forbidden Forest there was a gentle knock at the door and he looked up from where his face was currently pressed into his pillow.

"Cole?" Thad's voice said tentatively. "Are you okay?"

Cole pushed himself up and moved to open the door, giving Thad a tight smile and allowing him into the otherwise empty dormitory.

"Hey," he grunted, shutting the door behind him and returning to flop back on his bed.

"Hey," Thad said softly. He sat down next to Cole and gave him an anxious look. "Why don't...why don't you come down to the party? They'll be plenty of people there and...I didn't see Lupin so...you can come celebrate."

Cole sighed, tucking his hands behind his head. "I don't feel much like partying," he muttered.

Thad laid a hand on his knee. "I'm sorry," he said softly.

Cole felt sudden, unexpected tears welling in his eyes and he blinked hastily. "I just...I don't understand why he's doing this to me," he said, sniffing. "He says he likes me and then fools around with other people and then...pulls that stunt and...I don't know what to think anymore."

Thad gave his knee a sympathetic squeeze. "Sometimes people act pretty insane when they like someone," he said, smiling faintly.

Cole looked over at him, unable to stop himself from smiling as well. "I don't know if he likes me or if he's just pretending, though," he said, sighing.

"Just...come down to the party," Thad said, adjusting his jacket absently. "You'll have fun. I promise."

Cole sighed, considering the suggestion for a moment. "Alright," he said at last. He sat up as Thad beamed at him. "Just...let me get my hat and stuff." He opened his trunk and pulled on a sweater and gold Gryffindor cap. It might be June but the nights were still chilly at Hogwarts. Turning to Thad, he shrugged a little, tugging his hat down self-consciously.

"You look very nice," Thad said, smiling as he stood with him. "No let's go. There's lots of Butterbeer and when I left, Jeff and Nick were entertaining everyone by seeing who can drink the most Firewhiskey in one go. I think it's more of a test to see who passes out first." He wrinkled his nose in distaste.

Cole grinned as they walked down the spiral staircase and out of the nearly empty Gryffindor common room together.

The Castle was silent around them, their footsteps echoing off the stone corridors.

"I haven't been to one of these before," Cole said absently. "Are they fun?"

Thad shrugged. "They're not bad," he said. "A bit loud for my taste but...I guess it's a bit of a tradition. And as it's my last year, I suppose I ought to go."

They walked in silence for a few minutes, striding through the oak front doors into the cool evening air. There was a crowd of sixty or seventy students gathered at the beach, loud, raucous cries and shouts of laughter echoing up to them.

"Oh, it looks like Nick won," Thad said off-handedly as they approached the group to find Jeff passed out on the fringes, Gwen Davison holding her wand out, pointed at his face.

"*Aquamenti!*" She cried, laughing along with the rest of the group gathered as a jet of water shot from her wand to hit Jeff in the face and he sat up, sputtering and shaking water from his eyes.

Thad made a faint noise of disapproval, leading Cole to where Wilson was standing with Blaine, Hummel, Cross, and his best friend, Daniel Westwood, by the shallows.

Thad fished him a Butterbeer from where they were chilling in the lake, popping the cork and passing him the bottle with a smile.

"O-oh," Cole said, staring at the bottle. "I've, um...I've never had Butterbeer before."

"Really?" Thad said, looking shocked. "It's quite good. You should have some. It's not strong. Just go easy."

Cole bit his lip anxiously for a moment before taking a drink, blinking in surprise at the warmth that flooded him immediately. "Wow," he said, staring into the bottle.

"Good, right?" Thad said, grinning. "Come on, you can stay with us."

"Are you sure?" Cole said, following him over to where Wilson and the others were gathered. "I don't want to be annoying."

"You're not annoying," Thad said, elbowing him lightly.

Cole smiled and took another sip of Butterbeer.

"Hey, pet," Wilson said, wrapping an arm around Thad's shoulders and kissing the top of his head when they approached. "Convinced him to come down, then?"

Thad nodded, snuggling against Wilson's side. "I told him Lupin wasn't here."

"Actually," Westwood said, pulling a face. "I think I just saw him running around with some Slytherin fifth years a few minutes ago." He craned his neck to look around, squinting as he peered over the crowd.

"Oh no," Cole muttered, ducking his head and trying to covertly search for the other boy. It wasn't difficult to spot him with his brightly colored hair and Cole's eyes fell on him not far from where he was standing. He seemed to be looking for someone; it didn't take Cole much to guess who.

His fuchsia eyes fell on Cole and his face lit up.

"Crap," Cole muttered as Lupin started pushing towards them. "I gotta go."

Thad barely had a chance to say goodbye before Cole had ducked into the crowd, for once thankful of his height as he pulled his hat a little more snugly onto his head in the hopes of hiding his bright red hair. He glanced over his shoulder, peering through the throng to try and see where Lupin had gotten to. Sighing in relief that he didn't see him, he turned back around only to run straight into a certain Hufflepuff with turquoise hair.

"There you are," Lupin said, grinning as he steadied Cole with a hand on his arm.

"Get off," Cole grumbled, pulling his arm away. "I don't want to talk to you."

Lupin's face fell a little. "But...I thought-"

"Thought that telling the whole school that you wanted to...to..." Cole shook his head, scowling. "In what world would that *possibly* be a good idea?"

Lupin's shoulders slumped a little. "I just...I wanted you to know I'm serious," he muttered. "About...about liking you. I'm not messing you around. I'm not...I'm not very good with being all...*romantic* or whatever."

Cole made a scoffing noise. "You think?" he mumbled.

"I'm trying," Lupin insisted. "I *really* am. I swear."

Cole rolled his eyes and took a long gulp of Butterbeer. He already wanted the night to be over.

"Why won't you just believe me?" Lupin said, voice lowered so that Cole had to lean towards him to hear what he said.

"Because," Cole said, returning to his former position and taking an extra step back for good measure. "You pretended like you cared—"

"I'm not pretending," Lupin said in a small voice. He swallowed, glanced down at his feet and then returned his gaze to Cole. "I'm not..."

"Well...it's hard to tell when you say you like me and then a few hours later I find you with some girl latched onto your neck," Cole said, voice hard and eyes cold.

Lupin sighed, gripping his face in his hand for a moment, dragging his fingers down across his lips and chin before pulling them back to rub the side of his neck. "I'm sorry," he said. "I am. I was being stupid. Why can't...why can't you just believe me?"

"What reason do I have to believe you?" Cole said, staring into his Butterbeer to avoid his gaze. He stiffened when Lupin's hand came to rest on his upper arm.

"Because I'm telling the truth," Lupin said, leaning closer to him. "I want to...to be *with* you. Not just...as some 'hook-up'. I swear, I'm not...not just trying to...get you in bed, or, whatever."

"But that's your *eventual* intention," Cole said, cocking an eyebrow.

The fact that Lupin didn't answer immediately was confirmation enough for Cole and he scoffed, turning away from him and shrugging his arm out of his grasp.

"Stop," Lupin said, voice actually cracking a little. He grabbed Cole's arm to turn him back around, vibrant eyes looking unusually paled and drained of color. "Please."

"I'm sorry," Cole said, shaking his head. "I just...I can't."



Lupin closed his eyes for a moment, exhaling slowly. "Alright," he said, opening his eyes at last. "I'll leave you alone."

"Really?" Cole said, faintly surprised.

"You obviously don't want me around," Lupin said, not looking at him.

"So...I'll let you get back to your...stuff." He gestured around at the chattering crowd.

He fixed Cole with a steady gaze, the hand on his arm moving up and across his shoulder. Cole gulped and stiffened when he felt the feather light touch of fingertips across his neck, the brush of a thumb on his collarbone. It was gentle and timid, nothing like what Lupin was usually like, and froze him in place.

Lupin's eyes searched his features and for a split second, it looked like he was leaning forward and Cole's stomach squirmed. But then he was walking away, the warmth of his hand gone and the faint scent of his cologne lingering on the air.

Cole turned to watch him leave, still slightly shocked by what had just happened. He turned back to his drink, staring down into the bottle and frowning. Touching the spot on his neck where Lupin's hand had been, he wondered why his skin felt like it was lighting up with electricity from the touch...and why he missed it so much.

He couldn't let himself feel like this. Not about Lupin, not about someone who'd been with at least a dozen different people in the last six months from what he'd heard. Why would he suddenly change and chase after *him* of all people? Cole wasn't special. He wasn't...popular or all that attractive or even unusually smart.

The only thing he could think of as a possible reason was that he'd saved Thad from Derricks but even that seemed unlikely given how little Lupin cared about that sort of thing, more impressed by those high on the Hogwarts ladder, which Cole certainly wasn't even *with* the after-effects of the incident.

Within fifteen minutes, he'd downed his Butterbeer and two more without even realizing it as he continued to contemplate Lupin. He was suddenly feeling much warmer and faintly light-headed as he stumbled a little through the crowd, humming.

"You alright, Cole?" Ellie Collins said, grinning from where she was sitting with her sister and a few other fifth year girls.

Cole nodded, smiling broadly as the girls giggled. "Awesome," he said, surprised at how slurred his own voice was.

"Maybe you should go sleep it off," Ellie said, biting her lip and obviously fighting back laughter. "How many did you have?"

Cole shrugged, frowning into what he *thought* might be his fourth Butterbeer, though he wasn't entirely sure.

"Yeah, you should definitely go sleep it off before you yack everywhere," Ellie's sister Jaimie said, lifting an eyebrow as she sipped her own gillywater.

"I'll do that," Cole said, nodding and thrusting his bottle into the hands of a Hufflepuff girl before setting off across the dark lawns away from the noise, which was starting to give him a headache.

He swayed a little bit as he walked back towards the Castle, feeling giddy and blithe. He stumbled on the marble staircase, giggling as he tried to straighten up and clinging to the handrail to pull himself to his feet.

There were footsteps behind him but he couldn't get his body to turn his head around so he simply continued up the stairs.

"Let me help you, Ginger," a gentle voice said, a strong arm slipping around his waist to hold him steady.

Cole giggled and leaned against the warm body next to him, his legs a little wobbly as he walked down the corridor with whoever it was helping him. He caught a faint whiff of chocolate and turned his head towards the smell, burying his face into the faintly muscled chest and inhaling deeply.

"You smell good," he mumbled, tugging gently at the hem of the other person's t-shirt.

There was a small sigh that vibrated across where Cole's face was pressed into the other's side. "Thanks," they muttered. "You need to get some sleep."

"Not sleepy, though," Cole said. He breathed in again and suddenly felt a wave of desire passing over him. "You smell *really* good. I like chocolate."

He looked up and saw a small smile playing on the other boy's lips.

"Me too," he said, glancing down at Cole, who caught a flash of purple and turquoise before he closed his eyes again and snuggled into the arm around his waist.

"I want chocolate," Cole mumbled, pouting a little.

There was the rustle of foil and a hand pressed an open chocolate bar into his fingers.

"Ooo!" Cole said excitedly, taking a bite of chocolate and chewing happily as they turned down the seventh floor corridor. "Mmm, that's good." He sucked on the end of the bar, making a faint sound of satisfaction.

"Not fair, Ginger," the other boy said, groaning a little.

Cole giggled and licked up the side of the chocolate, trying to keep his focus on the pair of fuchsia eyes watching him.

"Merlin, stop it," Lupin said, forcing himself to look away.

"You're cute," Cole said, trailing a finger down Lupin's chest.

"And you're drunk," Lupin said. "You just told me to leave you alone twenty minutes ago."

"So then why did you follow me?" Cole said teasingly.

"Because I didn't want you hurting yourself," Lupin said as they reached the end of the corridor. "Nogtails."

The Fat Lady swung open in reply to the password and Lupin hauled Cole through the portrait hole into the common room, where a few younger students were hanging around or working on homework. The looked up curiously at Cole and Lupin, watching their faltering progress across the room to the spiral staircase.

"Alright," Lupin said as they reached the fifth year boys' dorm. "You need to get some sleep." He helped Cole over to his bed and sat him down.

Cole giggled and whooped as he fell back, his hat falling off and his shirt twisting a little as he hit the mattress, hitching up to reveal a strip of his stomach. He saw Lupin's eyes flicker to the spot for a moment before he stared down at his hands.

"Will you be okay?" Lupin said, tugging off Cole's shoes and setting them beside his bed.

Cole looked up at him. He swam in and out of focus, a look of concern on his face. "Why do you like me?" Cole said curiously. "I'm...I'm not special."

Lupin leaned against the post of his bed, folding his arms absently.

"You are," he said, giving him a steady look. "You're very special."

"Why though?" Cole said, frowning. "I mean...how am I special?"

"Because," Lupin said, sighing. "You were...you were the first person who didn't...*fawn* over me. When you were commentating at the Ravenclaw-Hufflepuff match you barely even remembered my name. You were too busy focusing on Anderson. No one's ever acted like that around me before, really. Usually people fall all over themselves to be my friend or...whatever. It was nice. But you wanted Anderson and then you wanted Jenkins and then after everything you did...I thought I should take my chances."

