

Just Listen

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Chapter One: It Must Be So Lonely

There was always that certain social enigma that was so out of reach from everyone else in school, yet at the same time so in reach. There was always that person who could float from group to group, being welcomed anywhere and everywhere simply because that was who that person was. There was always that person that, somehow, everyone loved and nobody, not even the most hateful people, could find anything that made them dislikeable to the point of hatred. That person always existed in schools.

McKinley High School was no exception.

Or, well, it used to be, anyways.

Blaine Anderson was McKinley High's enigma from the moment he stepped through the doors on his first day in freshman year. Even all of the seniors loved him at that point in time, and, normally, seniors hated all freshmen.

Blaine seemed to be everywhere, though. He was on the soccer team, the debate team, he was in orchestra, part of the science club—he was kind of crazy, actually. At the same time, he somehow always had so much energy. He was always smiling and being polite and saying hi to everyone as if every single student was a really good friend from his childhood or something.

Maybe, to him, everyone was.

Girls adored him; guys envied and liked him as a friend. Blaine Anderson didn't really date anyone, though. Quinn Fabray dated him for a little while, but they broke it off. All the Cheerios and Quinn herself said she ended it, everyone else knew that Blaine did (she went off to date Finn Hudson anyways). Some people said that Blaine slept with girls, never dated them. Others said that he liked to keep his relationships secret, no matter whom he was dating.

Blaine's closest guy friend was apparently Wesley Kim (he went to another school, though), his closest girl friend was, amazingly enough, Santana Lopez, even though they never really publicly spoke to each other. Everyone knew that they were close, though, even without proof.

Suddenly, though, for some unknown reason, in the middle of sophomore year, Blaine missed a week of school and when he came back, he came back silent. Isolated. He didn't speak to anyone and constantly had music playing in his ear. Nobody knew what happened. There were rumors, of course, but no one would ever prove them to be correct. Or, for that matter, incorrect.

And, so, the small town high school in Lima, Ohio, lost its social enigma. It never got one back. Plenty of people tried to take Blaine Anderson's place, but no one did, or could, of course.

People lost interest in the previous mystery that was Blaine Anderson, since people always wondered how the kid could be so happy all the time and have so many friends yet get amazing grades no matter what. Actually, not everyone lost interest. Just the main popular people at first, like the football players and the Cheerios (cheerleaders) and quite a few other groups of multiple people, for example.

The high school's glee club, the New Directions, didn't exactly lose interest in Blaine immediately. They tried to pull Blaine towards them, they tried to be his friends, but he resisted silently and ignored any offers they gave him politely in a way that no one understood. Blaine Anderson had been an amazing singer. He was never an official member of the New Directions, but he had stopped by often and jammed with them from time to time.

By the end of sophomore year, most of them lost interest in trying to pull the Eurasian towards them, as well, though that was mostly due to Santana telling all of them to just back off of him.

Most of them. Kurt Elizabeth Hummel (no one was sure if the middle name was serious or if it was just self-given anymore), on the other hand, never quite lost sight of the quiet, music-obsessed teenager. He had always been interested in Blaine, merely because how he managed to be a looser while being a popular kid never made sense. No even his stepbrother, Finn Hudson, could manage to do that (he tried to be that kid after Blaine faded out and failed miserably). Plus, no one could deny it; Blaine Anderson was one of, if not the, cutest guy in school. That gave Kurt plenty of reasons to watch him.

He just did it quietly, secretly, and from afar. He was really only as secretive about it as he was in order to avoid the wrath of Santana, though, because no one wants to get on her bad side.

However, it wasn't like Kurt was a stalker about it. If he saw Blaine in the hall, he'd watch him from a distance and when he'd get out of view, Kurt would move on to whatever he was doing. He didn't know anything personal about Blaine, just his first and last name. Nothing else made itself known.

Kurt was okay with that.

Yes, one could say that Kurt wasn't exactly up to date with Blaine Anderson gossip. Honestly, he kind of ignored it when everyone was talking about it and by the time he was really truly interested in it, during junior year, nobody was talking about it. He took it into his own hands to find out as much as possible from as few people as possible.

"Mercedes," Kurt asked his best friend as he opened his locker, transferring the books in the crook of his arm into the metal box, which honestly was what a locker was, "what do you know about Blaine?"

The plus-sized, but still absolutely gorgeous, girl looked over at the taller pale teenager, an eyebrow raised, "Why, boo?" she asked, using the pet name that she gave just about everybody, "Taking an interest in the quiet kid?" there was a teasing tone in her voice, and Kurt could tell without looking that she was smiling a little bit.

Kurt shrugged, glancing down the hall and stopping his movements when he saw Blaine walk across the hall adjacent to the one that he was in, watching the dark-haired teenager walk by with his ear buds in his ear, as per usual, "He's in my English class," Kurt finally said honestly, if not a little breathlessly, not looking away from the other hall until Blaine was completely out of sight and down the hall, "I just don't know much about him, so I was wondering."

"Nobody really knows much about him," Mercedes responded, glancing at him just as he went back to shifting his French stuff for his English stuff, coincidentally, "even when he was Mr. Popular, nobody knew too much about him. I'm pretty sure that the last rumor that was spread about him was that he's gay," Kurt raised an eyebrow at this. No one could get that rumor spread about them and not get bullied for it. Except for Blaine, apparently. How he did it, Kurt did not know, "Not a single person knew what went down with him, not even Santana."

"What does Santana have to do with Blaine? Apart from being his best friend, that is," Kurt asked, grabbing his English book and grabbing his locker door, staring over at Mercedes before he bothered to close it. Sure, best friends told each other everything but it didn't really seem like Santana and Blaine hung out that much.

The African American girl looked up at him, obviously confused, "You didn't know that Santana dated Blaine last year a while before and after the incident?" Kurt shook his head slowly because that made no sense. Santana was always extremely out there with whom she dated— "They kind of kept it on the down low the entire time," ... well, that explained why Santana seemingly wasn't "dating" anyone for a few months last year, "but they had a thing for a while. Apparently they were closer than everyone thought they were, before they dated. Anyways, not even Santana knows much about what happened, and if she does she isn't going to say anything about it any time soon, if ever," Mercedes finished, shrugging and grabbing the last book she needed before shutting the locker.

Kurt blinked, a little shocked, closing his locker slowly, "How did I miss that?" he asked rhetorically, and Mercedes shrugged in response. Kurt

sighed, shaking his head a little bit, "Well, I guess I'll see you later, 'Cedes," he said with a small smile, before walking past his best friend and down the hall, hearing her say her goodbye before walking the opposite direction.

Blaine and Santana dated. Kurt supposed that could be true... Blaine was, after all, apparently secretive about relationships. It just didn't sound like something Santana herself would do, keeping a relationship with the most popular boy in school a secret. Then again, Santana wasn't exactly everything she made herself seem to be...

Kurt sighed a little bit, trying to clear his head so he could get to English on time without any run-ins with stupid Neanderthals— Halfway to his English classroom, Kurt was suddenly shoved to the side by a very solid body, and he collided roughly with the wall, dropping his books abruptly and sliding down to the floor with a small groan because, damn it, his shoulder had just healed from the last bruise that he got. He looked up angrily and saw a football player whose name he couldn't quite remember at that moment, "What is your problem?" he demanded angrily.

The football player laughed cruelly, grinning meanly down at the short (compared to him) brunet, "No fags allowed in my hallway, Lady!" he spat before turning around and continuing down the hallway, laughing to himself and receiving a few pats on the back from fellow brick heads that were lining the hall.

Kurt sighed and reached out for his books, gathering the ones closest to him. He was about to grab the one furthest from where he sat until someone else was grabbing it, and he looked up again, ready to tell off another jerk who was probably going to throw the book into the trash can that was next to the bathrooms or something—

He stopped when he found Blaine Anderson in front of him, holding his book and staring at him with horribly beautiful hazel eyes that Kurt had never seen this up close and personal because even when Blaine would stop by the choir room last year Kurt kept his cautious distance, the hand holding said book outstretched and a neutral expression on his face.

Kurt took the book, still a little shell-shocked, "Thanks..." he breathed quietly, forgetting for a moment that Blaine couldn't hear him.

Well, actually, it seemed like Blaine could hear him or was at least reading his lips effortlessly, since he nodded mutely before turning and heading back down the hall, most likely continuing to their shared English classroom.

Kurt sat there for a few more moments before standing up since class was seriously about to start, starting to jog down the hall despite

wearing boots that really weren't made for rushing. He blamed the stupid football player who pushed him.

Kurt made it into his classroom just as the bell rang, and sat down at his desk quickly as the teacher, Mrs. Coleman, started to take role. He looked at the board to see that they were doing today, and tried not to groan too loudly when he saw, in big, curving letters on the board:

Projects to be handed out and assigned today

Of course. The big project for juniors who decided to take AP English. It was a several month long project that had to be done with a partner that the teacher assigned. Honestly, it wasn't the work that Kurt was dreading, like most people, it was who he was going to be partnered with. He was always annoyingly unlucky when it came to predetermined partners that no one had any say in the deciding of. Oh well. What happened, happened, Kurt supposed.

Kurt glanced around the room and found Blaine sitting on basically the clear other side of the room, ear buds still in, staring off into space. For some reason, he never got in trouble for listening to his music during class and he always had nearly flawless notes, in rather straight, perfect handwriting, whenever Kurt would pass him to get to the pencil sharpener. Apparently, Blaine was freakishly good at reading lips.