Cole stared at him. "You...you really liked me since November?" he whispered.

Lupin shrugged, staring down at his feet. "I...yeah," he said. "But I didn't know what to say. I didn't think you'd take me seriously. I might act like a total idiot sometimes but I really *do* care. It's just...I guess that's my way of dealing with things."

Cole blinked, watching him sit down on the edge of the bed next to him.

"I'm really trying," Lupin said, staring at his hands. "I swear I'm trying."

Cole tilted his head to the side as he watched him. He really *was* attractive. The bright hair and eyes were starting to grow on him. And he smelled so good and his lips looked soft and Cole suddenly wondered what they tasted like.

All inhibitions gone and replaced by the alcohol in his veins, he leaned forward and grabbed Lupin's wrist, pulling him over on the bed on top of him and fisting his other hand in his bright blue hair. He groaned, kissing sloppily across Lupin's neck. He tasted even better than he smelled. Lupin stiffened a little in surprise but didn't pull away.

More. He wanted more. *Needed* more. More taste and touch and smell of Lupin's cologne and...all of it. He'd always been so shy about the idea of anything sexual but now...the alcohol was like a catalyst for his nerve.

Cole twisted Lupin's head to catch his lips in a messy kiss, wrapping one leg around his waist and pulling him closer as he moaned into his mouth. He wanted him so badly and he was suddenly straining in his jeans and he simply didn't care about anything else right now but the boy lying on top of him. Lupin kissed him back, fingers tightening in his sweater as he let out a heavy breath.

"God, Ginger," he groaned, tongue slipping across Cole's lips.

Cole whimpered in reply, the rush of hormones to his veins making every moment bleed into the next without distinction. His stomach was wriggling excitedly, his whole body lighting up with every brush of Lupin's fingers over his arms. He ran his shaking hand down Lupin's side to hook in his beltloop, tugging insistently.

Lupin stopped suddenly. "Wait...Ginger," Lupin said, trying to pull off him as Cole's fingers slid along the waistband of his jeans. "Gi—Cole, stop." He broke away and stepped back, panting lightly. He licked his reddened lips and closed his eyes at the taste, taking a steadying breath. "You...you don't want this. You don't know what you're doing." "I know you taste good," Cole mumbled, trying to pull him back again. His pulse was shooting up and the temperature had risen at least twenty degrees in the last few minutes. He didn't know why but he suddenly *needed* Lupin to kiss him again. "Come back. Why don't you want to kiss me?"

Lupin sighed, dragging his fingers through his hair. "I do," he said, eyes sliding over Cole's body, "I do more than you know. But *you* don't want me to. You may think you do but...I'm not about to let you do this in this...state. I want you to want me when you're sober. And I don't think you do. Not right now, at least."

Cole stuck out his bottom lip in a pout, crossing his arms and scowling. "Come on, Ginger," Lupin said gently. "You need to sleep, okay?" He helped Cole up so he could pull the blankets down for him, gulping

when he turned around to see Cole in just his t-shirt and boxers. "L-lie down, Ginger."

Cole crawled into his bed, snuggling under the covers and smiling up at Lupin. "You taste good," he said matter-of-factly. "Do I taste good?" Lupin nodded, smiling faintly as he tucked the covers around Cole's shoulders. "You do," he said. "You taste *very* good, Cole. Like Butterbeer and...strawberries, I think." Cole giggled at this. Lupin paused, brushing back a loose strand of hair from Cole's forehead. "Now get some sleep, okay? We can talk about this later...if you remember it, that is."

Cole nodded, yawning. "Can I have a goodnight kiss?" he mumbled, giving Lupin a hopeful look.

Lupin sighed, giving him a steady look before leaning forward and pressing a tender kiss to his forehead.

"A *real* one," Cole said, frowning. "Please?"

Lupin looked hesitant, chewing the inside of his cheek for a few seconds before bending back over and giving him a soft kiss on the lips. Cole leaned into the touch. It was gentle and warm and made his nerves tingle happily.

"Better?" Lupin said when they broke apart a few seconds later.

Cole nodded, licking his lips and burrowing into the pillows a little more.

"Alright," Lupin said, straightening up. "Now go to sleep."

Cole smiled and closed his eyes, yawning as he heard Lupin walking away. He heard him pause at the doorway for a few seconds. Then the door opened and closed softly and Cole pulled the blankets around himself a little tighter as he drifted off into a hazy sleep.

When he woke the next morning, head pounding and stomach churning, he didn't remember any of it.

---

Flint groaned at the glare of sunlight across his eyes, rolling over to bury his face in his pillow. He vaguely remembered the party the night before. He remembered Jeff and Nick both passing out on the beach, laughing as Gwen took pictures of them when they curled around each other in their sleep. Remembered Kurt and Thad being giggly and tipsy and lying in the grass together and picking out shapes in the stars. He wasn't sure how he'd gotten back to his dorm exactly as he'd had spent the evening slowly working his way through at least half a dozen Butterbeers and several mouthfuls of Firewhiskey as he and Blaine talked about their new positions on the Tornados, practice for which would start two weeks after graduation.

Shifting beneath his tangled blankets, he reached towards his bedside table to check his clock only to encounter another warm body curled up next to him.

Thad groaned faintly at the contact and snuggled back against him in the bed, one hand groping for Flint's to pull his arm around his middle.

"Morning, pet," Flint muttered, pulling him close and kissing the top of his head.

"Mmm, morning," Thad mumbled, turning his head to look at him.

"How're you feeling?"

"Like I got hit in the face by a brick wall," Flint said with a yawn.

"You?"

"Same," Thad said, making a face. "I need some water."

He slithered out from under Flint's arm, stumbling as he stood and tiptoes past Flint's sleeping roommates towards where his wand had fallen near the door. Returning to the bed, he Conjured up two glasses of water, passing one to Flint, who accepted it with a murmured thanks, eyes still screwed up against the light.

They drank in silence for a minute, Thad setting the empty glasses on the table before scooting under the blankets again to cuddle against him, his hands pressed lightly to his chest as he tangled their legs together.

"Happy Birthday," he said softly, smiling.

Flint grinned, pushing a hand through his dark hair. "Thanks," he said.

Thad tilted his head up to kiss him gently, lips moving slowly in his sleepy state. "What do you want to do today?" he mumbled against Flint's lips.

"Doesn't matter," Flint said when Thad pulled back. "Get rid of this headache. And hold you the rest of the day. And kiss you silly."

Thad smiled, twisting the collar of Flint's shirt between his fingertips.

"I think we could do that," he said. "Let me get your presents, okay? And no peeking," he added before sitting up and bending over the side of the bed.

Flint sat back, propping himself up on the pillows and admiring the stripe of tanned skin across Thad's back where his shirt-one of Flint's-had ridden up his torso.

Thad straightened up, holding a wrapped package and smiling brightly.

"Here," he said, passing the box to Flint.

"How did you get this up here?" Flint said, frowning at the present.

"I'm sneaky," Thad said with a playful grin.

Flint laughed as he unwrapped the pair of heavy leather Quidditch boots with "Wilson" engraved across the heels.

"I *wanted* to get your number engraved on them too," Thad said with a sigh. "But then I remembered that when you go to the regular squad it will probably change."

Flint smiled and set the boots on the floor before planting a kiss on his cheek. "But that might not happen for a long time," he said, pulling Thad close again. "Thank you, pet. They're perfect."

Thad sighed and relaxed against him, trailing his index finger over Flint's chest. "Are you ready?" he said softly. "To get married, I mean?"

Flint looked down at him. "Yeah," he said, nodding and giving him a gentle squeeze. "Are you?"

Thad nodded, smiling. "Yeah, I am," he said softly. "Kurt's done so much to make sure it's going to be perfect for us, you know?"

"I know," Flint said, thinking of the few times Kurt had asked his opinion on things like flowers and Hors d'oeuvre before giving up when he didn't have a preference and claiming he'd "take care of it."

Thad was silent for a minute or so, staring absently across the room.

"Are we going to be living at Bennett Square with Kurt and Blaine?" he said, glancing over at him. "Did you...I mean with the Tornados, um..."

"Pet, you're allowed to ask me about money," Flint said.

"It's *our* money, not mine. And yes, my parents took the money from my sign-on bonus and found us a nice little flat in the building. It's not as big as Kurt and Blaine's but...it's nice. They're bringing some pictures to graduation."

Thad nodded, frowning faintly. "It's hard to believe we're going to be leaving Hogwarts in less than a month," he said in a small voice.

"But you're ready, aren't you?" Flint said. "To graduate and...all that?"

"Yeah," Thad said, smiling. "I'm going to miss it but I'll have other stuff to look forward to, right? We'll get to live together and Kurt and Blaine will be close by. It'll be fun, I think. Jeff and Nick said they're going to be there all the time, though." He wrinkled up his nose. "I can't imagine what *their* flat will look like. I'll probably have to go clean it for them." He sighed heavily.

"You're so adorable," Flint said, nuzzling his ear. "I can't wait to wake up next to you every morning, you know that? I know I'm a huge sap sometimes and I get all sentimental about everything but...it's only because I really *do* love you. So much, Thad."

"I know," Thad said, kissing him on the cheek. "I love you too." He reached out to tug the hangings closed around the bed, blushing faintly. "I think you said something about kissing me silly?"

Flint grinned. "C'mere, you," he muttered, wrapping an arm around Thad's waist and pulling him on top of him. Thad giggled and sighed happily as he kissed him, slow and soft as he so often was. Yes. He could definitely get used to this every morning.

---

As he had the year before, Kurt spent the last week of classes studying for exams until he thought his brain might turn to mush inside his own skull. Every lesson was a review period where their professors shot question after question at them until he was sure his head would explode if he tried to fit anything else into it.

Blaine occasionally had a spat of crankiness in which he'd get quiet and moody at which point Kurt would either remain silent or let him be and study with Thad or Leighton instead until he'd cooled down again. It was during one of these times, when Blaine had snapped at him for writing too loudly, that Kurt had retreated to the library to study Potions with Leighton the Saturday before their N.E.W.T.s started.

"Alright," Leighton said, tapping his quill absently against the table as he flipped through Kurt's copy of *Advanced Potion Making*. "How many days do you need to let the lacewing flies stew in a Polyjuice Potion?"

"Twenty...one?" Kurt said hopefully, thinking back to when they'd brewed the potion the year before.

"Right," Leighton said, ticking off a line on the long list of review questions Kurt had made for himself. "And what's the...third ingredient you add to the Draught of Living Death?"

Kurt frowned at the ceiling as he tried to remember the instructions for the potion, which he'd never actually had a chance to brew. "Horklump juice?" he said, glancing at Leighton.

"No, it's the Valerian root," Leighton said, shaking his head. "It's alright," he said when Kurt sighed in annoyance. "You've gotten everything else right so far. I'm sure you'll do just fine."

"I hope so," Kurt muttered, resting his cheek on his fist and doodling on the corner of his parchment. "Otherwise I have no job."

"You'll do brill," Leighton said, flipping through a few more pages and scratching his nose absently with the tip of his quill. "Everyone knows you're the best at Potions in the whole school."

"Thanks," Kurt said, smiling faintly as Leighton grinned at him. He leaned back in his chair, pulling his feet up to cross his legs. "How's Gavin?"

"Good," Leighton said, glancing at Kurt's review sheet. "He's got everything ready to move in as soon as term's over. Then we're heading to Spain after I get my Apparition license."



Kurt sighed. "You're going to Spain, Thad's going to Paris, and I'm going to be cooped up in London all summer finishing planning a wedding."

"Don't try and admit you don't enjoy it," Leighton said, pointing his quill at him. "I know how excited you've been about it."

Kurt pursed his lips. "Yes, well, that doesn't mean there's not a lot that goes into it," he said with a sniff. "Do you know how many spells I've had to learn just for the flowers and live butterflies that I'm going to have released at the reception?"

Leighton stared at him, slightly slack-jawed.

"What?" Kurt said, shrugging.

"Nothing," Leighton said, shaking his head and grinning as he looked back down at Kurt's book.

There was the faint rustle of wings and Kurt looked up to see Pavarotti winging through the shafts of sunlight towards them.

"Hey, Pav," Kurt said, smiling as the eagle owl landed on top of his notes and held out his leg, to which an envelope was tied. He pulled the letter off, stroking the bird's wings absently before slitting the envelope with his wand and pulling out the folded paper inside. "It's from my dad," he said absently. "Give me a second."

*Kurt,*

*Just wanted to let you know that we've got the Portkey set up and we'll be heading up the last Friday of your term the day before your graduation. We've got as much of your clothes and everything packed that we could. I talked to Blaine's mom and she's going to drop it off at your apartment for you.*

*We've got a room booked at that tavern, The Three Broomsticks, so we'll be staying there until your graduation's over. We're planning on staying the rest of the weekend so you'll have plenty of time to show us your apartment and tell us all about your new job.*

*Good luck on your exams, I know you'll do fine. Don't let yourself get too stressed, okay? Finn and Carole say hi and they can't wait to see you in a few weeks.*

*Be good. Love you, kiddo,*

*Dad*

Kurt smiled, folding the letter and tucking it in his bag. He fished an Owl Treat out for Pav, patting the owl on the head and hurrying to hold his notes down as the bird took off in a flurry of wings.

"Everything alright?" Leighton said, closing Kurt's book.

Kurt nodded. "Just letting me know about graduation. I should probably let Blaine know when they're coming," he added with a sigh, accepting his book back from Leighton and packing up his notes. "I hope he's out of his *mood*."

Leighton grinned as he pulled parchment, obviously to write to Gavin. "Good luck tomorrow," called after him.

Kurt raised a hand in farewell, hitching his bag a little higher on his shoulder as he left through the quiet shelves. Just as he was thinking he might hunt down Thad before trying to deal with Blaine, he heard footsteps and looked up to see Blaine walking towards him, looking sheepish.

"Oh, hey," Kurt said apprehensively. "How's your studying going?"

"I'm finished," Blaine said, stopping as well. His hands twisting a little.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled. "I'm awful when I get stressed."

"It's alright," Kurt said, smiling and moving to take his hand. "I've come to accept it. Just like you accept me being a bit overdramatic at times. It's called compromising, dear."

Blaine smiled gratefully and squeezed his hand. "I can make it up to you if you'd like?" he said.

"I'm not really in the mood right now," Kurt said apologetically. "I'm exhausted and my mind is just trying to retain all this damn information."

"I wasn't talking about sex," Blaine said, chuckling. "I meant I could give you a back rub. I know those always help you relax."

"That actually sounds great," Kurt said, rolling his sore shoulders. "If you're sure you're finished with your studying."

"I am," Blaine said, leaning over to kiss him on the cheek. "Though I guess it doesn't *really* matter what N.E.W.T.s I get anyway, giving I'm going to play Quidditch."

"Yes, well, that's no reason not to try and do a good job," Kurt said, giving him a stern look. "What happens if you screw up your back or something? It's not a good idea to depend on always being able to play Quidditch."

"I know," Blaine said, sighing. "I'm going to do my best, trust me. I'm not about to throw away seven years of good marks."

"Good," Kurt said, still eyeing him closely. "And what about...Jeremiah? Are you sure you're okay working with him?"

"He seems...better," Blaine said, shrugging as they climbed the spiral staircase to the Ravenclaw tower, where a pair of giggling second years were leaving as they stepped through the door. "I don't think he'll cause any problems."

"Hmm, let's hope," Kurt said. He still didn't like the idea of Blaine having to spend almost every day in the presence of someone who had not only tried to completely screw up both their lives, but who Blaine had admittedly been in love with. He wasn't about to make a scene over it, but it didn't sit well with him. For some reason, the fact that Jeremiah was supposedly "better" did not comfort at all.

"Something wrong, love?" Blaine said, giving him a concerned look as they walked into the dormitory and Kurt dropped his bag onto the floor and slipped out of his shoes.

"Not really," Kurt said, shrugging as he shrugged off his sweater and lay down on his bed on his stomach. "I just...I don't like him much."

"I know," Blaine said, kicking off his shoes and sitting down next to him, swinging one leg over Kurt's thighs and gently kneading his shoulders. "I don't either. I'll put up with him though. I don't have much of a choice, do I?"

"I guess not," Kurt mumbled into his pillow, closing his eyes and groaning as Blaine worked at the tense knots in his back. "You're much too good at this, you know that?"

Blaine chuckled, leaning down to kiss the back of his neck. "I like doing it, you know," he said, knuckles gently digging into the small of his back. "I like taking care of you."

Kurt smiled. "Oh, I forgot," he said, turning his head and cracking one eye to look at him. "Dad, Finn, and Carole are coming Friday after next. They're staying in the village and Dad said we'll have to show him our place and stuff afterwards."

Blaine's face spilt into a wide grin.

"What?" Kurt said, frowning.

"*Our* place," Blaine said. "I like the sound of that."

Kurt laughed. "Me too," he said, nodding. "Though I'm pretty sure it's going to become 'Jeff and Nick's place where they hide from having to clean their own apartment'."

"Probably," Blaine said with a grin. "I feel sorry for anyone who lives in their building. They'll never have a moment's peace."

Kurt smiled, closing his eyes again as Blaine continued to move his fingers across his back, shoulders, and neck. "Very true," he mumbled, yawning.

"Why don't you get some sleep, love?" Blaine said gently. "You're wearing yourself out with all the studying you've been doing."

"Need to pass," Kurt murmured, yawning again. "I keep thinking I'm going to get to the test and my mind will go completely blank and I'll fail everything."

"You won't," Blaine said, sliding off him to lie on the bed. "You're very smart. That's why you're in Ravenclaw."

"I thought it was my biting wit and infallible charm," Kurt said, grinning as Blaine laughed.

"That too," Blaine said, kissing his cheek. "And your sarcasm and the way you can still manage to get shy sometimes when you get a compliment and how gorgeous you are."

"I think we're leaving Ravenclaw territory and entering into 'requirements for the House of Blaine,'" Kurt said, quirking an eyebrow. "Yes, well, you meet all of those, you know," Blaine said matter-of-factly. He kissed him on the forehead again. "Take a nap. It won't kill you to sleep for an hour or two and then we'll study again." "Will you stay with me?" Kurt said, sliding his fingers into where Blaine's hand was lying next to his on the bed. "It's easier to sleep with you around." "Of course I will, love," Blaine said. "Go to sleep." "Okay," Kurt said, yawning and snuggling closer to Blaine on the bed as he slipped into a contented sleep.

---

O.W.L.s were pure torture. Cole's brain felt like an over-wrung sponge after the first week was over. He'd had Transfiguration, History of Magic, Runes, and Potions and didn't know how on earth he was going to survive another full week of exams.

The only upside of it all was that Lupin had actually backed off. He had no idea why but the Hufflepuff had actually been relatively civil towards him after he'd approached Cole the Monday after the party to ask him if he remembered what had happened on Saturday. Cole, having little to no recollection of the night after walking down with Thad to the lake, told him he had no idea what he was talking about and stalked off.

Monday morning of the second week of exams, he was sitting at the Gryffindor table during breakfast, running through the long list of Charms spells he'd memorized and trying to keep the incantations straight as he stared down at his uninspiring eggs, picking at them absently with his fork.

Someone dropped into the seat next to him and Cole scowled when he caught a flash of bright blue in the corner of his eye.

"What do you want, Lupin?" he muttered, not looking at him.

"To talk to you," Lupin said softly.

"Well, I don't much fancy talking to *you* right now," Cole said. "I've got exams I need to study for."

"I'm aware," Lupin said. "But this is important."

Cole sighed and set down his fork. "What?" he said, turning to him. He was taken aback to see Lupin's face looking faintly drawn and paler than usual. There were dark circles under his eyes and he looked anxious.

"Have you...I mean, are you still...do you still hate me?" Lupin said quietly, looking forlorn.

"I never *hated* you," Cole said. "I told you that."

"I know," Lupin said, slumping in his seat a little. "But...you still don't like me?"

Cole sighed again. "I'm not really in the mood for this right now," he said. "I've got another week of exams and you've got your own to think about as well."

Lupin exhaled shakily. "So...you'll never consider going out with me?" he said in a small voice.

"I...don't know," Cole said, looking away from him and returning to his plate. "I'm still having a bit of trouble believing you've changed so suddenly."

"I have," Lupin said insistently. "I swear I have! Ask anyone, I've been good."

Cole rolled his eyes. "Okay," he said, though he didn't really trust him after what had happened. He pushed his plate away and stood up. He simply didn't want to deal with this right now.

"Aw, come on," Lupin said. Cole heard him standing and hurrying after him. "I swear, Ginger, I haven't touched anyone but myself in two whole weeks!"

Cole felt the heat rise up his face as eyes turned in their direction. Why on earth was he doing this *here*? It was as bad as his stunt at the Final.

"And you can't get mad at me for that! That's not cheating!" Lupin cried, catching up to him at the Ravenclaw table, where Thad and his friends were watching with a mixture of amusement and apprehension. "I'm allowed to jerk it if I want." He lowered his voice and wiggled his eyebrows suggestively, suddenly returning to his usual, brash self in the eye of the rest of the school. "Especially if I'm thinking of you when I do it." He winked.

Cole stared at him, mouth falling open in disbelief. The entire Hall was watching them now.

"I see you're speechless," Lupin said with a smug expression. "I've been known to have that effect on people."

Cole smacked him around the head.

"Oi!" Lupin cried, shielding himself with his arms. "What was that for?"

"For being an idiot!" Cole hissed. "Why—the Great Hall—you stupid—*UGH!*" He turned and stormed off, blushing harder than he ever had in his life.

"Ah, come on!" Lupin cried in exasperation. He made an aggravated noise. "It was a compliment!"

Cole stomped up the marble staircase.

"Cole, stop!" Lupin called after him. "Please, why won't you listen to me?"

"Because," Cole said, rounding on him at the top of the stairs. "Look at you! You're quiet and act like you care when I'm the only one around but the *second* anyone else starts watching you become the world's biggest prat! You expect me to deal with that on a daily basis? It's ridiculous."

Lupin's face fell and he gnawed on the inside of his cheek. "I'm sorry," he mumbled. "I'm...I'm still learning."

Cole scoffed and turned around again, striding down the corridor and shaking his head.

"Hey!" Lupin's voice wasn't pleading or gentle or even smug this time, just a hard shout that stopped Cole in his tracks. He turned to see the other boy walking towards him, frowning with his fists clenched at his sides.

"What now?" Cole snapped.

"I'm sick of this," Lupin said angrily. "I'm sick of trying to do my best to impress you when I never *try* for anyone. I could have given up weeks ago because you wouldn't put out but guess what? I didn't and I'm not going to now. You know what? Because I *like* you, Ginger. I like you and I see you as more than just someone I can hook-up with and dump off when I'm done. I don't want to be like that anymore.

"Now, it may not be good enough for you, but I'm trying my damn hardest to change for you so you'll believe me, but I'm tired of you refusing to believe me and just pushing me away every time I try and act serious. I'm sorry I'm not changing fast enough for you, but the fact that I'm willing to change for you should be enough!"

He was breathing a little heavily when he finished, wetting his lips nervously as he waited for Cole's reaction.

Cole merely stared at him, eyes wide, completely taken aback by the abrupt change in his attitude.

"W-well?" Lupin said, a little rough though the underlying apprehension was clear in his tone.

"Okay," Cole said at last, nodding. "I'll...I'll think about it."

"Really?" Lupin said excitedly.

Cole sighed. "Yeah," he said, trying to quell the sudden flutter in his stomach. "I really need to concentrate on my exams but...I'll think about it."

Lupin made a triumphant gesture. "Oh, god, I could kiss you," he said happily. "I want to kiss you, can I? I'm going to."

Before Cole could stop him, Lupin had grabbed him by the shoulders and planted a firm kiss on his lips. Cole's eyes flew wide open at the touch, his whole body tensing up at the unexpected contact. Lupin tasted like chocolate and peppermint and somehow vaguely familiar;

there was the faint waft of his cologne in his nostrils and Cole found himself relaxing into the kiss without even realizing it. He gasped when Lupin broke away, his purple eyes lighting up with his wide grin.

"I missed that," Lupin said happily. "Alright so...you go do your exams and I'll leave you alone." He winked. "See you later, Gi—Cole."

Cole watched him leave, completely speechless, his heart beating a stuttering rhythm against his ribcage. He blinked, shaking his head to clear it as he turned back up the corridor, trying to figure out exactly what had just happened to him.

---

The two weeks in which they took their N.E.W.T.s went by in a rush of exam papers and pounding headaches. Each morning Kurt would wake up, study an hour before breakfast for whatever subject they had, have breakfast, then study again until he was called in for his exam, which took place in two parts for most of his classes, practical and written.

The first week wasn't too bad. He breezed easily enough through Muggle Studies and Potions, though he thought he'd still messed up the question on the method for the Draught of Living Death on the written exam. Seeing as the other exams for that week were Care of Magical Creatures, Arithmancy, Divination, and History of Magic, he had plenty of time to study for his remaining exams the following week.

Monday was Transfiguration, where he had to turn the examiner's desk into pig as part of the practical exam and spent a full roll of parchment detailing Gamp's Law of Elemental Transfiguration for the written test. Tuesday was Herbology so he spent most of the day studying for Charms the next day with Wes and David in the tower, Acorn stubbornly sitting on their notes until one of them scratched him behind the ears.