As Mrs. Coleman was starting class, Kurt gazed subconsciously over at Blaine, leaning his cheek against his hand, trying to figure out that the dark haired teenager was thinking at the moment. He was such a mystery and it was just odd, seeing Blaine staring directly at the teacher rather than staring off into space blankly. His defined jaw was tensed slightly and the look in his hazel eyes was so concentrated. Blaine was still an amazing student, evidently. Everyone expected him to be their class' valedictorian... at the same time, no one expected him to give a speech.

That was another odd thing about Blaine Anderson. No one, apparently, had heard him say a single word since last year... and, now that Kurt thought about it, when he was actually listening to the buzz about Blaine, Santana had never been one of those people saying she hadn't heard anything from him. If anything, she had been quiet throughout the whole thing and always changed the subject to something else... and she was one of the biggest gossips in school. Well that was definitely odd.

Kurt's attention was drawn away from the quiet student and to his teacher when she called his name, obviously about to tell him is assigned partner. He held his breath as she scanned the list quickly, because he just knew that he was going to get paired with a football

player because every teacher wanted all of their students to pass and Kurt was always the one to do most (if not all) of the work no matter who he was partners with—

"Kurt, you'll be working with Blaine Anderson for this project," she announced, interrupting his worried thought process, smiling over at him a little bit as if she knew that he was freaking out about his partner.

Well, that was unexpected.

Not unwelcome, though.

Kurt looked over at his partner for the project and found Blaine leaned over his desk, scribbling into a notebook, a very slight frown on his face and—was that a somewhat hopeful look in his eyes?

Kurt's eyebrow arched upwards at this as he leaned forwards onto his desk slightly, tilting his head to the side just as Blaine looked away from the notebook and looked at Kurt. They locked eyes for a few moments, before Blaine gave a slight, pretty random, nod and ended up looking back off into space. Kurt continued to stare at him for a little while longer before sighing a little and staring off into space himself, tapping his fingers against the desk.

One thing was definite to Kurt.

This was going to be an interesting, quite possibly long several months.

Though, maybe, just *maybe*, he'll learn more about the strange Blaine Anderson.

Chapter Two: We'll Carry On

Well, Kurt discovered that some of the rumors about Blaine were true. Actually, really, only *one* of them (technically two, but the second was no surprise since it was just that Blaine listened to music all the time, which proved to be correct when the room once went eerily silent and Kurt actually listened really hard to hear the telltale sound of music filter through the air, just barely there) was proved correct in the small amount of time that he spent with the former-popular kid.

Blaine *never* talked. Not even a single word. He never said hello or good-bye. He just worked on his portion of the project, only looking at Kurt sometimes when Kurt was looking at Blaine himself. It was so extremely... *awkward* and *weird*. Kind of sad, too, actually, since every other pair in the room was almost constantly talking about everything and anything that went on in the school.

It was the same thing every day when he walked into English class. Blaine would already be sitting at his desk, working on or reading something, and Kurt would walk over and take the vacant seat next to him, putting down his books and taking out a pencil. Kurt situated himself perfectly at his desk, taking out whatever he had been working on the previous class, before turning to the teenager who was writing in his notebook (or on a sheet of paper or staring at a book) and listening to music.

"Hello," Kurt would greet him as cheerfully as possible, which was odd for him since Kurt wasn't exactly a *cheerful* person. Not as cheerful as he feigned to be when greeting Blaine.

Blaine didn't look at him. He didn't even seem to notice Kurt's actual existence. Sometimes he swallowed thickly, his Adam's apple bobbing and his neck flexing a little, but Kurt didn't know if that was him notifying Kurt that Blaine was aware of his presence, or if it was just random swallowing.

Probably random swallowing.

Kurt's smile fell from his face *every time* and he always sighed, irritated, before turning back to his own papers and picking up his pencil (or pen) and continuing to take notes on their topic—Shakespeare. They had to analyze five Shakespearean plays as much as humanly possible (which was a lot. It was *Shakespeare* for crying out loud), write a synopsis of each of those plays, analyze all of the plot-important characters (Kurt sometimes wondered why the guy even wrote so much), and *then* they had to write a three-page biography of Shakespeare himself.

Basically, it was hell in project form. No it didn't matter that Kurt absolutely *adored* Romeo and Juliet and several other Shakespearean plays simply because of his natural aptitude for romantic things. It was still hell.

Really, it was just made even *worse* because Kurt's partner *wouldn't talk to him* for some reason. Normally, Kurt wouldn't mind someone not talking to him, but this was *Blaine Anderson*. Kurt wanted basically nothing more than to at least get the dark haired teen to say a single word to him (maybe a new pair of boots, but that was totally against the point). *That* would be amazing in and of itself.

Seriously. It would be.

Kurt *almost* resorted to asking Santana for a little bit of help by Wednesday because she *was* Blaine's best friend. Blaine had to talk to her at some point, especially since Santana always made sure to make people stop gossiping about Blaine whenever a stray word would be said about him for no particular reason... Then he remembered that Santana would probably put him on her death list for that. That was somewhere where he *really* didn't want to be.

That was somewhere no one wanted to be unless they really, really wanted to die.

So, instead of going to the former Cheerio for help, on Friday, after skillfully dodging a few meatheads, when he walked into his classroom he marched straight over to the table he shared with Blaine, and slammed his books down hard enough to alert just about *everyone* in that room.

No, honestly, everyone turned and stared. A few yelled at him. There might have been a smart ass who shouted, "Lover's quarrel!" only to be hit over the head by a book... or at least it sounded that way.

Blaine himself looked up from the book that he was reading (probably "Romeo and Juliet", actually), a confused expression in his clear hazel eyes, which was weird because, hey, there was an *expression* in his usually carefully guarded eyes, as Kurt just *stared* at him for a few moments.

He honestly couldn't help but feel a *little* shocked that he got something about of Blaine, even if it was mainly due to being a borderline violent.

Maybe Kurt should find another way to get Blaine's attention...

Oh well. He got it. And—

Whoa, wait. Kurt could have *sworn* that he just saw Blaine's hand wander towards his jacket pocket where his headphone chord was connected to (probably) his iPod. Was Blaine turning down his music to listen to Kurt?

The surprises just wouldn't stop, would they?

Then again, he couldn't be *too* sure. Blaine might be turning it up for all Kurt knew.

"We're never going to get this project done if we just work on it in class," Kurt began, after getting over his initial shock, quietly when people stopped staring at the pair, not wanting everyone else in the room to hear this probably one-sided conversation. Blaine nodded slowly, still staring at him, as if agreeing with the (true) statement, "I propose that you come over to my house this weekend and for the following weekends until we get this monstrosity done."

Blaine stared at Kurt for a few more moments, blinking several times, his eyes slowly reverting back to their blanker state, before wordlessly turning around his notebook and pushing it towards Kurt, who was standing in front of the table, leaning against it with both hands braced widely in front of him.

Kurt glanced at the book of lined paper confusedly, before looking back at Blaine, "... What are you trying to tell me?" Honestly, Kurt had *no idea*. That was another problem. Then Blaine *did attempt* to communicate with him (which only happened once, maybe twice before that moment) it never worked and they both just kind of gave up before really trying.

The dark haired teen blinked again and bit his bottom lip gently, gesturing with his hand for Kurt to lean towards him, and Kurt did. Blaine leaned forwards as well, his lips *right* next to Kurt's ear, and his mouth opened and he inhaled deeply, as if getting ready to speak, and Kurt almost stopped breathing because Blaine was seriously *about to talk to him for once*—

Until Blaine was suddenly leaning away, shaking his head to himself for some reason, grabbing his notebook and turning it towards himself, picking up his pencil and staring to write, having a weird look in his eyes that reflected... Kurt couldn't really put a name on what Blaine was probably feeling at that moment. It was too vague of an emotion, masked by some measured amount of indifference.

It was like Blaine *practiced* looking like that. Like he practiced looking guarded, reserved, alone.

Maybe he did...

What a depressing thought.

There was one small flaw in his mask of indifference, though. A light tinge of red ran high on his cheekbones, which made Kurt squint slightly and lean forwards *just* a bit because he couldn't help but wonder why Blaine was *blushing*. Or, at least it looked like he was blushing.

Maybe it was the dodgy lighting the in classroom...

Kurt decided that was probably the best explanation he had... despite the fact that Mrs. Coleman had lamps situated *everywhere* in the room and they were *all* on and shining ridiculously brightly.

Blaine suddenly turned the lined paper back to Kurt just as he leaned forwards, though, causing Kurt to snap back upright immediately and *hope* that Blaine didn't see him leaning over so awkwardly. The paper held a simple, neatly written note that Kurt had to lean back over to read:

Address? And Number? I'll need both if we're going to work this weekend.

Kurt stared at the message as Blaine turned the book back to him... and he nodded slowly, reaching out for his own pencil bag and retrieving a pencil, leaning over the desk and scribbling down his address below the short message that Blaine wrote for him, passing it back to his partner wordlessly, watching the tamed curly head of hair, his head tilting to the side slightly.

Blaine stared at it for a few moments, as if trying to commit it to memory even though it was *written down*, before looking back up at Kurt, nodding a little bit and—did he just kind of smile? *At Kurt?* Kurt probably looked shocked for a few moments, before nodding back and smiling a little himself, not able to help himself because— holy *hell* Blaine looked really, really good when he smiled. Better than Kurt actually remembered, honestly...

The taller brunet had to bite his lip a little harder to keep from telling Blaine that he looked *so much better* when he let some amount of emotion work its way into his face. It was meant to be a compliment, but Kurt wasn't particularly sure how Blaine would take it, since it could be taken in a bad way...

That was another probably true rumor: Blaine basically never smiled in school anymore, which was honestly just *bizarre* because the guy used to grin all the time no matter what, unless he got genuinely bad news that was frown-worthy.

The small smile he just gave Kurt, though... that was different from the easy grins, as far as Kurt could tell. It was tiny, yes, but Blaine's eyes almost melted and seemed *warm* and *so different* from how blank they normally were.

Kurt's breathing might have even stuttered slightly because of this. He took his seat before he could acknowledge the weird hiccup in his breathing completely, though, and was taking out his own book to read, annotate, and analyze, simply to make sure he didn't do anything else stupid.

Not like Blaine himself would have noticed either way. His nose was basically once against pressed into his book—which was "Romeo and Juliet".

It *might* have just been his imagination, but Kurt could have *sworn* that Blaine looked a little more relaxed than he usually did, his shoulders mainly appearing lower and less stiff, which was *just another* odd thing about the guy. Even when he was the center of attention, he had this weird posture that never seemed to be broken, as if he were afraid to slouch a little bit.

That probably went along with the fact that Blaine's family was kind of really rich, though.

Why he was going to a public high school, no one knew. Yet another Blaine Anderson mystery.

... Yeah, the relaxation was probably just his imagination. Just like that kind of faint sort of there smile.

Yup.

When Kurt got home that night, he said hello to Carole, his step mom, who greeted him cheerfully and handed him a bowl of fruit to take up to his room to eat as he studied. She already knew that he had no plans for that night, so she was prepared to basically cater to his every need if Kurt desired it. At times, Kurt was hugely relieved to have his step mom around so often.

Not that he didn't love Carol all the time. He did. A lot.

Right as he reached the bottom of the stairs, though, he turned around and caught his step mom stepping into the living room, and figured that would be a good time to ask about having Blaine over to work. "Carole," he called out, causing her to stop and look at him, "can I have someone over tomorrow to work on that huge English project that I have?"

The woman smiled warmly, her eyes wrinkling at the corners but still sparkled with a hint of youth, "Of course you can, Kurt. Who's your partner?"

"Blaine. Blaine Anderson."

The mention of his partner made his step mom blink, the smile dropping for a split second before she quickly corrected herself, nodding, "Alright, thank you for telling me, Kurt," she said before walking into the living room completely.

Kurt stood there for a little while longer, a little confused by her reaction, before shrugging to himself and heading up the stairs, plucking a strawberry out of the bowl when he reached the top and biting into it. Nice, ripe and sweet, without sugar, just like he liked it.

With a somewhat content sigh, he opened the door to his room, nudging it closed after him, and put his book bag down and the bowl on his desk, before falling back onto his bed uncharacteristically. He felt oddly tired, so he decided that he could put off his homework until later that night for a little rest. A little bit of procrastination wouldn't *kill* him.

A short hum filled the air, before he sat up and unzipped his jacket, toeing his boots off carefully, not wanting to scuff the heels or toes. With a slight stretch, he reached into his bag and grabbed his iPod, turning it on and pushing his ear buds into ear. Falling onto his side, he closed his eyes and let his iPod start to play randomly.

His eyes opened again when he heard "Welcome to the Black Parade" by My Chemical Romance start to play, and he stared at the window across from his bed, his eyebrows rising slowly. Honestly, he forgot that he even *put* that song on his iPod... he had put it on shuffle, though, and normally he just played his favorite songs on his iPod, avoiding the other ones without actually meaning to.

A memory, pushed far back into the corner of his mind, pushed itself forwards and made itself known once again out of *nowhere*. The song alone was so familiar for some reason in a way other than the radio... where had he heard it before? He couldn't remember anyone in the New Directions singing this song... but he vaguely remembered hearing it during a meeting for some reason. Frowning a little bit, he rolled onto his back and stared at the ceiling, *trying* to remember.

Rachel wouldn't sing this kind of song... neither would Santana, Brittany, or Quinn, he doubted that Finn would... maybe Puck but not Artie or Tina or Mike... hell, Mike barely ever sang in general.

Kurt made a small noise of surprise when he realized what he was trying to remember so hard that was linked to *that* particular song. At one point, around November the year prior, after school when the glee club was meeting in the choir room as per usual, *Blaine* himself had walked in all casual and grinning, saying a rather bright hello, pulling warm welcomes from the rest of the teenagers in the room in response.

Kurt reached for his iPod and set the song on repeat, still trying to work out the kinks of the memory, because *somehow* he knew that it was a *really* good memory... he just needed to remember it completely, and it couldn't be *that* hard. It would probably be completely worth it, anyways.

Licking his lips absentmindedly, Kurt's blue eyes closed again and he relaxed, tilting his head back completely into one of his soft, fluffy pillows, steadying his breathing and just trying to *remember*.

Kurt was sitting in the choir room, directly next to Mercedes and Rachel, seated in the back, watching the entire room, from Brittany trying to explain some crazy theory to Artie, who was just staring at her like she was crazy, to Mr. Schue who was talking to Brad (it was probably a one-sided conversation). Santana was staring at her phone intently.

"Hey, look, it's the New Directions!" announced a cheerful voice from the door, and absolutely *everyone* looked to the constantly open passage into the hall, seeing Blaine leaning into the room, holding onto the doorframe with the ever-constant grin on his face.

Everyone responded with a mixture of different greetings—except for Kurt. Kurt watched Blaine quietly, tilting his head a little bit at Blaine's eyes skimmed the room, their eyes meeting for a split second, hazel and blue, before Blaine walked completely into the room and straight over to Santana. Brittany moved over a seat immediately, since she was taking up the seat next to her best friend, despite the fact that there was an open seat right in front of Kurt which had been closer to Blaine to begin with.

Santana leaned very slightly towards Blaine when he sat down.

"Okay guys," began their teacher, who now stood in the middle of the room, clapping once and smiling at the group of misfits, "now that the infamous Blaine has joined us for today," Kurt heard Blaine chuckle a little bit, if not embarrassedly, "let's get started with the assignments for this week, shall we?"

Blaine raised his hand a little bit, and Mr. Schue nodded to him, "What is the assignment this week, anyways?"

Mr. Schue grinned and started walking backwards, before pointing to the board, "Anthems," he announced proudly, pointing to the singular word scrawled on the board proudly.

Blaine tilted his head to the side slightly, and Kurt could almost see the wheels turning in his head, "Well then," began the still smiling teen, who hopped up, "how about I take a shot at this? There's a song I have in mind that's *perfect* for this assignment!"

Mr. Schue looked surprised, but nodded regardless, stepping behind the piano and gesturing to the floor, "Be our guest!"

"As much as I love that movie, Mr. Schue," Blaine joked, hopping over to the center spot happily, "I don't think that's much of an anthem," he winked a little bit, and Kurt's eyebrow rose a little at this, a small smile inevitably playing on his face as everyone else laughed a little at the somewhat lame joke.

Blaine cleared his throat and looked over at Brad, "I think Brad here knows the song that I'm thinking about," Brad nodded knowingly, and Blaine grinned *more* if that was possible, "Alright! Hit it!"

He was so flamboyant. Kurt could swear that, at times, Blaine seemed gayer than him, and Kurt *was gay*.

Kurt wasn't particularly surprised when the beat to "Welcome to the Black Parade" started playing, since Blaine was just that Top 40 all the time, but both of his eyebrows still rose. The smile didn't really leave his face though, even as Blaine started jumping around, acting like a little kid, and jumping on a few chairs and just about everything he could jump on in the room—except for the piano. Usually, students weren't exactly allowed to do that, but no one really cared because Blaine was *such* a showman. No one was about to stop him.

The dark haired teen ended up jumping over to Santana, and held out a hand for the Hispanic girl to take, which she did, despite rolling her eyes and laughing oddly uncharacteristically as he spun her around before letting her go and gesturing for the rest of the club to stand up, crying out, "We'll carry on!" as he did, coincidentally.

Almost everyone did stand up.

Kurt hung back though, watching the interesting, rather hyper teenager who wasn't an official member of the club (Blaine was kind of an honorary member of the glee club, actually. Everyone had decided not too terribly long ago) jump around in the midst of all of Kurt's closest friends. He couldn't help but laugh a little bit, under his breath, when he spun Santana playfully again, dipping her backwards.

They were a cute pair of friends.

Mercedes ended up dragging Kurt up and out before the song ended, telling him to stop being such a wallflower for a little bit, and he danced along, simply because it seemed like too much fun *not* to.

Maybe it wasn't really a song to *dance* to... but it just seemed right, at the time.

Blaine was like a magnet, or a connecting link, or even *super glue*. He could somehow magically bring everyone together, even people who were *totally* against each other. It wasn't even like the New Directions were against each other (at the time); it was more like it was kind of rare for that type of thing to happen.

That was, honestly, probably one of the best practices they had ever had.

Kurt opened his eyes again, staring at his ceiling for a few moments before sitting up and taking his ear buds out of his ear, shaking his head a little bit. That was a *really* weird memory to relive, mainly because that made a lot of other things connect in his mind that hadn't at the time, nor recently.