Charms went well enough, though he'd accidentally sprayed the examiner with water when he was laughing at Nick, who'd lit his own robes on fire across the Hall and was running around trying to stomp them out. When they caught up with Jeff and Blaine after the exam, Blaine simply lifted an eyebrow at the site of Nick's singed robes, Jeff tittering beside him as Nick scowled.

Thursday was Defense Against the Dark Arts and, therefore, Kurt's last exam as Ancient Runes was on Friday morning. He struggled a little with his written exam, his brain pounding against his skull as he tried to remember all the complex spells and incantations that he'd learned over the past seven years. One thing he was *sure* went well was the portion of his practical exam in which he had to produce a Patronus.

He smiled as he thought of the apartment he and Blaine would be moving into in a few days, feeling a swell of happiness as a delicate silver foal burst from his wand and trotted around the room, tossing its silver mane and turning its wide, glowing eyes onto Kurt before dissolving in a cloud of silvery mist.

"Thank *god* it's over," he said when they'd turned in their exams papers and gathered in the Great Hall to wait for the House tables to be put back in place for dinner. "I seriously thought my brain was going to leak out of my ears if I had to take one more test."

"I've still got Runes, though," Thad—who had joined them after their exams were over with the others—said, biting his lip anxiously. "And that's the one that really matters."

"As if you'd have any trouble," Jeff said, rolling his eyes. "Everyone knows you're brilliant, wildcat."

"Yeah, stop being so modest," Nick said, glaring playfully at him.

Thad continued to look nervous and the two softened their gazes and gave him reassuring pats on the shoulder.

"So, we're leaving Saturday," Blaine said, leaning up against the Ravenclaw hourglass, where hundreds of tiny sapphires glittered in the bottom globe.

"Don't say that," Jeff groaned, covering his ears.

"We're not ready!" Nick said, slumping against his best friend with a dejected look.

"You'll have to *get* ready then," Kurt said. "It's happening."

"Promise you'll let us visit all the time?" Jeff said hopefully.

"Like you're about to ask permission," Thad said, giving them a pointed look.

"You're probably right," Nick said thoughtfully. "Flint, I hope you're prepared to have your home invaded on a possibly daily basis."

Flint laughed. "I just I have got much of a choice, do I?"

They grinned. "Nope," they said in unison.

Kurt exchanged a look with Thad, rolling his eyes as the other boy giggled.

"*And* we've got the wildcat's wedding," Jeff said, beaming at Thad.

"Our little bunny is all grown up and marrying lions," Nick said with a theatrical sniff, pretending to wipe away a tear.

"You're both mental," Thad muttered, scowling.

The doors to the Great Hall opened and they all filtered in, Flint kissing Thad goodbye before trailing off to the Gryffindor table.

They gathered in their usual seats, Jeff and Nick immediately shoveling food onto their plates and eating with no semblance of table manners as they so often did.



"We'll all keep in touch, won't we?" Thad said suddenly, looking anxious. "Even after we've left Hogwarts and...and have jobs and move around. We'll still be friends right?" He glanced around at the others. "Of course we will," Kurt said, squeezing his wrist and smiling. "We're best friends. And don't forget, we're going to go to all the scrimmages together and you can come up and have tea with me in the mornings. And if we move, you can still Floo or Apparate over any time."

"And you're not getting rid of us that easily," Jeff said, swallowing hugely. "We need someone to do our washing for us."

"Yeah," Nick said, wiping his hand across his mouth. "Last time I tried cleaning my own clothes, I shrunk my sweater down so small it barely fits my baby sister. And she's nine."

Thad smiled, looking relieved.

"We're not going to stop being friends just because we've stopped being classmates," Blaine said, patting Thad's hand reassuringly.

"Ravenclaws for life," Jeff said, pointing a stern finger at him, Nick nodding firmly beside him.

Thad's smile widened as he looked around at them fondly. "For life," he repeated.

## Chapter Thirty

"I'm not ready for tomorrow."

Kurt looked up to where Thad was sitting on the bed beside him, looking dejected.

"Neither am I," Kurt said truthfully. He knew it was going to happen, knew there was nothing he could do to stop it, but it didn't make the fact that he was going to be leaving Hogwarts the following day any easier.

To try and combat the feeling of depression settling over them, they'd decided to spend their final night at Hogwarts holed up together in their dormitory, the seven of them and—after much pleading from Thad—Flint. They were currently waiting for Jeff and Nick to get back from raiding the kitchens, Wes and David sitting together on Wes' bed looking as forlorn as Kurt felt, and Blaine in the bathroom changing into his pajamas. Flint had yet to arrive.

"I can come visit you, right?" Thad said, cupping his mug of tea close to his chest despite the warmth of the breeze wafting through the open windows.

"I *want* you to visit me," Kurt said, smiling. "All the time. We can keep up the tradition of having tea together in the mornings. I think there's a tea shop down the street from the building, we can always go there, too, for days we don't want to just stay inside."

Thad's face lit up at the suggestion. "Maybe it won't be so bad," he said, blowing lightly on his tea. "I'll be with Flint and you'll be close."

"Just a few floors up," Kurt said, knocking their shoulders together. Thad sighed, dropping his head onto Kurt's shoulder and tucking his legs up to his chest. "I'll still miss Hogwarts, though," he muttered.

"There's not really anywhere like it."

"That's what makes it so great," Kurt said, smiling. "It's different and a little crazy but...it's perfect."

The door burst open and Jeff and Nick tumbled in with armfuls of food and bottles of Butterbeer.

"Who's ready to whoop it up?" Jeff shouted, Nick tittering beside him. They'd obviously already broken into the bottle of Firewhiskey Jeff was clutching.

"And then there's Jeff and Nick," Kurt said with a sigh as Thad straightened up next to him with a giggle.

Flint followed in after them, half-grinning as he watched them fall over each other. "I found them on my way over," he said as moved to sit next to Thad on Kurt's bed, kissing the other boy on the cheek. "They were having an argument with a suit of armor."

"They do that sometimes," Blaine said as he stepped out of the bathroom in a pair of dark grey sweats and a Tornadoes t-shirt. He eyed the pile of food Jeff and Nick had just unloaded onto Jeff's bed.

"Did you remember the coconut ice?" he said.

Jeff scoffed and threw him a packet of the pink and white candies.

"Blaine," he said, words a little slurred. "Would you really doubt us?"

Blaine didn't answer, simply watched Jeff fall over his own feet into Nick, the pair of them toppling over, giggling madly. "I think that answers the question," Blaine mumbled, rolling his eyes as he tore open the packet with his teeth. He crammed onto the bed next to Kurt, Wes and David moving to sit on Blaine's bed with Jeff and Nick, who were trying to see who could stretch their Jelly Slug out the longest before it broke.

Kurt sipped his tea, leaning against Blaine, who kissed the top of his head gently.

"So what first?" David said, glancing around at them as he uncorked himself a Butterbeer.

"Oh, oh, I know!" Jeff said excitedly, his hand shooting into the air.

"This isn't class, Jeff," Wes said, rolling his eyes.

"Okay," Jeff said conspiratorially, eyes a little out of focus as his hand flopped back down by his side. "We should go around and say what our favorite moment at Hogwarts was. And I don't want any sappy answers, got it?" He pointed threateningly in the general direction of the two couples on Kurt's bed. Kurt rolled his eyes.

"Me first," Jeff said, passing the Firewhiskey to Nick. "So, my favorite moment was when Nick and I discovered how to break into the kitchens in second year and we ate the whole chocolate cake that was supposed to be for Trelawny's birthday."

"I remember that," Thad said, smiling faintly. "The two of you were sick for a week. And you refused to go to the Hospital Wing because you didn't want to get in trouble."

"Yes, that was back when they still had some semblance of respect for rules," Blaine explained to Kurt, who nodded as Jeff and Nick beamed at each other.

"My turn!" Nick said, thrusting the Firewhiskey into Jeff's hand, the blonde falling back on the mattress and sucking at the bottle like a gerbil at a water feeder. "In third year, when Jeff and I started taking Divination and...we had a lesson about crystal balls—" Jeff had started laughing beside him, obviously knowing what was coming, "—and we're both flummoxed as to what the bloody hell we're supposed to see in those blasted things and Trelawny—" he took a few seconds to calm himself down as he starting laughing, "—Trelawny looks at Jeff and says 'what do you see, my child? Tell me, what does the orb

reveal to you?' And Jeff...Jeff looks her straight in the eye and goes, 'I don't see anything. But that's probably because I'm not used to staring at balls all day'."

He finally succumbed to his laughter, clutching his side and doubling over as Jeff howled next to him, tears of mirth in both their eyes. Kurt couldn't help but laugh along with them, the sound was infectious and Thad was shaking with giggles next to him.

"Okay," Jeff said, struggling to catch his breath and calm himself down. "Okay...okay, Wes, go."

Wes chewed slowly on his éclair for a moment, frowning thoughtfully as he swallowed. "Favorite moment," he said, drumming his fingers on his thigh. "I'd say it was the time in third year in History of Magic when Binns came into class and spent the hour lecturing while the six of us sat in the back of the classroom and played Exploding Snap and he never even noticed."

"I remember that," Blaine said, smiling reminiscently. "Thad nearly got his eyebrows singed off."

"We did that every day," Jeff said, gesturing to himself and Nick. "The cards...not burning Thad's eyebrows off."

"Which is why you both got 'T's on your O.W.L.s," Thad said with a reproving look.

"It's not like it matters," Nick said, rolling his eyes. "Who cares about that class anyway? Besides, it's Davey's turn."

David gave him a warning look for the use of the nickname before speaking. "Mine was in fourth year when my sister was bragging about Gryffindor winning the Quidditch Cup and we snuck out the night after the Final and wrote 'Ravenclaws *still* rule' all over their corridor."

"You know, we were the ones who had to clean that up," Flint said, glaring good-naturedly at them.

They all laughed, exchanging fond glances. Kurt smiled, though he felt a little left out given he hadn't been there for any of the experiences.

"Alright," Jeff said, "Thad, you're up. Whattaya got, bunny?"

Thad wrinkled up his nose in thought, tilting his head to the side.

"Well," he said, "since I can't be 'sappy', I'd have to say it was when I turned Reinhold into a donkey last year." He nodded firmly. "Yes. Yes, that was quite fun."

Jeff and Nick grinned at each other.

"I do say, it was rather enjoyable," Jeff said, speaking in Thad's Welsh accent.

"Oh, pip pip, cheerio, jolly good, old chap," Nick said in a refined voice, laughing as Thad threw a pillow at him, scowling.

"I guess I'm next, then?" Blaine said, shifting in his seat.

"*Obviously* I'd like to say something about Kurt but seeing as you

won't let me...I *suppose* it would be the start of our first year when I got lost on my way to Charms and Filch caught me and started raving about me being late for class and Peeves showed up and dropped a bowl of custard on his head. He wasn't exactly trying to *help* me, but it was still hilarious watching Filch trying to get custard out of his eyes while Mrs. Norris licked his shoes."

The others rolled about laughing at the thought, Jeff nearly falling off the bed. It took them a moment to regain their composure, Blaine grinning at Kurt's side.

"Alright," Nick said, gulping down air and forcing himself to calm.

"Flint, you next."

Flint smiled broadly, obviously glad to be included with the group.

"Well," he said, glancing at Thad, "I know my *favorite* moment would be when Thad agreed to marry me—"

"Boo," Jeff cried to suppressed giggles from Nick and a glare from Thad.

"—but," Flint continued, smiling faintly, "Winning the Quidditch Cup in second year when I joined the team was pretty amazing, too. Nothing compared to *anything* with Thad but...it'll work."

Thad smiled bashfully, snuggling a little closer to Flint on the bed.

"Kurtsie?" Jeff said, the rest of them turning curiously towards Kurt.

Kurt passed his now empty mug to Blaine to set on the bedside table as he considered the question. "I really don't know," he said honestly.

"I've had some pretty amazing moments in the past two years. I don't know if I could say I have a favorite. It'd be like...like picking who I like more between the two of you." He nodded to Jeff and Nick.

"Well, we all know it'd be me," Jeff said airily, grinning as Nick shoved him playfully. "Just pick one. A memory, I mean."

Kurt sighed, looking around at their expectant faces, Jeff and Nick kicking each other lightly though their eyes were fixed on him, Wes and David sharing Butterbeer and sweets, Flint grinning, his arm around Thad's middle; and Blaine, smiling fondly at him.

"Just...coming here," Kurt said at last. "The day I started at Hogwarts. The day I got Sorted into Ravenclaw. I thought you were all a little insane at first but...yeah, that was my favorite moment. I guess it's a little strange thinking about it but...I'm almost glad I got bullied out of McKinley. If I hadn't, I'd never have met any of you." He sighed. "I suppose that's a little sappy, isn't it? Do you want me to pick another—" Before he could finish, he was being engulfed in a hug by Thad, Jeff and Nick bounding between the two beds to join in awkwardly.

"Oh, Kurtsie," Jeff said, grinning somewhere near Kurt's right ear.