For one thing, that single day—not even a day, it was less than ten minutes—had so many hints in it that screamed that Blaine and

Santana were a couple. The grabbing, the spinning, the laughing, the *smiles*... if that didn't scream "Actually happy Santana", Kurt wasn't exactly sure what would. Santana was rarely ever like that... Kurt kind of wondered how he didn't pick up on that at the time. Another thing was that was the night that he downloaded that song, hilariously enough. It was probably the fact that Blaine sang it *really* well that convinced Kurt that it would be a nice song to add to his iPod...

Good grief, Blaine Anderson really was influential back then. The last, probably most important thing is that... *that* was the moment that made Kurt *really* interested in Blaine. Of course, he didn't really start acknowledging his interest until after Blaine fell into isolation, but *that* was when Kurt started to subconsciously watch Blaine in the halls.

Kurt sighed softly, rubbing a hand over his face, cringing slightly because of the oil that he *knew* was going to cause problems if he didn't moisturize *extremely* thoroughly that night. Licking his lips again, he put his iPod on the bedside table and stood up to retrieve his bowl of fruit, since fruit wasn't exactly delicious when warm.

"Kurt," he heard his step mom call from downstairs, and he blinked, putting down the bowl and walking over to his door, pulling it open and leaning out into the hall way, shouting back to alert Carole that he heard her. "One of your friends is here to see you," she responded. One of his friends?

He hadn't heard the doorbell ring or even a knock on the door... he supposed that he was so lost in thought that it shut everything else out, "Just send them up," he called out, ducking back into his room to plug his iPod into his iHome.

Who the hell would be visiting him? Rachel had a date with Finn, Mercedes was babysitting... it couldn't be Blaine, could it be? Well, maybe... Kurt kind of doubted it, though, for some reason. He had explicitly made a note near the end of class that told him Saturday they could work...

"Hummel."

Kurt spun around, turning towards his door hurriedly, his eyes widening and his eyebrows shooting upwards in shock.

What the fuck?

"Santana?"

Chapter Three: Cause We are Broken

Kurt stood in front of his bedside table staring at Santana with an expression that clearly said "What the fuck," without using any actual words, because, honestly, he and Santana rarely spoke outside of Glee unless they were exchanging juicy gossip. Aside from those spare moments, it wasn't like they were totally buddy-buddy. Kurt didn't even know that Santana knew where he lived. So, yes, he was confused and shocked. Maybe a little freaked out.

Just a little.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, taking a slight step forwards and crossing his arms slowly, his head tilting to the side as he scrutinized the Hispanic girl's appearance with a keen eye, feeling his bitchy side push itself out, which really only happened when he felt a need to be defensive.

Then again, there was always a reason to be defensive around Santana, wasn't there? She had vicious words and strong fists.

Yup.

She was dressed like she normally was. Tastefully but at the same time showing off what she could without getting in too much trouble. A simple black, strapless, very much form-fitting short dress with a black and red knit cardigan on top and... she was wearing a red beret. Kurt kind of really wanted that beret, he wasn't going to lie to himself... but he wouldn't actually tell her that.

"You like to cut to the chase, don't you?" Santana drawled pointedly, walking over to his bed, sitting down on it and crossing her legs—which were in knee-high really nice boots that Kurt kind of wanted, too—as if she owned his room.

Bitch.

Santana Lopez was just a bitch who had a lot of nice clothes, wasn't she?

Oh, wait, Kurt already knew that. The entire population of Lima, Ohio knew that.

"Well," Kurt began, walking over to his vanity and sitting down on the chair that was set in front of it, crossing his legs similarly to the teenage girl, "you're kind of in my room, and I didn't even know that you knew where I lived, so I think that I have a right to question you on your intentions for being here."

They stared at each other silently for a few moments, as if challenging each other who would break and start talking first. Kurt knew that Santana would technically have to start talking first since he had already asked her a question that she should answer...

Then again, Santana kind of just played by her own rules all the time. That was one of the worst things about her.

Santana finally sighed, breaking the silence that was between them, and pulled off her beret with one hand, running the other through her long, dark hair. She looked a little (or very) frustrated as she dropped the hat next to her and looked directly at Kurt, an odd expression—what was that expression? It was like a weird mixture of sadness and contempt, which just unnerved the poor guy—on her face, "I'm here about Blaine," she said bluntly.

Kurt's eyebrow rose at this, "What do I have to do with Blaine?"

"You're his partner for the English project," she deadpanned, looking entirely not amused suddenly, her arms crossing under her chest as she leaned back slightly—though not enough to fall backwards.

Kurt felt more confused by the declaration. Everyone knew that they were partners for the project since nothing was ever kept as a secret in McKinley High—at least, not for very long. Why would Santana be here to talk, about something serious from the look on her face, about Blaine? "Yeah, everyone knows that but—"

"Mercedes also told me that you asked her about Blaine the other day," Santana interjected and Kurt knew that he looked horrified for a split second. Thank you, Mercedes. Then again, Santana probably asked around to see if Kurt had asked anyone about Blaine in general, so it most likely wasn't even Mercedes' fault... The momentary horror was more than enough for Santana to sigh yet again though. Whether it was due to frustration or annoyance, Kurt didn't know. "Okay, listen, I know that you're going to eventually come crawling to me for information."

Kurt didn't try to deny that. It was kind of inevitable, and he knew that well. He was just trying to buy his time...

Which was apparently up before it technically started.

The normally bitchy girl looked abruptly frustrated and rubbed her right temple slowly for a moment, before staring Kurt straight on once again, "I may as well explain some things to you, but I swear, if you drop a thing about this conversation by Blaine, or anyone, actually, I will kick your ass, former-Cheerio, fellow glee club member or not, got it?"

Kurt nodded, mainly unaffected by her threat because he hadn't planned on telling anyone anything. He hadn't even been planning on asking Santana about anything until later, "Crystal," he replied, trying to keep the automatic cheeky tone out of his voice so Santana wouldn't get pissed off or anything.

No use in making her leave accidentally before he got any information.

Santana stared at Kurt for a few moments, gauging his appearance briefly, like she was contemplating whether he was worthy or not to know what she knew. It was kind of demeaning, really, "I don't know that much," she admitted finally, rolling her eyes once again, "but, yes, Blaine and I did date last year for several months. Longest standing relationship I've had, actually," Kurt's eyebrow rose in surprise at this.

Now all he needed to know was why they were such close friends when, even at the top of the high school hierarchy, they were basically total opposites since Blaine had always been a people-person while Santana kind of... drove most people away by her behavior, whether it was intentional or not.

Plus, Blaine had just been a really nice guy... Santana was... well... a bitch.

"We were childhood best friends."

Well. That answered a lot of unspoken questions.

"Childhood best friends," Kurt repeated, a small frown pulling at his lips slightly. Sure that explained a lot about their behavior around each other at times (which Kurt couldn't quite remember. It was all a little hazy since they weren't around each other often in school and the last thing that he remembered about popular-Blaine was when he and Santana were apparently an item) but that was still hard to believe...

"Blaine's family is ridiculously rich, isn't it?"

Santana sighed yet again. She clearly didn't actually want to talk about this. Kurt kind of wondered why she was bothering, in that case. Was it to benefit Blaine himself...? "My dad is a doctor. My family is actually just as rich as the Anderson family is. Why do you think I have much better clothes than over half the people in school?" she gave him a pointed look.

Kurt shot back his own not amused look, but Santana pushed on, ignoring the look he was giving her.

"Our families were, naturally, close, especially because we were next-door-neighbors," it sounded so cliché already... "Which just led Blaine and I to being close as well. Are you following so far?" Kurt nodded, still not quite able to get over the cliché of them being next door neighbors, "Good. We, we grew up together in that nice neighborhood a little outside of Lima," okay. Kurt wasn't going to lie. He felt a little jealous from hearing his. That was a really nice neighborhood, "It was really only natural for us to start dating eventually since we were so close."

"Naturally," Kurt retorted sarcastically, because that was such a cliché that it was a little ridiculous. Nothing short of romantic, of course, but still, "aren't you not that into guys apart from sex, Santana?"

She scowled, her bitch face coming back into play within seconds. Kurt wasn't even sure when it left, "Shut it, Hummel, and let me keep talking. I'm meeting Brittany after this and I don't want to spend forever here."

Kurt rolled his eyes almost mockingly before leaning back slightly himself, silently gesturing for Santana to continue with whatever she was saying.

"We are—" we are? What? "Blaine is like this crazy exception to just about everything," that was a messy save... but, still, tell Kurt something that he didn't know. Blaine seemed to be an exception to everything that Kurt knew, "we never even had sex." he couldn't really help it. His jaw dropped slightly, but noticeably, because what the hell "Mainly," she glared at his shock, emphasizing the word to make him shut his mouth, "because he didn't want to do the deed, it's not like I didn't want to have sex with him. I compensated anyways," Kurt rose an eyebrow slowly at this and she rolled her eyes yet again, "It's not like he minded. He knows how I am."

"Regardless, we dated and it was strictly romantic, even if I was cheating—and it wasn't even technically cheating since he knew what was going on—on him. I only really did that for the first... two weeks of our relationship anyways. He wooed me big time, being the romanticist that he was, and I guess I subconsciously decided to stop getting together with other guys. That's why he was constantly in the choir room after school before winter break last year."

Kurt nodded slowly at the new information... or, well, confirmed information, more so.

Santana looked off to the side briefly, seemingly contemplating what she should say at that point, "The thing that I'm about to say is the main reason why I came over here today rather than let you come to me later," she began, looking at Kurt once again with a steady, unwavering gaze, "I have no fucking clue what happened to Blaine the entire week he was gone last year."

Kurt almost fell over. He really, honestly wanted to fall over because... if Santana didn't know what happened to Blaine, then no one in school apart from Blaine himself would know.

Great.

At the same time, though, Santana herself seemed frustrated because she didn't know what was going on with Blaine.

That was understandable, though, since she was his best friend... it probably put her out that he hadn't told her anything.

"All I know," Santana continued, pulling Kurt out of his thoughts, "is that when he came back to school and to the real world in general, his sister had begun to be home schooled verses going to the private coed

school her parents originally put her in for some reason. Apart from that, I have no idea since I never went back to the Anderson home after that. Blaine and I hung out at my place instead, but he obviously didn't talk to me very often whenever we were together—"

"So he can talk?"

Santana gave Kurt an incredulous expression, her head moving from side to side a little bit at him, "Duh, he can talk, Hummel. He just doesn't talk often. I don't even think rarely is the proper word to use for him since the last time we had a proper conversation without those damn ear buds was two weeks ago or something." Santana sounded extremely frustrated once again.

"Apparently, the only people he talks to are Wes, his family, naturally, and me. The closest people to him—though, from what I've been hearing, he and Wes have grown apart slightly so maybe Blaine has been talking even less lately." She waved her hand in the air briefly, a rather sharp scowl pulling at her mouth.

"Anyways. If you're done interrupting me," she shot him a short, scathing look, "We hung out at my house a lot. We watched movies together and mainly just cuddled in my room. I'm pretty sure that when he thought I was asleep or something, he'd cry a little bit," the biting look faded slightly as she said that, a stricken expression crossing her face for a moment, as if the thought of Blaine crying was too painful for her to really think about for too long.

Oh. Well. Would you look at that? Santana had a heart.

Well, Kurt knew that. It wasn't like he hated Santana. It was just weird to see her acting this way.

"We broke up, we're still best friends. End of. Any questions?" Santana finished everything suddenly, with no actual conclusion as if she were rushing. She had actually been rushing the entire thing, but... whatever.

She offered to let him ask questions, even if she was just being sarcastic.

Like Kurt was going to let that opportunity pass him.

Kurt figured that he may as well not press anymore on the incident and instead went with his more curious gossipy side, "Who broke up with who? And why did you guys break up if you were so happy together?"

Santana groaned a little bit, as if she had anticipated both questions and dreaded them at the same time. Honestly, Kurt just wanted to know if Santana ended it because of Blaine's isolation.

"I didn't break up with him, he didn't break up with me. It just ended," she said, shocking Kurt, once again, "It didn't end because of his social problems—I'm not that shallow." Apparently, Santana could read

minds. "Let's just say that... we both gained an interest in other people before the incident but still had mutual feelings for each other despite that so we stayed together after talking about it. As those interests grew stronger, however, we figured it'd be good for us to end it then and there before someone got hurt." Santana shrugged a little.

Kurt stared at her, trying to figure out if she was feeling anything by talking about her break up with Blaine, "... Did you love him?" Kurt didn't know why he was asking these kinds of questions. Curiosity for curiosity's sake, he supposed.

Santana seemed just a little pissed off by the question since she was suddenly crossing her arms defensively again, "Maybe." He gave her a critical look. She rolled her eyes exasperatedly. "This does not leave this room, got it?" Kurt just nodded, waiting for the answer. "... Yes I probably did love him at him point, okay?" it took all of Kurt's willpower to seriously not fall over from that. Santana with truly romantic feelings. That was just a weird thought. "It's not like we said it to each other or whatever. I'm just saying that it was probable that I was, at one point, in love with him. Otherwise, yes, I do love him... as a brother and a friend."

Kurt was kind of really shocked, mainly by how open Santana was being for no particular reason. They really weren't the very best of friends... so it was pretty bizarre, but at the same time... there was a sudden gentleness to her features, heavily contrasting her usual sharp tones and looks. Really, Kurt had only seen Santana like this when he caught her and Brittany in between classes, standing in front of lockers and talking to each other quietly.

After searching her expression for a few more moments, Kurt opened his mouth to ask Santana yet another question, but a cell phone ringing interrupted him before he could get the first syllable out of his mouth. "Landslide" started playing. Well, Kurt could guess who that was.

The Hispanic girl pulled her thick dark hair to the side and grabbed her phone from behind her ear (honestly, how did she manage do to that?) checking it quickly before standing up, "That'd be Britt. Have to split, Hummel. See you Monday." She headed for the door to his bedroom and pulled it open, about to step out of it.

"Santana," Kurt suddenly called out, standing up from his chair, stopping the girl in her tracks, "... Who was the person Blaine found an interest in?" it was just about as obvious as the sun on a cloudless afternoon as far as Santana's new interest went, but Blaine he wasn't so sure about.

"... Why?" she asked, turning around and leaning against his doorframe, scrutinizing him with her gaze carefully.

"Curious."

"Don't... don't tell me that you like him, please," Santana looked a little... distressed? For maybe a split second before her bitchy mask came back?

Kurt still looked at her, feeling a little confused—before he realized that, yeah, the question made it sound like he was interested, "I don't like Blaine like that, Santana," he answered honestly, crossing his arms, "I barely know him."

"That never stopped you before," Santana retorted, looking entirely disbelieving and Kurt felt a little bit of anger rise, which always happened when talking to Santana at some point. She pulled out all stops and really didn't take the other person's feelings into account during a conversation...

She wasn't the bitch of the school for paying attention to people's feelings, though.

Despite her disbelief, she still glanced away; she opted, instead, to stare at Kurt's wall with her left shoulder still leaned heavily against his doorframe. She didn't say anything for a few moments, and it actually looked like she was trying to recall something, "It's someone you know," was all she said, sounding almost scarily mysterious, not looking sparing him another glance, before disappearing from the doorway.

Kurt stood there for a little while longer, staring at his open door confusedly. If anything, that little conversation with Santana just made him even more confused about Blaine, if that was at all possible.

Absolutely nothing was making sense—especially because, apparently, Blaine hadn't told Santana a single thing about what happened. She was supposed to be his closest confidant, and if he hadn't told her then... no one close enough to Kurt for him to ask about Blaine without feeling horribly awkward would know.

Like anyone would have known to begin with.

Blaine Anderson was truly the most mysterious person who had ever graced the halls of McKinley High. He did a complete personality 180 within a week and was freakishly isolated, never even got bullied, never talked to anyone in school as far as anyone knew... although, apparently, he could talk.

It wasn't even like Kurt doubted that Blaine could talk, it was just really... odd, because at this point he couldn't actually imagine Blaine talking at all. Plus, no one could really change that much within a week. Something big had to have triggered it...

Kurt sighed, shaking his head and walking over to his bed, sitting down on it and reaching into his backpack, grabbing his French book to do some homework to distract himself... although he really couldn't

get everything Santana said out of his head for the life of him, it seemed. Random pieces of their conversation kept floating around in his head...

Blaine and Santana had dated. She confirmed that much even though he hadn't doubted what Mercedes told him. Judging from what she told him, they had probably started dating early on in the school year until about... February, maybe March.

Truly Santana's longest relationship without any breakups.

Blaine also happened to be the only guy to get Santana to stop sleeping around even if she had done so for the first two weeks of their relationship... Puck had seemed a little put out for a while around that time, but that was another thing all together.

Even further, despite Santana being Blaine's girlfriend at that point, she didn't know a single thing about what happened to him that entire week when he was gone (now that Kurt thought about it, she had seemed more on edge throughout the entire week and started crying a few times out of nowhere...).

All she knew was that Blaine's sister started to be home schooled—which probably has nothing to do with that happened to him. Kurt hadn't even known that Blaine had a little sister—wait, he didn't know if it was a younger sister. Then again, Santana had mentioned briefly that she had gone to a private coed school. That was probably why he had never heard of her, whoever she was.

The rest of it really didn't have anything to do with why Blaine changed so abruptly. Santana had said that their split was gradual and mutual, so it couldn't be because of that. Could it have something to do with the person that Blaine apparently took an interest in...?

Kurt frowned a little bit, looking up from his French book (since he was multitasking. He was getting his homework done, thank you) and peering around his room quickly. Santana had said that Blaine took an interest in someone that Kurt knew. Kurt didn't really know that many people... and Blaine was (apparently) straight.

How could any of the girls in the New Directions affect Blaine? Apart from Santana, that is.

Nothing came to mind immediately. No tragedies had even happened in the New Directions that week—apart from Blaine being mysteriously gone—so there was no way anyone could really make that much of a difference in Blaine's life. Santana would have torn them apart limb from limb anyways.

Kurt couldn't help but wonder who Blaine had been (still was?) interested in, though.

Mercedes...? No, probably not...

Brittany? No. Brittany and Blaine were decent friends but Kurt doubted that Blaine would have taken an interest in the same girl that his ex-girlfriend did.

Quinn? Definitely not. They had already gone out the previous year and Blaine never really even seemed remotely interested.

Tina? ... No, Kurt couldn't really see that. It was more of a possibility than Quinn, but still extremely improbable...

Lauren? Well, wait, Lauren hadn't even been in glee club at that point in time... and she really didn't seem like Blaine's type. At all. Not even close.

Who was he missing out of the girls in his glee club...