"We're glad you came here, too."

"But don't tell anyone," Nick said as they pulled away and sat back.

"We've got reputations to keep up, you know."

Kurt rolled his eyes, shaking his head and grinning as the two returned to their seats on Blaine's bed.

"For the record," Blaine whispered softly in his ear. "My *real* favorite moment was meeting you. I had no clue what I was getting myself into but...it was all worth it." His fingers found Kurt's on the bed, gripping them gently. "I love you."

"I love you too," Kurt said softly, giving him a discreet kiss as Jeff and Nick started arguing over who got the last packet of crisps, Thad giggling as Wes subtly took the bag for himself and David.

They spent the next few hours reminiscing about their time at Hogwarts, Kurt often sitting back and simply listening to their stories from before he'd arrived, Flint, for the most part, doing the same on Thad's other side. It was strange thinking that it would all be over in less than twenty-four hours, that they'd be taking the Hogwarts Express back to Platform Nine and Three-Quarters—though they could of course Apparate, they'd decided to take the train—for the last time together, leaving from the station to go their separate ways without the promise of seeing each other again at the end of the summer.

It wasn't until after two—when Thad had long since fallen asleep against Flint's shoulder, arms curled around his fiancé's waist, and Jeff and Nick were attempting to recite the method for Switching Spells to each other, laughing as they stumbled over their own words—that they decided it was time for bed.

Kurt saw Flint trying to gently wake Thad and stopped him. "It's fine," Kurt whispered. "I'll sleep on Blaine's bed."

"Are you sure?" Flint said.

Kurt nodded as Blaine got up next to him, stretching and yawning.

"Let him sleep, it's fine," he repeated, smiling as Thad shifted closer to Flint in his sleep. "You can stay here if you want, too. It's not like I'll be using the bed anymore."

Flint gave him a grateful smile, kissing the top of Thad's head as Kurt got up and walked softly to Blaine's bed, Jeff, Nick, Wes, and David having retreated to their own four-posters.

"Last night at Hogwarts," Blaine said as he crawled into his bed, holding the blankets up for Kurt to climb in next to him.

"Yeah," Kurt said, sighing as he lay down, facing Blaine. He smiled.

"I'm glad I get to spend it with you."

Blaine trailed his toes up Kurt's ankle under the blankets. "Me too," he said, winding their fingers together on the mattress. "Now...on to more important matters. Do you want to be the big spoon or the little spoon?"

Kurt stifled a laugh. "Little," he said, rolling over and shifting under the sheets so Blaine's chest was pressed against his back. "You can be the little spoon tomorrow night."

"We'll be in our own bed then," Blaine said, fingertips brushing through Kurt's hair absently.

"Yeah," Kurt said, smiling and pulling Blaine's arm around his waist.

"It won't be as quiet there, you know," Blaine whispered.

"Quiet?" Kurt said, glancing back at him as the sound of Jeff and Nick giggling in the next two beds over filtered over to them. "What is this 'quiet' you speak of?"

Blaine chuckled. "You know what I mean," he said, tickling him briefly.

"Peaceful, I suppose. There'll be traffic noises and all that there."

"I'm sure we'll get used to it," Kurt said, yawning. He could see the outline of Flint shifting Thad down on the bed in the moonlight. "There are worse things that could happen."

"Being invaded by Jeff and Nick sounds pretty bad," Blaine said, smiling against his neck.

"Well, that's inevitable, though," Kurt said, grinning.

Blaine kissed his neck gently. "I love you," he murmured. "And as much as I'm going to miss Hogwarts, I'm okay with leaving because...well, it just means I get to start out fresh. With you."

Kurt squeezed his hand where it was resting against his stomach. "I'm excited for that, too," he said softly.

Blaine squeezed his hand back. "Mmm, good," he mumbled. "Now get some sleep, love. We've got a lot to do tomorrow. We're adults now."

Kurt smiled, closing his eyes as he heard the hangings around his—well, he supposed it wasn't really his anymore—bed rasp close around Flint and Thad. A warm breeze swept lazily around the room, playing across his face and mingling with the pale moonlight filtering through the open windows.

Blaine's lips were brushing across his neck and he occasionally whispered soothingly, not really any discernable words, simply soft, musical sounds that were easy enough to interpret despite the fact that Kurt couldn't hear exactly what he was saying. The warm weight of the other boy was comforting against him, the gentle *thud* of their heartbeats slowly synching up until it was impossible to separate them and they were simply one sound, the soft tic of muscle pumping blood through veins, the rise and fall of chests pushing air through lungs at a steady pace.

They might be two different bodies, two distinct entities, but their hearts and minds were so closely knitted together it was sometimes hard to tell where it stopped being Kurt and started being Blaine. They were joined, fused together like two parts of a whole that had existed

apart but couldn't be divided now that they were joined, like stars colliding in space. They'd been on the path towards each other for their whole lives and never known it, circling one another until the pull was so great they surrendered and let the universe have its way. And now, they couldn't be distinguished. There might be bits and pieces noticeable from each, but they were one and the same. They'd both shed parts of themselves when they'd come together, cast off pain and hurt, but the final result, this product of love and heartache and friendship, it was more staggering and exquisite than anything they could have been on their own.

It might have been his last night at Hogwarts, but he could safely say it was also his best.

---

Leighton woke unusually early Saturday morning, blinking away the sunshine glaring off the lake and rolling over to press his face into the pillow. He grumbled at the thought that he still had a few things to pack and forced himself to get up, yanking the curtains closed over the small windows before tossing his last few books and articles of clothing into his trunk. He tugged on a t-shirt and pair of jeans, slipping his shoes into his sneakers and thinking he'd get an early breakfast before everyone else was up, he snuck out of the dorms and down through the empty common room out into the dungeon corridor.

When he reached the entrance hall, where the four hourglasses displaying the House Points—Gryffindor had won the House Cup by a mere twenty-three points over Ravenclaw—shone, the little gemstones gleaming and sparkling like multi-colored stars, he saw the doors to the Great Hall were still closed. Glancing at his watch he realized it was barely six o'clock and turned back towards the dungeons, grumbling.

Pausing, he decided he'd take a walk around the Castle, enjoy the silence before the madness of the final day started up. He turned and strode up the marble staircase, his footsteps echoing around the empty hall, loud and almost imposing in the still air. Little dust motes floated around the corridor as he walked, each tiny fleck catching the pale sunlight and glimmering like a speck of gold.

Humming faintly, he tried not to think too much about the fact that he'd be away from Hogwarts for two months, concentrating instead on the fact that he'd get to see Gavin today and that they were going to have the whole summer together.

He walked past an unused office and caught a whiff of something redolent of cherries. He froze, walking backwards to stop at the door, which was slightly ajar. Pushing it open a bit more, he peered inside, biting back a shout of excitement at the sight of Gavin standing on the



other side of the room, facing away from him as he carefully placed books on the dark shelves.

As silently as possible, he slipped into the room, shutting the door behind him and tiptoeing over to Gavin, who continued arranging his books. Leighton grinned as he approached and wrapped his arms swiftly around Gavin's waist, hugging him tightly.

Gavin yelped and dropped the books he was holding turning around and whacking Leighton across the face with his elbow as he did.

"Dammit!" Leighton shouted, clutching his face as tears of pain welled in his eyes.

"Leighton?" Gavin said, looking utterly shocked. "What are...why...oh my god, I'm so sorry! My defenses kind of kick in automatically. You know...from my dad and all." He hurried to Leighton's side, pulling his hands down gently so he could examine the bruise rapidly forming on his jaw. "Oh, Leigh, I'm sorry! You can't sneak up on me like that. I'm really paranoid now I can barely hear."

"Sorry," Leighton mumbled, wincing as he touched the throbbing spot on his jaw.

"Don't be an idiot," Gavin said, frowning. "You have nothing to apologize for." He ran his fingers over the bruise gently, looking guilty.

"So...hi," Leighton said timidly.

Gavin smiled. "Hi," he repeated. He gestured around the office. "As you can see, I'm getting moved in. My room is just through there." He pointed to a door at the back of the office between two bookcases.

"Would you like the grand tour?"

"You wouldn't be trying to get me in bed, would you, Professor?"

Leighton said, smirking.

"Maybe," Gavin said with a wink. "Come on. My wand's back there, too, I can fix your jaw."

Leighton followed him through the door into a relatively large bedroom—about the same size as his own dormitory—with a small attached sitting area and another door that he assumed led to the bath. Dark paneling lined the walls, pale yellow hangings sweeping over the small window above the sitting area. A large four-poster bed sat to one side, Gavin's wand lying at the center as if it had been tossed there when he'd arrived.

"It's nice," Leighton said, nodding as he admired the room. "Suits you."

Gavin smiled, retrieving his wand from his bed. "Here," he said, moving back to Leighton to tap his cheek gently with his wand and heal the dark bruise on his jaw. "There you go. All better." He trailed his fingertips over the spot. "I missed you," he said softly.

"I missed you, too," Leighton said, leaning into his touch. "I get lonely without you here."

"You'll get to see me every day next year," Gavin said, one hand skimming down his chest before sliding around his waist and up his t-shirt, palm and fingers resting flat against the warm skin of his lower back.

"I know," Leighton said, smiling. "Doesn't change that I was lonely." Gavin gave him a sympathetic look, tilting his head up to kiss him softly. He made a faint noise of satisfaction. "Mmm," he murmured, pulling back though his lips still brushed against Leighton's. "I missed that."

Leighton smiled, leaning forward to kiss him again, relishing the familiar taste of cherries that always lingered on Gavin's tongue. He laid his hand gently on the side of Gavin's neck, brushing over the rough scars before winding his fingers in Gavin's hair and pulling him closer to deepen the kiss. Gavin's fingers dug into where they were resting on his back, a low groan radiating out from his chest. Leighton broke away gently, swiping his tongue over his lips nervously.

"What's wrong?" Gavin said, looking concerned.

"Gavin," Leighton began, barely meeting his eye. "I was...I was thinking m-maybe, if you'd like, um..." He rubbed the back of his neck, chewing on the inside of his cheek anxiously.

Gavin lifted an eyebrow, making a faintly confused face as he looked at him. "Leighton, you know you can tell me anything, right?"

Leighton nodded, gulping. "I just...I thought since you're here now and it's end of term and...we could, erm, c-celebrate." He sighed in annoyance. Why on earth was it so hard for him to simply say it aloud?

"Leigh," Gavin said gently.

"Sex," Leighton blurted out. He blushed faintly. "I, um...I wanted to do...er...it."

Gavin's bright blue eyes widened in surprise, his mouth falling open and his eyebrows flying up his forehead. "Really?" he said after a moment. "I mean...you're ready for that?"

Leighton nodded. "A-are you?" he said.

Gavin grinned. "What do *you* think?" he said. Leighton laughed nervously and Gavin's gaze softened again. "Hey, I'm just trying to calm you down. If you don't want to, I'm alright. But yes, I'm most definitely ready for that."

"Okay," Leighton said quietly.

"Okay?" Gavin repeated. "As in 'yes'?"

Leighton had barely started to nod when Gavin was kissing him again, searing and hungry, one hand digging into Leighton's back, the other gripping the back of his head. Leighton relaxed into the touch, kissing him back with just as much fervor as he let his tension melt away.

Because this was Gavin. Gavin wouldn't hurt him intentionally.

Gavin *loved* him. And he loved Gavin just as much.

Gavin growled faintly in his throat, pushing his hips up against Leighton's, his erection pressing into Leighton's thigh. "Lay down," he hissed in Leighton's ear. "I'm going to go lock the door." He gave him another heated kiss, made a little noise of impatience, and practically ran back out to his office.

Taking a calming breath, Leighton stripped off his t-shirt, slipping out of his shoes, socks and jeans and sitting awkwardly on the bed. Gavin returned thirty seconds later, stumbling in the process of trying to tug off his shirt and kick off his shoes simultaneously.

Leighton laughed softly at the site of him emerging tousle-haired and flushed, though he was quickly silenced when Gavin as good as pounced on him, pushing him down into the mattress and attacking his lips. Leighton gasped, coughing a little as he tried to suck back in the air that had just been knocked from his lungs.

"Sorry," Gavin mumbled, moving down to kiss his neck, sucking on the pulse point.

"It's alright," Leighton said, the sound changing into a long sighing groan as he tilted his head back into the pillow, clawing at Gavin's bare shoulders and wrapping one leg around him tightly.

Gavin grabbed his wand from the bed, lifting off him for a moment and giving him a steady look. "You sure?" he said, his blue eyes blown with lust and his lips red and swollen from kissing.

Leighton nodded. "Yeah," he gasped. "Yeah, I'm sure."

Gavin grinned and winked before sliding down off the bed, pulling Leighton to the edge of the mattress and tugging his boxers off with one hand. He looked down at his lap, muttering something Leighton couldn't hear, before wrapping one hand, now slick with lubricant, around Leighton's cock, squeezing and pumping gently.