Rachel? It wasn't too far of a stretch. Rachel was talented, a star, constantly craving attention—attention that Blaine could easily and readily provide. Kurt blinked a few times, trying to imagine them together... he could really honestly only see them as friends. Not even friends with benefits, just friends.

Plus, Santana had been Blaine's girlfriend. Santana wasn't a huge fan of Rachel herself. Even if she had started to like Brittany as more than a friend (or fuck-buddy for that matter, since that was what they were apart from best friends), she would still tear Rachel apart or at least would have glared at her constantly.

Santana was territorial. All the time. Over anything and everything. Especially boyfriends or whatever she was interested in at the time. Wait. Santana was territorial. Her reaction when she accused Kurt of liking Blaine (which really didn't make any sense)... that was a sense of sadness. There might have even been a little bit of anger influencing her words.

Santana wasn't upset by the idea that Kurt might have liked Blaine, was she? Santana didn't like Blaine like that anymore, Kurt was pretty sure, especially by the way that she was talking about their relationship.

Damn it all, couldn't Santana send one not confusing signal, for once? Of course not. Then she wouldn't be Santana Lopez.

"This is pointless and stupid," he muttered to himself, shaking his head and leaning back over his French book, "I shouldn't even be thinking about their past relationship... plus, Blaine might like one of my acquaintances not a person close to me..." he reasoned with himself, writing down a few answers.

He didn't pay attention to the fact that he didn't really have acquaintances. He really just had his friends and then his bullies... there was no medium ground between the two, but whatever. That didn't matter.

It wasn't even Kurt's business. Just because he and Blaine were project partners didn't give him a right to wonder about Blaine's love life. He had just been curious about Blaine and Santana, and that was where he'd draw the line.

Who said that Blaine was completely straight, anyways? No guy who was that into Broadway and who was that flamboyant could be totally straight. But, honestly, whatever. Who cared? Kurt didn't. It was just natural curiosity that got him wondering.

Natural curiosity.

Maybe even the entire desire to know Blaine was pointless. It probably was. They just needed to get the stupid project done. No need to get distracted with friendship or curiosity or whatever on the way. It was just a few months; maybe even less than that if they worked diligently and quickly.

At the same time... Kurt felt like he would be betraying himself if he didn't at least try to figure the guy out. He should probably try to stop being so forward, though... if Blaine was going to talk to him, then he was going to talk to him. Otherwise, there was no use in constantly trying to talk to him unless he really needed help with something.

There was no use. Blaine didn't even trust him, most likely. Being project partners didn't mean that they needed to trust each other no matter what.

Kurt had to get the ridiculous longing to know what happened to the infamous Blaine Anderson out of his head.

He tried to.

Of course, some part of his mind already knew that it wasn't going to happen. Kurt Hummel had a natural, possibly deadly, curiosity. He wouldn't give up on figuring Blaine out, not quite yet.

There was still time.

Chapter Four: You Always Find An Escape

The next day, before Blaine came over, it started to rain outside. Actually, it had started to rain while Kurt was asleep. He woke up to the sound of rain falling against the roof above him and the window across the room from him. The brunet turned onto his side and stared out the window, seeing the gray sky outside and the raindrops sliding down the glass slowly.

A picture suddenly flashed in front of his eyes, though, and he found himself out of his bed and in front of his window in a second, maybe two, staring out at the wet street below as well as the dreary-looking houses. It seemed silent, and still outside apart from the steadily falling rain, and a shiver ran up Kurt's spine as he closed his eyes and leaned his forehead against the glass, breathing deeply as yet another thing jumped into his head that he had completely forgotten about in general somehow.

When he *tried* to remember, though, it disappeared, just like that. As if it wasn't an important memory to begin with... maybe it wasn't.

Kurt let out a small sigh, but didn't move from the window, and instead listened to the pitter-patter of rain outside of his window... the sound of rain calmed him for some reason that he had never really been able to figure out. With a small nod to himself, he pushed away from the window and headed towards his bathroom so he could start getting ready for the day. Since Blaine was coming over and it wasn't exactly going to be a lazy rainy day in, he had to make himself more presentable.

Finishing his moisturizing routine, Kurt wandered into his room and over to his closet, pulling it open and staring at his clothes. It wasn't too much of a big deal for him to look absolutely perfect and formal... he grabbed a dark pair of skinnies as well as a blue t-shirt and a black vest. Nice and simple.

After he pulled on his socks—because, yes, Kurt Hummel wore his socks inside of his house—he walked down stairs and into the kitchen, only a little surprised to find it vacant apart from a plate of food. He grabbed the plate, and the note placed next to it, reading said note as he munched as quietly as possible on his toast. Loud munching in a silent house was just weird to him.

I'm taking your father shopping for some new clothes today, and we're going grocery shopping afterwards. Finn stayed over at Noah's house last night, I think (maybe it was Rachel's...), so he probably won't be back until later. There's some food in the refrigerator for when your

friend comes over. Sorry to leave while you home alone while you were sleeping!

-Carole

Kurt swallowed his bite of toast and nodded at the piece of paper, before going back to eating his breakfast. It was no big deal that his parents were gone. He and Blaine would just be working on a project, after all, so it wasn't like anything major was going to happen. The fact that they were going out just proved to Kurt that they weren't worried at all.

He finished eating contentedly, before looking at the clock. 11:30. He had slept in later than he usually did... but that didn't really matter. Kurt had no idea when Blaine was coming over though—

Well, how coincidental. The doorbell rang just as he thought that. Quickly dumping the plate into the sink, Kurt washed his hands briefly, drying them and walking over to the front door as fast as possible. It was raining after all; he didn't want Blaine to be stuck in the rain very much longer...

Kurt unlocked the door and pulled it open, automatically stepping to the side so Blaine could come in. However, Blaine didn't come in *immediately*. Instead, he gave a short, polite nod and pulled in his umbrella, shaking it away from the door with purpose, trying to get all the rain water off of it (Kurt couldn't help but think that Blaine was lucky they had a porch with a roof over it), before *then* stepping inside the house.

"Uhm... hey," Kurt said slowly, a little bit awestruck by the fact that Blaine was being really, really polite. Unnaturally polite.

Wait, hadn't Blaine always been like this?

As far as Kurt's memories went... yeah, he actually had.

Blaine looked over at Kurt with a *very* slight smile once again, his eyes warming up just a little bit and—he wasn't wearing ear buds.

He wasn't wearing ear buds.

For the first time in a long time, Kurt saw Blaine without ear buds pushed into his ears—never mind, he was pulling them out of his pocket along with his iPod.

Kurt smile briefly, just a little forced, and nodded towards the stairs, "We can work in my room," he said simply, walking over to the stairs, "take off your shoes, by the way," he called over his shoulder as he grabbed the banister. He didn't turn around, though. He really wanted to know if Blaine could still hear him or was listening to him.

The telltale sound of shuffling and a little bit of squeaking told Kurt that Blaine had heard him and apparently hadn't started playing his music yet. He heard the quiet padding of feet over the rain, and started up the stairs, sure that Blaine was following him, up into his

room. His door was still open from earlier, and he let Blaine step inside first, "You can put your bag down next to my bed and just take your stuff out so we can start. We'll probably be working on my bed," he noted, following the shorter teen into the bedroom.

Blaine nodded—still only wearing one ear bud, which really just surprised Kurt—following the directions perfectly, systematically pulling his books and papers and a pencil out of the bag that he had brought along, and sat on the very edge of the bed as Kurt grabbed his own work off of his desk and took a seat next to Blaine, scooting back a little bit to sit further towards the middle of the bed.

"Alright," he began, reorganizing his papers quickly, "how far are you with analyzing 'Romeo and Juliet'?" he asked. When Kurt finished reorganizing his papers, he looked up to see Blaine looking over at him, holding the partially annotated book in front of him, looking pretty serious... it was kind of like a freaky parallel to the first time they really stared at each other.

Kurt nodded and took the book quietly, still noticing the fact that only one ear bud was in, flipping through the book quickly. "Oh, wow, you're already halfway through Act III..." he noted, a little surprised. Then again, Blaine worked so diligently constantly, so it probably shouldn't have been as much of a surprise as it was.

He handed the book back to his partner, who took it gently, and opened it to the page that he left off on, picking up a pen and starting to concentrate on annotating.

Blaine was still only wearing one ear bud.

Kurt watched the quiet boy silently, his eyes trailing the strong, well-defined jaw up to his clear, now guarded, hazel eyes that scanned the book meaningfully. Blaine was still just as attractive as he used to be... no surprise there. So, really, Kurt couldn't help but gaze at him... until Blaine's eyes flicked to the side and met his levelly. At this, Kurt looked back down at his own stuff hurriedly grabbing his "Julius Caesar" book, opening it to the page that he had left off on, as well. Out of the corner of his eyes, Kurt could see that Blaine was still staring at him, and stayed stiff until Blaine looked back down to his own book. Even then, though, Kurt didn't relax too much for some reason... and it was ridiculously hard to work since it was so quiet. The only sound in the room was the falling rain outside, and Kurt didn't want to concentrate too much on that... he found that when he did, he just ended up getting drowsy and it'd just be a bad idea to fall asleep...

It was really the only thing he could listen to, though. It wasn't like Blaine was going to start talking randomly and he was listening to his music... so, Kurt took a deep breath and mainly paid attention to the

steadily falling rain. He listened to the sounds of cars and the splashing of puddles... the sound of rain against his roof and the street. It was so eerily calming...