Leighton groaned, legs tightening on the side of the bed for leverage as he pushed up into Gavin's hand. Gavin kissed his knee, biting down and licking the teeth marks as his other hand moved between Leighton's legs.

He paused as Leighton squeezed his eyes shut and tensed. "Just relax, okay?" he said softly, kissing his thigh. "I'll go slowly."

"It's going to hurt, isn't it?" Leighton said, staring at the ceiling and feeling ridiculous.

"If you need me to stop, I will," Gavin said. "Okay?"

Leighton nodded, trying to relax his muscles. He closed his eyes, focusing on the amazing feeling of Gavin's hand working around him. He hissed in a stream of air when he felt Gavin's slick fingers rubbing at his entrance.

"Relax," Gavin repeated. "I love you."

"Love you too," Leighton said, though he didn't know if Gavin heard him or just caught the movement of his mouth.

Gavin's index finger pushed inside him and he whimpered at the slight burn, struggling to calm himself down and relax the tight muscle.

Gavin kissed his leg reassuringly, bending twisting his finger carefully. He pressed in a little further, frowning faintly.

Pleasure exploded inside him and he nearly screamed, bearing down on Gavin's finger to try and hit the same spot again.

Gavin grinned, crooking his finger to hit the bundle of nerves over and over again and still working his other hand at a steady pace until Leighton was close to tears from the pleasure.

"More," he groaned. "God, Gavin, *dammit*."

Gavin pulled his finger free, smirking at his annoyed whine, and slid two fingers in instead, moving his other hand lazily as he watched Leighton falling apart.

It stung when Gavin added a second finger, even more when he added a third a few minutes later, but the feeling over his hand gliding up and down his cock and his fingertips brushing over his prostate outweighed the pain and he was soon whimpering and arcing into Gavin's touch, sobbing for more.

Gavin's hand and fingers were suddenly gone and he whined at the loss, looking down to the end of the bed to see Gavin standing up and pulling off his jeans and underwear with a sigh of relief.

He paused as he caught Leighton watching him, a loving look passing over his features as he leaned over him to push his hair—the fringe of which was damp with sweat—off his forehead. Pressing their lips together in a soft kiss, he rested one hand on Leighton's hip.

"Ready?" he whispered, vibrant blue eyes staring straight through him. Leighton nodded, winding one hand in Gavin's hair, his heart pounding in his ears. Gavin kissed him again, slow and tender, Leighton barely able to return to kiss as he gasped and whimpered as Gavin pushed inside him slowly. It burned much more than his fingers had, the dull sting taking longer to wear off. Gavin continued to give him as he waited, whispering soothingly between kisses.

"It's alright," he said, stroking Leighton's hair back. "I've got you. I love you, Leighton. I love you."

"You too," Leighton breathed, slowly his breathing to allow his muscles to relax. "You can move," He said, looking up into Gavin's loving gaze. It was still mildly painful but he couldn't wait any longer.

Gavin smiled, pulling his hips back so that Leighton felt the slow, strange drag inside him as he pulled out before pushing back in gently.

"Oh god, that's fucking incredible," Gavin groaned, closing his eyes and tilting his head back.

Leighton kissed his neck, dragging his fingernails across his back and pushing his hips up insistently. Gavin took the hint and gradually picked up a steady pace, rocking into him, hands planted on either side of Leighton's chest.

Their heavy gasps filled the air, a groan or shout of pleasure slipping loose occasionally. Leighton looked up into Gavin's clear blue eyes, catching the tiny smile that quirked up one corner of the other boy's mouth. He was amazing. In spite of his scars and all the hurt he'd suffered, he was still there, smiling down at Leighton with the same loving look that had been their even before Leighton knew it was love he was seeing.

Gavin shifted, standing up so he could wrap one hand around Leighton's cock, pumping steadily with the movement of his hips. Leighton was close, had been since Gavin had been working at him with his fingers, and he could tell by the rough jerk of Gavin's hips that he was as well.

Gavin swiped his thumb over the slit of his cock and he was gone, arching off the mattress and crying out Gavin's name as he came across his own stomach, his muscles tensing suddenly.

Gavin groaned, thrusting into him a few times before he came with a low moan. It was an odd sensation, the wet warmth spreading inside him, but the look of ecstasy on Gavin's face made his discomfort and earlier pain worth it.

Gavin dropped his head to his chest, panting and stroking Leighton's thighs for a moment before pulling out carefully. He collapsed onto the bed next to Leighton, finding his hand on the mattress with his own and gripping it tightly. Turning to Leighton, he gave him the safe small, half-smile.

"Love you," he said, leaning over to kiss him.

"You too," Leighton said. "And that was...un-fucking-believable."

Gavin grinned. "How are you feeling?" he said in a tone of mild concern.

"Alright," Leighton said, wincing as he shifted. "Sore but...it'll wear off."

"We can switch next time," Gavin said with a wink.

Leighton laughed, tilting his head to the side to rest against Gavin's shoulder. He closed his eyes, ignoring the uncomfortable feeling on his

stomach and the backs of his thighs and simply enjoying the proximity to Gavin after the weeks they'd been apart. He was so used to barely seeing him; he could hardly imagine what it would be like being able to just walk up from the dungeons to the first floor to be with him. The thought made him unable to stop smiling.

"Something funny?" Gavin said, the smile clear in his voice.

"No," Leighton said, turning his head to look up at him. "Just excited to get to see you more often from now on."

"Mmm, me too," Gavin said, kissing his forehead. "And not just...not just for sex. I *really* missed you."

"I know," Leighton said, closing his eyes again as he nuzzled his shoulder. "I missed you too."

Gavin sighed and carefully shrugged out from under his head to sit up. Leighton gave him a quizzical look.

"Give me a mo'," Gavin said, frowning as he bent over, obviously searching for something. "Ah, there it is." He straightened up, grinning and holding his wand, which he waved, banishing the mess drying on Gavin's stomach and between his legs. He set his wand back down and struggled a little to try and move Leighton up the bed.

Leighton laughed. "I can move," he said, chuckling as Gavin gave him a sheepish smile. He slid up towards the pillows, curling around himself a little and wincing.

Gavin looked guilt and apologetic as he draped a blanket over him before crawling under the fabric as well. He wrapped an arm around Leighton's middle, reaching up to place his hand on his chest as he kissed the back of his neck.

"We've got a few minutes before breakfast," Gavin mumbled, holding him a little tighter. "Just...stay here with me for a bit, okay? I never get to do this."

Leighton nodded. He'd missed the contact as well. It was true, they never really had a chance to simply lay together like this. There were a few moments they'd been able to but it was such a rarity that Leighton was a little upset that he was going to have to leave Hogwarts in just a few hours when he'd *just* been reunited with Gavin. He knew he would see him again soon, once he'd gotten settled into his new quarters, but the idea of being separated again from him so soon made his heart ache.

He thought he would simply enjoy the moment while he could, appreciating the closeness while he had the chance just like he'd been doing for the past four months.

---

Whether Kurt was ready for it to happen or not, Saturday came in a blaze of sunlight flooding the dormitory through the arched windows.

Birds heralded the dawn outside, trilling across the pale blue sky streaked with white clouds like strips of paint smeared across a canvas.

Groaning in protest of the bright light, he squeezed his eyes shut and pulled the blankets over his head, scooting back against Blaine, who tightened his grip around his middle, mumbling in his sleep.

He heard someone moving around and cautiously lowered the blankets enough to peek over the top and see Thad pulling on the dark blue and bronze pin-striped button-down shirt they were all given to wear for their graduation in addition to their dark slacks.

"What time is it?" Kurt mumbled, squinting against the sunlight.

"Just after eight," Thad said brightly. He was much too chipper for it being so early. Then again, he'd fallen asleep two hours before the rest of them. "Flint's just showering and then we're going to get breakfast. Would you like me to bring you something?"

"Doesn't matter," Kurt said with a yawn. "I can come down later, I guess."

"I'll bring you something," Thad said, smiling as he straightened his sleeves. "Scones alright?"

"S'fine," Kurt murmured, rubbing his eyes.

The bathroom door opened and Flint strode out wearing a shirt like Thad's, though his was dark crimson and gold. He too looked cheerful.

"Morning, Kurt," he said, smiling as he moved towards Thad, slipping an arm around his waist. "Ready to go, pet?"

Thad nodded, beaming.

"You two are very happy," Kurt said, narrowing his eyes suspiciously.

"Oh," Thad said, blushing faintly. "We, er, we just—"

"We had a walk around the lake," Flint said hastily.

"Yes," Thad said, looking grateful. "Yes, a walk around the lake. It's lovely out."

"Mhmm," Kurt mumbled, rolling his eyes as he tugged the blankets over his head again. "Whatever you say."

He heard them walking away.

"You don't think he heard, do you?" Thad whispered nervously.

"We were in the bathroom with the shower on, of course he didn't hear," Flint said quietly.

"I can hear you now," Kurt said, raising his voice a little.

Thad yelped and Kurt could almost hear him blushing, grinning as they left and shut the door behind them.

"They've got the right idea," Blaine murmured, lifting his head to kiss Kurt's ear. "You know, everyone else is still asleep. They'll probably be out for an hour and we've got some time before Thad and Flint get back." His hand strayed down Kurt's stomach to slip into his pajamas,

where he palmed him gently through his briefs. "Whattaya think, love?"

Kurt groaned faintly, twitching his hips into Blaine's hand. "Alright," he breathed. "But we have to hurry."

Blaine practically leapt out of bed, stumbling a little as he got caught up in the blankets. Kurt laughed and shushed him at the same time, giggling as he ran to the bathroom, Blaine right behind him.

Blaine shut and locked the door behind him, barely turning back to the room when Kurt was pushing him up against the door and kissing him hard, fingers moving frantically to unbutton his own pajamas.

"To think," Blaine mumbled against him, hands slipping down the back of Kurt's briefs and gliding up and over his hips. "We'll never soil the Ravenclaw tower again."

"Or the grounds," Kurt said, smirking.

"Or the Room of Requirement," Blaine said, chuckling as he tugged his shirt over his head.

"Don't forget the library," Kurt added thoughtfully.

"We *do* get around," Blaine murmured, reattaching his lips to Kurt's once they were both down to their underwear.

"Mmm, it's because you taste so *good*," Kurt said, gasping as Blaine shoved him lightly into one of the shower stalls, stepping in after him and closing the frosted door.

Blaine stripped off his boxers and Kurt shed his briefs before flicking on the shower, hot water immediately dousing both of them. Kurt groaned that the warmth, sagging against the tiled wall and tilting his head back to let the spray wash over him.

Blaine's lips latched onto his neck, moving easily against the wet skin as his hands skimmed down Kurt's chest before gripping his waist lightly as he pressed their hips together. Kurt bit his lip hard to keep from crying out as pleasure arched up from the point of contact, flickering across his nerves as Blaine moaned into his neck.

"Merlin, can we start every morning like this from now on?" Blaine breathed, trailing wet kisses across his jaw.

"I could get used to it," Kurt said, lifting one leg up to wrap loosely around the back of Blaine's thighs and pull him closer. "Put we can switch it up. Make sure it doesn't get dull."

"How about I wake you up tomorrow with breakfast in bed and a blow job?" Blaine suggested, nipping his ear lobe as he dragged his hips against him.

"Mmm, now I'm going to be looking forward to that all day," Kurt mumbled, smiling.

"Best not mention it to our parents," Blaine said, hands slipping around Kurt's waist to hold him close.



"Good idea," Kurt said. He closed his eyes again, leg still draped around Blaine's thighs and head back against the wall as water splashed across his face, Blaine's lips moving across his collarbone and his hips rocking steadily into him.

One thing he wouldn't miss was the fact that they had to be so careful to make sure no one caught them doing this sort of thing. Then again, it had always been a little thrilling, the thought that someone might walk in on them. He guessed they could always leave the curtains open in their apartment.

He felt himself getting close, his fingernails digging into Blaine's shoulders and soft whines building in the back of his throat. Blaine caught his lips in a heated kiss, hot water slipping over their mouths and tongues as Kurt groaned loudly, eyes rolling back as he came between their flush bodies.

Blaine's arms tightened around him. He buried his face in Kurt's neck, hot breath hitting his wet skin as he continued to move his hips, the motion becoming a little sporadic as he neared his own climax. He bit down on Kurt's neck, limbs shaking and a low moan vibrating over Kurt's skin.

They stood there for a few minutes, panting and savoring the proximity and heat of the shower, the air around them heavy with steam.

"Love you," Blaine mumbled, kissing lazily up his jaw to catch his lips against his own.

"Mmm, you too," Kurt sighed, letting his leg fall back onto the floor and enjoying the moment of peace.

"Guess we should get ready," Blaine said, planting a final kiss on his neck before pulling back reluctantly.

"I guess," Kurt said, sighing and flicking off the shower before stepping out into the thick air onto the chill marble floor. "Ah, that's cold!"

Blaine grinned, wrapping a fluffy towel around him and hugging him tightly. "Little bit better?" he said before grabbing his own towel and tucking it around his waist.

"Yeah," Kurt said, biting his lip as he admired Blaine's leanly muscled back and arms, glistening with water, as he bent over to gather up their clothes.

They tiptoed out of the bathroom together, hurrying to get dressed before Thad returned a few minutes later, clutching several scones wrapped in a napkin. "Flint's gone to get his trunk," he said as he perched on Kurt's bed and laid the scones out.

"Thanks," Kurt said, smiling as he broke open a scone, blowing gently at the steam before taking a bite as Blaine dipped his own into the tea he'd Conjured up.

They ate as the others started waking up, Jeff and Nick popping up from their tangled blankets and sniffing the air like a pair of gophers at the smell of their breakfast.

"Mmm, scones," Jeff mumbled, tumbled out of his bed over to sneak one of the scones, tossing a second one to Nick. He juggled it between his fingers before taking a bite. "Ah, hot."

"No, really?" Kurt said sarcastically, rolling his eyes.

When they'd all showered and dressed, they double-checked their trunks—which they'd packed the night before—and stared around the now bare dormitory.

"I guess...I guess this is it," Kurt said, glancing around at the others. Thad sniffed, dashing away the tears welling in his eyes with the back of his hand.

"Hey," Jeff said gently, smiling and laying an arm around his shoulders.

"Don't cry, bunny," Nick said, touching his arm lightly. "We'll still see each other."

"Promise?" Thad said softly, looking up with a hopeful expression.

"All the time," Jeff said with a nod.

"You won't be able to get rid of us," Nick said, grinning.

Thad smiled bashfully. "Good," he said, toying with the hem of his shirt.

"Come on," Kurt said gently. "Let's go."

They filed out, lugging their trunks out with them. Kurt glanced around the room a final time, smiling at the flood of memories, before turning back to Blaine, who gave him a fond look and took his free hand in his own, before stepping out into the hall and closing the door behind them for the last time.

---

The Great Hall seemed almost overfull with the amount of noise coming from it, the sea of Muggle clothes rather than black robes punctuated every now and then by seventh years dressed in their House shirts. They left their trunks—and Acorn's basket—in the entrance hall with the rest of the school's. Kurt had already sent Pavarotti to his father the night before, planning on picking him up after they'd arrived in London to take to their apartment. Thad waved to Flint as they settled at the Ravenclaw table for the last time. Jeff and Nick ate ravenously despite the scones, as if they were trying to get as much of the good food as they could before they were forced to attempt cooking on their own. Kurt knew they were going to go look for a flat somewhere in London once they got back to King's Cross, though he was sure the two of them would be spending more time in his own and Thad's apartment than their own.

Thad sat between Kurt and Jeff, staring at the table and looking faintly teary-eyed.

"Hey," Kurt whispered, nudging him with elbow. Thad looked up with a forlorn expression. "It's going to be okay," Kurt said. "Just think of it as...new opportunities. Think of all the fun you'll have working at Gringotts! You'll get to translate Runes all day."

"If I passed my Runes exam," Thad mumbled, gaze dropping to his lap as he sighed.

"Stop it," Kurt said sternly. "You know you passed, I know you passed, everyone knows you got an 'Outstanding' and that's just because they couldn't give you a higher grade."

Thad smiled weakly, glancing up at him. "Thanks, Kurt," he said softly. "I...you're a good friend."

"What are best friends for?" Kurt said, smiling and patting Thad's leg under the table.

The younger students started filing out, chattering happily as they made their way to the carriages waiting to take them to Hogsmeade Station. Hanna kissed Nick on the cheek and squeezed his hand before hurrying off with her friends. Gwen waved and grinned as she passed, Jeff waving enthusiastically in reply. Kurt saw Leighton and Gavin—who'd opted to sit at the Slytherin table as he still wasn't *officially* a Professor until the start of next term—leaving together, talking softly and holding hands.

As McGonagall had made her speeches to the school the previous night during the Leaving Feast, there was little left to do other than have the Heads of Houses pass out their N.E.W.T scores and receive their goodbye from the Headmistress before they too made their way to the village.

It wasn't like graduation would have been at McKinley. No showy ceremony or elaborate send offs. No framed diplomas and tasseled hats. Simply, a farewell.

Kurt thought it might be better that way. A drawn-out, tearful goodbye wouldn't make things any easier. And he wasn't *really* leaving.

Hogwarts would always be a part of him no matter where he went. He'd have the memories, the laughter and tears that he'd shared with the others inside the ancient walls. They'd linger on, perhaps fading a little with time, the lines blurring until it was difficult to discern the moments, separate one memory from the next, but always solidly existing in the recesses of his mind and heart.

The four House Heads moved amongst them, passing out their exam results. Tiny Professor Flitwick approached them after handing Wes, David, and the Ravenclaw girls their parchments.

"Here you are, boys," he said, handing their papers around. "You've all done excellent! I'm most pleased with your results in Ancient Runes, Mr. Jenkins. And yours in Potions, Mr. Hummel. You might not have been here long, but you certainly left your mark on Hogwarts!"

"I'd say," Jeff mumbled to laughter as they all opened their results and scanned them quickly.

Kurt grinned down at his scores.

*Muggle Studies O*

*Charms E*

*Defense Against the Dark Arts E*

*Potions O*

*Transfiguration O*

"Good job, love," Blaine whispered, kissing him on the cheek. Kurt glanced over at his scores, all 'Outstanding's except for an 'Exceeds Expectations' in Muggle Studies. He turned to peek at Thad's parchment, unsurprised to see top marks in every subject.

Jeff and Nick were high-fiving over their matching results, which were high as expected, despite their reassurances that they were *not* that smart.

Flitwick patted them all on the shoulder, thanking them for all their hard work, but Kurt was barely listening. As the Heads returned to their table and McGonagall stood, giving a brief speech on what great additions they had been to the long list of Hogwarts students, it started to hit him hard that it was really ending.

He was leaving Hogwarts.

And he wasn't coming back.

Maybe one day he might visit as a parent but...he'd never sleep in the Ravenclaw dorms again, never spend his evenings lounging in the common room, curled up with Blaine reading a book, never want to tear his own hair out because of the mountain of homework his teachers had given them. Never...any of it. It was over. Just like that. Tears splashed onto his exam results as he cried silently, head down. Thad was sniffing next to him, head on Kurt's shoulder as he cried as well. Blaine's hand slipped into Kurt's and Kurt turned to see his hazel eyes shining with unshed tears as well.

He couldn't believe that less than two years ago he'd been *forced* to come to Hogwarts because of a bully and now...now he was being forced to leave.

He scrubbed his eyes hastily when McGonagall dismissed them, sounding close to tears herself, which did nothing to make Kurt feel better. Taking a steadying breath, he stood up with the rest of them, glancing over to when Flint was giving Dan a firm hug before clapping his best friend on the back and hurrying towards Thad. Two Hufflepuff

girls were sobbing in each other's arms, a third patting one of them on the shoulder as tears streamed down her own face.

"Come on, love," Blaine said, tugging on his hand. "Our parents are waiting."

Kurt blinked hard a few times, squeezing Blaine's hand as they left the Hall. He glanced back at the four long tables, the enchanted ceiling—currently a bright, clear, cloudless blue—high above, as the other seventh years filed out around him.

They walked through the entrance hall together, out into the warm sunlight to the several carriages waiting for them. He gulped back tears as the oak front doors closed behind them with a gentle *thud*. He climbed into a carriage with Jeff, Nick, Blaine, Thad, and Flint, keeping his gaze fixed out through the window at the Castle as the carriages started out, jostling and bumping down the path.

Thad was crying into Flint's shoulder, face buried as his body shook and he clung to Flint like a lifeline.

Kurt stared back at Hogwarts, twisting his body around to keep it in sight as long as possible as they rounded a bend. His eyes started to water and he blinked hard. When he opened them again, Hogwarts was gone, hidden by the crest of the hill they'd just gone around.

Tears came hot and fast to his face as he turned around in his seat, hand still clutching Blaine's in his lap. Blaine kissed his cheek reassuringly.

"I love you," he whispered. "It's going to be alright, love. We've got all the time in the world together. Even if it's not at Hogwarts."

Kurt nodded, leaning against him and sighing shakily. Thad was still crying, though a little softer now, Flint's eyes were closed as he kissed Thad's hair, and even Jeff and Nick looked dejected now that they realized they really were leaving for good.

The carriage rattled around them, each lost in their own thoughts as they passed through the winged boars and turned onto the High Street and up the side road to Hogsmeade Station.

The line of carriages stopped and they all clambered out onto the street, shielding their eyes against the sudden, bright sunlight. Kurt blinked rapidly, face screwed up as his eyes adjusted.

"Kurt!"

Kurt turned at the sound of his name, barely having a chance to take in the crowd of parents and some older siblings gathered on the platform before he was swept up in a crushing hug.

"Finn, must you always try and kill me?" Kurt gasped, coughing as Finn released him with a wide grin.

"Sorry," he said, still beaming. "Just missed you, bro."

"You too," Kurt said, massaging his ribs as Blaine stuck out his hand towards Finn only to be engulfed in a hug as well. Kurt smiled at his look of surprise.

His father and Carole approached, both smiling and looking proud, though Carole's eyes were bright. Kurt hugged them both tightly. Blaine's mother was holding Blaine in a tight embrace, whispering about how proud his father would have been.

Jeff and Nick weren't far away, Jeff standing beside a young man with bright blonde hair who Kurt assumed was his older brother. He had an arm slung around Jeff's shoulder, a familiar, mischievous smirk on his features that Kurt had seen hundreds of times on Jeff's face. Jeff's mother was chatting with another woman with long, dark hair who was clutching the hand of a young girl of around nine whose other hand was grasping Nick's.

Not all the students' parents were there as many of the students were simply Apparating home or their parents were working.

"This isn't anything like my graduation was," Finn said, looking around at the remaining students and relatives as Kurt's father, Carole, and Blaine's mother started discussing the possibility of meeting for lunch while they waited for Kurt and the others to take the train back to London. "It was huge! We had to listen to all these speeches and stuff. I got super bored. I like this better. Not so, um, boring. Wish I could see your school, though. Too bad Muggles can't see it, it sounds awesome. I—"

"Finn!" Kurt said, Blaine grinning next to him.

"Sorry," Finn muttered with a sheepish expression. He looked up at the Hogwarts Express with a mild expression of longing. "It's so cool! I wish we had a train to take us to school instead of having to drive."

"So ride with us," Jeff said, having just disentangled himself from his mother to approach them with Nick.

"What?" Finn said, staring blankly at him.

"Come with us on the train, Finnegan," Nick said with a grin as he and Nick slung their arms around Finn's shoulders.

"It'll be brilliant," Jeff said, beaming.

"Much more fun than hanging around all those old fogeys while you wait for us," Nick muttered, jerking his head towards their families.

"I—wow, really?" Finn said, looking excited.

"Sure," Jeff said with a shrug.

"Awesome!" Finn said. "Mom! Mom, I'm going to ride on the train!" he shouted, turning back to call out to Carole.

"He sounds like a five-year old, doesn't he?" Kurt mumbled to Blaine, who chuckled.

"Alrighty, then," Jeff said cheerily. "Let's show you aboard, good sir."

He and Nick smirked as they steered him towards the train.

"I have an awful feeling they're going to try and wheedle all my secrets out of him," Kurt said, pursing his lips.

"Does Finn even *know* all your secrets?" Blaine said curiously.

"No," Kurt replied. "But he knows enough to give them material to blackmail me."

"Like what?" Blaine said, grinning.

"Like how I had a crush on him before I came to Hogwarts," Kurt said, narrowing his eyes and setting off after the others.

"What?"

---

They said their brief goodbyes to their parents, promising to catch up with them on Platform Nine and Three Quarters. They crammed into a compartment together, Jeff and Nick on either side of Finn, who gazed in awe as they did some simple spellwork for him. Thad perched on Flint's lap by the window, blushing a little at his position. Kurt settled next to Flint, Blaine sitting next to him and crossing his arms with a small scowl. He wasn't all that pleased finding out Kurt had once harbored feelings for Finn.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Dan Apparating home?" he said, turning to Flint, who nodded.

"His parents are Muggles," Flint said. "So...they couldn't exactly come out here to see him. We're meeting up tomorrow though. He's trying to get into the Ministry in the Department of International Cooperation. He's got an interview Tuesday."

"Cool," Kurt said, smiling. He wasn't necessarily close to Dan, but he was always nice to him and a great friend for Flint, not to mention incredibly protective towards Thad from what he'd heard.

"Wes and David heading home too, then?" Flint said, his arms resting loosely around Thad's middle. There was the hiss of steam and groan of pistons outside as the train kicked into life.