About forty-five minutes after Kurt started working, when he was about halfway through Act III himself, he felt his eyelids start to droop, and mentally berated himself because he wasn't supposed to get tired. He was supposed to be working attentively just like Blaine because they were supposed to do equal portions of work. Falling asleep was not an option and—

Oh, screw it. Closing his eyes for a few moments wouldn't kill him, right? Right.

Just a few... moments...

No more than that...

Right...

Kurt pulled up into the parking spot in front of the high school in his car, parking it and turning off the engine, before sitting there and staring out of his windshield to where rain was falling heavily on the ground. Puddles splashed up high as kids ran through the rain in desperate hope of getting under a roof before they got too wet because they were too brainless to grab an umbrella before leaving their houses.

With a short, sarcastic laugh, Kurt reached behind his seat and grabbed his umbrella as well as his bag, just as there was a short, sharp knock on his window that made him straighten abruptly, effectively causing the arm that was holding onto his heavy bag to lag behind, thus making his shoulder hurt.

Mercedes stood there, grinning and holding her own umbrella, obviously waiting for Kurt to step out of the car.

Kurt sighed, laughing more genuinely than sarcastically while at the same time rolling his eyes, pulling his bag completely from the floor of his car and hiking it up on his shoulder, readying the umbrella in his hand before opening the door. Mercedes backed up as he held the black shield out of the car and pressed the release button for it to spread out.

When Kurt stepped outside, he took a deep breath of the air—for some reason, it always smelled really good to him when it rained. Kind of like how it sounded really nice, too. The only bad part about rain was the fact that it ruined his hair... that's why he always brought along extra product on days like this.

"Good morning Mercedes," he greeted, readjusting the straps of his bag after he closed his car door, holding the umbrella carefully with one hand where it was supposed to be held. The other hand grasped

just above the handle as the two divas started walking, notably slower than most other people, towards the school.

The diva smiled over at him, "Good morning, Kurt," she addressed similarly as Rachel joined them on Mercedes other side.

"Morning guys," Rachel said, obviously just as pumped as she usually was in the mornings... which was very pumped. Kurt never really knew how she did it, but she did somehow.

"Morning Rachel," Kurt replied easily, a small smile appearing on his face automatically, "Have you guys figured out what songs you're going to sing for this week's glee club assignment?"

Mercedes shook her head, though Rachel started speaking hurriedly, but that wasn't really much of a surprise.

"I had the perfect song for the assignment the moment that he assigned it! It is an absolutely amazing song that will showcase three things: me, myself, and my amazing talent!" she said excitedly, twirling her white umbrella—which had gold stars scattered on it. That was definitely less of a surprise than the fact that Rachel already had her song picked out.

"Sounds great, Rachel," Mercedes drawled, rolling her eyes a little bit. Kurt laughed a little, opening his mouth to say something as he took a slight step towards Mercedes, but he got cut off when a football of all things flew past him, dangerously close to hitting him in the shoulder, as well as his brand new, freakishly expensive black pea coat. He stopped in his tracks, staring at where the ball would have hit if he hadn't taken that small step towards his best friend, who had continued walking with Rachel for a few feet until they realized that Kurt was no longer next to them, and they turned around to see Kurt staring at... well, from their point of view, it probably looked like he was staring at the ground.

His eyes slowly looked to where the football had been headed, and saw David Karofsky standing there, in the rain, without an umbrella, holding the football that nearly killed Kurt. Or at least his new jacket. *Lovely.*

"That could have killed me, you Neanderthal!" Kurt shouted, clearly pissed off because, seriously, why were they even throwing a football in the damn rain? It was basically fucking pouring outside, actually.

Karofsky howled even louder, "That was the point, Lady!"

Kurt opened his mouth to make another retort, because, honestly, what an idiot, but he was cut off by someone with a familiar voice shouting.

"Hey, Anderson, what *are* you doing?" Kurt turned around and saw Puck with his sweatshirt hoodie up, cupping his hands around his mouth and shouting towards the school building...

Kurt looked back at the school and found Blaine... kneeling in the rain... holding one really expensive-looking camera up to his face, pointing it towards the scene that Kurt was in, or it looked that way, at least. The camera was lowered from Blaine's face and Kurt found that the teenager was laughing a little bit and grinning and—was a little red in the face? Well, that was odd...

He looked kind of really good wet, though.

Kurt almost hit himself for thinking that.

Blaine stood up, absolutely soaked (wow his hair was really curly when it was wet), holding the (apparently waterproof) camera in one hand and cupping the other one half-way around his mouth, "Taking pictures for my photography class!" he shouted in return, already back up towards the building.

"Oh yeah, isn't that project to take a picture of something you think is b—hey, Anderson!" Puck began, but Blaine was already gone, into the building, leaving the scene behind.

Kurt's eyebrow rose and he blinked a few times before shaking his head. He sighed a little bit and readjusted the bag on his shoulder as he rushed to catch up with Mercedes and Rachel, "Sorry for that, ladies. Meatheads just won't leave me alone..." he rolled his eyes.

"You okay, boo?" Mercedes asked, obviously a little concerned.

"I'm fine," Kurt responded easily as they walked into the confines of the warm building, pulling in his umbrella and cringing slightly due to all of the squeaking and squelching produced by the kids walking around with wet shoes.

What an ugly noise.

Oh well, despite the short run-in earlier, Kurt had a feeling it was going to be a good day regardless—

Well, he had thought it was going to be a good day. Until he got bitch slapped by an ice berg, a.k.a. slushied. Right in front of his locker too. From the lack of gasps around him, he also had a feeling that Mercedes and Rachel had left to go straight to their first periods since it started in...

Kurt wiped the icy substance gingerly from his eyes, ignoring the laughing jocks that walked past him, exchanging high fives. Kurt probably should have told them off, but he was more concerned about first period—

Which started in two minutes. Great.

With a small groan, Kurt made his way towards the closest bathroom, pushing the door open and walking inside, setting his stuff down under a sink and leaning over said sink. He honestly had half the mind to text one of his friends, but he didn't want to make them miss class...

so he turned on the warm water and pulled a spare towel from his bag.

Hey, when you're slushied on basically a daily basis, you'd bring a towel to school all the damn time, too.

After cleaning himself up, Kurt tossed the towel into the trashcan. There was no use saving it, he had tried cleaning the dye out of a towel before... yeah, that didn't work. It didn't necessarily help that he used all white towels, too, but whatever. It was an old towel on purpose, anyways.

Kurt pulled open the door and stepped out into the empty hallways, glancing at the clock and noting that first period had started fifteen minutes ago... well, now that he was already ridiculously late, he may as well take his sweet time. He'd have to stop by the attendance office to get a pass anyways, so there was no use in rushing.

He walked back to his locker and opened it as quietly as possible, just in case there was anyone skipping class lurking through the halls. No need to attract attention to himself. He hung his bag up after extracting its contents and placed the proper items into the locker, keeping the stuff for his first period class (which was science) in his arm.

By the time he closed his locker, another five minutes had passed... in all actuality, getting his stuff had taken two minutes. Checking his hair had taken three.

Anyhow... the attendance office. Right. On the clear other side of the school. Even fucking better.

"Today sucks," Kurt muttered to himself under his breath, starting the long walk to the attendance office. Of course, it would really only take three, maybe five, minutes to get there, but it was still extremely bothersome. Everything was boring without another person with you, everyone knew that.

Kurt subconsciously slowed down next to the large row of windows and stared out of them at the still falling rain—though it was noticeably lighter than before. He sighed almost wistfully, kind of wanting to go outside, but at the same time just wanting to stay away from the rain. Confusing feelings.

The sudden sound of hushed voices from the hall adjacent to the one he was standing in alerted him, and he automatically took a few steps to the side and back, hiding behind a corner as obvious, less squeaky than he was expecting, footsteps accompanied the two voices, one distinctly a girl, the other obviously a guy judging from their tones. Kurt peered slowly around the corner, only enough to see, but not enough to be seen unless someone was purposefully looking for him, trying to see who it was—and half-gasping when he saw the pair

walking down the hall. He strained his hearing as much as he could, because this had to be good, but he could only pick up pieces of their conversation.

"It's just— Santana," Blaine whisper-shouted (not nearly loud enough to Kurt to catch the entire sentence, though), clearly exasperated—which was a really weird way of seeing Blaine, since he was normally so calm and cheerful.

Santana stopped halfway down the hall, in front of a locker, and turned towards it, spinning the combination borderline violently, tugging it open kind of—okay, that was actually pretty damn vicious. She threw a textbook into the locker—Kurt imagined that there was probably a dent in the metal from that—before turning towards Blaine, away from Kurt, "Just a—A freaking—you're apparently—Blaine!" she whispered almost too loudly, obviously pissed off.

"You are—Santana," Blaine replied, a small frown making its way onto his face, "I don't—but you!"

"Liar," Santana hissed, taking a step towards Blaine, and—well, Kurt actually couldn't see because her body was hiding most of Blaine's, but he had a feeling she was angrily poking his chest, probably hard enough to really hurt, knowing Santana, "I saw that stupid—really fucking nice—"

"Please, don't curse—"

"I'll fucking cuss if I want to fucking cuss, Blaine! You don't control me!" she said even more loudly. Loud enough for Kurt to hear her clearly, anyways... she whirled towards her locker and seemed to shove things around for a little bit and—oh, wow... she was on the verge of tears, Kurt could see that much, "I didn't even—into g—" she stopped talking for a few moments. "... You never—of me," she finally whispered brokenly, stopping her movements.