Kurt nodded. "Meeting up with their girlfriends to celebrate," he said.

"From what I heard, Wes is moving in with Charlotte and David is going to stay with Janette and his older sister. I think they graduated together."

"They did," Blaine confirmed a little stiffly, the compartment shaking a little as the train pulled away from the station, Finn waving excitedly to his mother.

Kurt gave him a stern look, pursing his lips. "You realize I don't have feelings for Finn anymore, right?" he muttered as those gathered on the platform Apparated away with unheard *pops*, Carole gripping

Kurt's father's hand as he turned on the spot. "You have more of a reason to dislike Flint seeing as he and I, you know, actually dated." Blaine features shifted, his posture loosening. "Sorry," he mumbled. "I just...don't like the idea of you being attracted to someone else." "Well I'm not anymore," Kurt said, smiling. "So don't be so grumpy." He rapped him on the knee as he said it and Blaine grinned. "Sorry," he repeated. "You're just so...look at you. I don't doubt that any man would be all over you if he had the chance." "You'd be surprised," Kurt muttered, raising his hand in a wave as Leighton passed the closed compartment door, grinning in at him before continuing on. "My love life was rather stagnant before Hogwarts." Blaine laughed, squeezing his hand and leaning against him as the train picked up speed, leaving the platform, and Hogwarts, behind it.

---

The Hogwarts Express rumbled along the tracks steadily, fields of swaying grass and wildflowers passing by outside. They'd left Hogwarts a few hours ago and were nearly halfway back to King's Cross. Cole had spent the time reading and occasionally contributing to the conversation the other fifth years were having in the compartment he was sharing with them. He was just finishing the chapter he was reading on the history of Cheering Charms when there was a sharp *rap* on the window of the door. Thinking it must be for one of the others, he continued reading, not looking up. "Cole," Ellie Collins said, nudging his leg with her foot. "It's for you." He glanced up to see her and her sister grinning as Cole turned to the door with a frown. Teddy Lupin was standing on the other side of the glass, wiggling his fingers in a wave as he winked. Sighing and trying to ignore the sudden increase in his heart rate, Cole set his book down and stood up. "I'll be right back," he muttered, pulling the door open as Lupin stepped back to allow him out. "Take your time," Jaimie said, smirking. Cole rolled his eyes, closing the door behind him as he stepped into the aisle. He squeaked in surprise as Lupin grabbed his hand and tugged him away from the door, pushing him lightly against the wall and very nearly kissing him, his lips a hairsbreadth away from Cole's. "Hey, Ginger" Lupin breathed. "What is your problem?" Cole hissed, pushing him away. "What?" Lupin said with a shocked look. "You said, after exams—" "I said I'd think about it," Cole said, wishing his cheeks weren't glowing red. "That doesn't mean you can start...start—"



"Ravishing you?" Lupin said in a would-be sultry voice, though the effect was lessened by his yelp of pain as Cole smacking him around the head. "Oi! I was trying to be smooth!"

"Well, you're doing a right awful job of it," Cole snapped. He sniffed and gave Lupin a haughty glare, folding his arms firmly across his chest.

"Come on, Ginger," Lupin said, pouting. "You can't leave me hanging for the whole summer? What will I think about when I—"

"Shut up!" Cole hissed, clamping a hand over his mouth and blushing. Lupin grinned and licked his palm.

"Ew!" Cole cried, yanking his hand away and scrubbing it on his jeans.

"What the hell is your problem, Lupin?"

"I'm horny, that's my problem!" Lupin nearly shouted. Two girls further down the aisle turned to give them matching looks of wide-eyed amusement.

"Oh my god," Cole groaned, hiding his face in his hand. "You're ridiculous, that's what you are."

"At least let me get *you* off," Lupin said. "That's proper wank material anyway."

"*Oh my god, shut up!*" Cole hissed, unsure if he wanted to run away or simply die of embarrassment then and there.

"Ginger, you know I like you," Lupin said, with a pout that Cole wished wasn't as adorable as it was. "I'm going to spend the whole summer without touching a soul—other than myself, of course—just for you. Take pity, *please*."

"I am *not* touching your—" He gestured helplessly, feeling completely ridiculous.

"Cock?" Lupin offered helpfully.

Cole groaned in embarrassment, sliding against the wall onto the floor.

"Just kill me now," he mumbled into his knees.

Lupin's features softened a little and he sat down next to him.

Cole glared and tried to scoot away but Lupin kept him there with an arm firmly around his shoulders. The touch was gentle and warm and Cole suddenly found himself blushing for a whole different reason.

"Alright," Lupin said, his eyes softening from fuchsia to brown as they so often did just for Cole. "If you *really* don't want to do anything, I'll try my best not to beg. Though I'd wrestle a troll to suck your cock. Sorry, sorry, I'm still working on it," he added as Cole tried to pull away from him again. "I'll get better, Ginger. I swear."

Cole gave him a faintly doubtful look.

"I really like you," Lupin said with a smile—not a smirk or an arrogant leer, just a warm smile that reached his brown eyes. "I'm going to do my best not to be a total prat. But if my prat-ish behavior comes out

every now and then, I apologize in advance. Sometimes I can't stop it."

Cole smiled reluctantly. He sighed and allowed himself to relax under Lupin's touch. "Alright," he said at last. "I said I'd give you a chance. But we're not dating yet," he added hastily at Lupin's wide smile. "I...I think we should...write and...and see what happens at the start of next year. In case you...in case you...change your mind." He muttered the last three words, gaze dropping to his lap.

"I won't," Lupin said insistently. "I won't, I swear I won't."

Cole looked back up to see him smiling brightly, eyes lighting up as they returned to their usual vivid purple, his hair even more vibrant than usual. He couldn't help but smile as well. Something squirmed happily in his stomach.

Lupin suddenly looked nervous. "Um," he said, chewing on the inside of his cheek. "Could...can I maybe at least have a...a kiss? You know...to get me through. Two months is a long time."

Cole felt the heat creeping up his face as he looked at him, his pulse suddenly picking up. He gulped and nodded, anticipation fluttering in his chest.

Lupin grinned, eyes closing as he leaned towards him.

Cole held his breath, letting his own eyes flutter closed as Lupin kissed him. He relaxed immediately at the touch, sighing and moving his lips in reply to Lupin's. He shivered as Lupin cupped his cheek, fingertips dusting over his face before sliding down to settle on his neck.

He tried not to be too disappointed when Lupin broke away a few seconds later, pressing a second, short kiss to his lips as he did.

"You taste good," Lupin said, tilting his head to the side and smiling.

"Like strawberries."

Cole felt himself blushing at the compliment and ducked his head, attempting to regain his composure.

"You too," he muttered. "Um, but like...chocolate."

"Probably cause I'm addicted to the stuff," Lupin said with a sigh. His hand came to rest on Cole's knee. "Thank you for that. Hopefully you'll still want to do it come September."

Cole glanced over at him. He was pretty sure he wanted to do it now, but he'd promised himself to be careful after everything he'd done and everything he'd *heard* Lupin had done.

"Alright," Lupin said, patting his leg. "I'll let you get back to your friends." He pushed himself up, holding out a hand to help Cole up as well.

Cole accepted it, wishing he'd stop feeling so damn nervous around him like he'd started to lately, and stood.

"I guess I'll see you in September then," Lupin said, grinning. "Write me, alright, Ginger?"

Cole nodded, twisting his hands together.

Lupin gave him a steady look for a moment before leaning forward and planting a swift kiss on his lips. Cole gasped as he pulled away with a grin and a wink.

"See you later," Lupin said, waving briefly as he walked away down the aisle, hands in his pockets and a faint spring in his step.

Cole watched him go, a small smile building on his face as he slipped back into his compartment, suddenly more excited than he'd ever been for September to come.

---

"Whoa, Kurt, have you tasted this one? It's gross!"

"Finn," Kurt said with yet another impatient sigh. "I've had them before. I'm aware of the flavors."

"But it's a *dirt-flavored* jelly bean!" Finn said excitedly. "How weird is that?"

Kurt rolled his eyes, glaring at Jeff and Nick, who'd bought Finn a large pouch of Every-Flavor Beans from the trolley when it had stopped by their compartment almost two hours before. Finn had spent the time slowly eating his way through the bag, letting out an exclamation of shock every few minutes when he found a particularly odd flavored one.

Nick tittered, Jeff beaming innocently at Kurt as he glowered at them. "Here, Finnegan," Jeff said, passing him a bright red bean. "Try this one."

Finn popped the bean into his mouth, chewing with a curious expression. His eyes suddenly started bugging out of his head and he fanned at his mouth.

"Oh my god, that's hot!" he cried, grabbing for the pumpkin juice he'd been given as Jeff and Nick rolled around their seats laughing.

Kurt rolled his eyes, Blaine laughing lightly beside him. Thad had fallen asleep in Flint's lap like he had the year before, his legs curled up on Flint's knees as he snuggled against his chest. Acorn, who'd been loaded onto the train with all their trunks, was sitting between Kurt and Flint, his fluffy tail wrapped around his body as he slept.

"We'll be there soon," Flint said softly, eyes fixed out the window at the scenery. "Half an hour at most."

Jeff and Nick fell silent at this, exchanging an alarmed look as Finn continued to sample beans between them.

"We're all heading to our place first, right?" Blaine said, glancing around at the others. They all nodded.

"I want to see our flat, too," Flint said, smiling as he looked down at Thad.

"I'd like to as well," Kurt said. "Then what?"

"Food," Jeff and Nick said in unison to an eye-roll from Kurt.

"I don't know about the rest of you," Blaine said with a vaguely anxious expression, "but...I...well, my parents used to take me to the zoo every year after we left the platform. I'd...I'd like to go with my mom and...if any of you want to come..." he trailed off, looking around at them nervously.

Jeff and Nick beamed, nodding enthusiastically as Kurt gripped Blaine's hand tightly.

"The zoo?" Finn said with an excited look. "Awesome! I love zoos! I can get Rachel something. She likes stuffed animals."

Blaine looked relieved and touched by their attitudes, ducking his head as tears welled in his eyes.

"I know you miss him," Kurt whispered gently. He kissed his cheek. "I love you, Blaine."

Blaine sniffed, taking a calming breath. "Love you too," he said, smiling.

They rode on, the train swaying around them as Nick pulled out his chessboard and he and Jeff started explaining wizard's chess to a wide-eyed Finn. Much too soon, they started to slow, the building rising up around them as they delved into the heart of the city.

Flint woke Thad gently, the smaller boy looking around through bleary eyes as he tried to remember where he was. His lip quivered when he realized how close they were to the end of their journey and Flint quickly hugged him, whispering softly in his ear as Kurt forced Acorn into his basket, which was a much tighter fit than it had been in September.

The train slid to a halt with a squeal of metal on metal, jerking a little on the tracks. They struggled to get their trunks from the racks and under the seats, dragging them through the packed aisle and out onto the equally crowded and loud platform.

Kurt found their parents quickly, all of them gathered to one side, talking and laughing. He smiled a little at the fact that they got along as well as their children.

"Where to first, kiddo?" Kurt's father said, smiling as Finn launched into an excited spiel to his mother about the train ride.

"Our place," Kurt said as Blaine nodded. "We'll drop off our trunks and everything and then we want to check out Thad and Flint's place. We thought we could all grab something quick to eat and then head to the zoo. Then maybe we can all have dinner together. If that's alright with the rest of you?"

"That sounds lovely," Blaine's mother said, smiling. "It'll be just like old times, Biscuit."

Blaine groaned in embarrassment.

Kurt's father nodded. "Sounds fine to me," he said, glancing at Carole, who gave a small nod, still listening to Finn talk as he gesticulated wildly.

"We're meeting my parents and Thad's mum for dinner," Flint said with a faintly apologetic look.

"It's alright," Kurt said, smiling. "We'll still get to see you later. You *do* live in the same building."

Flint grinned, Thad looking cheered by the thought.

"Let's head out then," Kurt's father said, laying a hand around Kurt's shoulder as he took his trunk from him with his other hand. He caught Kurt's slightly sad look as he gazed at the Hogwarts Express. "You alright, kiddo?"

Kurt sighed and nodded. "I will be," he said with a small smile.

It might take him—and the rest of them—time to get over the fact that they weren't going back. That they were going their separate ways to start their careers and their own lives. But they had Thad and Flint's wedding to look forward to in two months, and there'd always be letters and Floo calls, meeting up for lunch on the weekends or simply gathering together at one of their apartments to laugh about something crazy Jeff and Nick had done or reminiscing about their time at Hogwarts.

His smile widened a little as he turned away towards the gateway leading back to the Muggle world, one hand linked with Blaine's. They might not be going back to Hogwarts again—at least, not as students—but they'd had their time just like so many others before them and so many more to come. They had their memories and their laughter and even their pain. Most importantly though, they had each other.

And that, Kurt thought as he passed through the stone archway out into King's Cross Station, was what really mattered.