Kurt felt like he was intruding on something horribly personal.

Blaine's anger evaporated from his face, and he took a step towards Santana, wrapping his arms securely around her, pulling her close and just holding her, "I do—of you... you're my best friend and—please don't—I—Santana..."

Kurt felt a harsh clenching in his chest, and he bit his bottom lip, raising up to the tips of his toes to get across the hall without being seen... Blaine and Santana seemed too absorbed in whispering to each other, anyways...

When he finally continued his walk to the attendance office, Kurt felt vaguely guilty... he had just eavesdropped on something that seemed so strictly private, especially since it was happening in an empty hallway...

That was so odd, though, the entire conversation—

A loud thunderclap seemed to shake the entire house and Kurt snapped up from where he was lying on his side, the blanket tucked around him falling away and—

Wait. Why was there a blanket on top of him? And why was he lying on his side?

Kurt let out a small groan, realizing that he had fallen asleep for... he checked the clock. Apparently an hour and a half. That was just... yeah. Great. He had even gotten a good night of sleep, too...

He sighed softly and rubbed his eyes, blinking a few times and pushing the blanket completely off of him. He had been working with Blaine before he passed out—wait, Blaine. Had Blaine laid him down properly and tucked him in? Where was Blaine, anyways?

Taking another look around his room, he noted that all of their project stuff was moved to the desk... and his lamp light was on.

Footsteps outside of his door made Kurt look over to the entrance of his room quickly—he blinked a few times, pretty much shell-shocked when Blaine walked into his room, carrying two glasses of water with him even though common sense told him that it had to be Blaine. No one else was home.

Blaine looked over at Kurt, tilting his head to the side a little bit, and Kurt stared back, mirroring the movement without really meaning to, "Uhm... hey..." Kurt muttered softly, pulling his legs towards him as a sign for Blaine to sit down.

Blaine sat down easily, handing Kurt his glass of water. Kurt took it, nodding in thanks, and glanced at Blaine's ears automatically (as weird as that sounds), surprised to see that he wasn't wearing ear buds at all. Kurt sipped at his water to keep from saying anything stupid, instead just staring at Blaine over the rim of his glass as he swallowed slowly, watching Blaine drink his own water.

Something suddenly clicked in Kurt's head.

He wanted Blaine's trust. He really, really did for some insane reason. Maybe it was so Blaine would talk to him; maybe it was just a nice thought, to have Blaine Anderson's trust.

"Blaine," Kurt suddenly began, lowering the glass from his lips and clearing his throat a little bit, closing his eyes briefly. When he opened them, he found Blaine staring at him curiously, "... I... don't want you to feel pressured to talk to me. If you want to talk to me... then you can, whenever you want, but I won't get angry if you never speak a word to me, okay? I still think that you're... pretty awesome," Kurt said, trying to smile a little bit... though he had to resist the urge to hit himself in the face because of how that sounded when he repeated it mentally.

Blaine stared at him unblinkingly before a few moments... before another miniscule smile pulled at the corners of his lips, and his eyes seemed to warm even more than they had been when Blaine first came in...

"Thank you," Blaine replied in a very hushed voice, just barely above a whisper. It was so quiet that Kurt could have actually just been hearing things, due to the heavy rain outside...

Kurt swore that he stopped breathing because... Blaine just talked to him. Maybe just two words, but he just talked to him. Blaine talked to Kurt.

That was definitely an improvement.

Kurt couldn't really help but grin a little bit. He started drinking his water again, though, just to hide it because... well, who knows how Blaine would take Kurt smiling just because he talked to him?

It was a pretty big thing, though...

Even though saying thank you was kind of weird.

Later that day, after Blaine had left (he hadn't said goodbye, though that wasn't exactly a surprise), and after Kurt ate dinner with the rest of the family, he found himself sitting in his room, finishing up the little math homework that he had for the weekend. The rain was still falling steadily outside, and when he did finish, he was really just left with his own thoughts.

That dream that he had... well, more like a flashback, really. At least, he thought it was a flashback...

Kurt had to wonder how he forgot so much from the year prior... but that was a completely different thought process. It was what the dream was about. Yet another memory of Blaine resurfaced in his mind, yet this one included a lot more Santana.

The rainy day from last year when he almost got hit with the football... the football thing he had remembered, of course, but he hadn't remembered that Blaine was kneeling in the rain taking pictures for, apparently, a photography class project... what was that project, anyways? Kurt never figured it out since none of his closer friends at that point in time were in photography...

It was aimed in Kurt's general direction, though. Then again, Blaine could have been taking a picture of anything. Actually, it made more sense for him to be taking a picture of Rachel or something.

... That also explained Santana's behavior... now that Kurt thought about it, they were probably fighting about whatever picture Blaine had taken. It was probably a picture of Rachel, which made Santana upset which spurred the kind of fight that Kurt witnessed...

It was the only theory that made sense—wait, maybe it didn't actually make any sense. Kurt deduced that Blaine didn't like Rachel that way... There was almost nothing else that could make Santana snap like that, though, and go into such an emotional fit.

Plus you didn't have to like someone to take their picture.

This was so fucking confusing.

It honestly felt like every time that Kurt seemed to figure something important out, everything would just get even more confusing. The reason Blaine was so weird now probably didn't even have anything to do with McKinley...

Maybe the best way to solve this was to actually get close to Blaine, not to speculate.

... That probably was the best way.

Chapter Five: She Said

The following Monday, it ended up being a very bright and sunny (for Ohio, anyways) November day, completely contrasting the past Saturday, when Kurt pulled into his parking spot and just sat there for a few moments longer than he usually would, staring at his school which loomed there, as per usual.

He felt ridiculously tired, even though he could have *sworn* that he got just as much sleep the night before as he usually did. His mind must not have been at rest, in that case... but still. It was bothersome—and the sun really wasn't helping anything, with it being bright and in his face.

Finally, after debating whether he should just go home and sleep it all off or not, Kurt grabbed his bag from the passenger seat and pulled it onto his shoulder, pulling his keys from the ignition and opening the door, stepping out into the sunny day, blinking blearily from the fact that even *more* like obscured his vision. Luckily, there was that November chill, so the fact that he was wearing clothes that basically covered his entire body (as per usual) didn't kill him.

Mostly. It was still ridiculously sunny outside, which naturally warmed things up more than it should have been.

It wasn't particularly pleasant, either way.

He started towards the school, his shoes clicking against the pavement loudly as he wove through clustered groups of people, walking straight past the jocks—who were throwing someone into the dumpster. Poor kid. At least they didn't notice Kurt walking by... well, they might have, but they were too absorbed in torturing whoever they were at the moment, and Kurt was too tired to really do much.

Kurt pushed his way through the crowds of people to get to his locker, already seeing Mercedes at her own—he was so glad that she had a locker next to him for once, honestly—getting ready for the day as she usually did.

It actually kind of felt like it was going to be a good day despite the exhaustion.

Though, every time Kurt actually *thought* that... yeah, something bad ended up happening. Kurt always ended up accidentally jinxing himself. Well, actually... nothing horribly *bad* ended up happening for the first few periods of the day.

Before English, however, something a little weird happened. However, Kurt probably should have expected that, seeing as it was *his* decision to do what he did. Nothing else really had a play in it.

Unless he wanted to blame Mercedes for getting sick the previous period, thus causing her to go home early.

Kurt breezed through changing his stuff out—French for English, as per usual—much faster than he usually did, since he wasn't being distracted by Mercedes' wonderfulness and hilarity.

Due to this, he decided that it'd be a *pleasant* idea to run by Blaine's locker for some crazy reason even though, in all actuality, he didn't know where said locker was. When he came to the hall adjacent to the one his locker was in that he usually took to get to his classroom, though, that was blatantly answered for him.

How *convenient*.

Honestly, things seemed a little *too* straightforward lately, for some reason...

Odd.

Blaine stood in front of an open locker, ear buds pushed into his ears, only a few lockers away from where Kurt was standing, holding his notebook for English as well as a few Shakespearean books in one arm. He didn't seem to be aware of the football players running around behind him, pushing each other and a few crashing into lockers dangerously close to Blaine... but Blaine really didn't notice much that went on around him in the crazy school, anyways.

Seeing as Blaine was *right there*, there wasn't really any time for Kurt to talk himself out of doing thing, despite the fact that he and Blaine weren't *that* close... at least, not close enough to walk to class together or something.

Not in Kurt's opinion.

Nothing bad could happen, anyways...

Unless Blaine just walked away after giving him a scathing look.

But Blaine would do that. He was too nice.

... Right?

With a sense of finality, since he wasn't really in the mood to think pessimistically, Kurt took a deep breath and nodded to himself before walking over to Blaine, pulling the books slightly tighter against his chest as he approached the dark haired teen. Kurt stopped about a foot away from Blaine so he could properly catch his attention, his mouth opening, ready to say something—until he was slightly distracted by the inside of the door of Blaine's locker.

Or, well, really distracted, actually.

There were a few pictures hanging up, one in a frame and two others not. The pictures were surrounded by stickers of soccer balls and music notes, plus one of the patches that went on jocks' jackets that told everyone they were from McKinley up in the very top corner. It was probably from Blaine's soccer days, actually...

Not that he ever wore the actual jacket that came with the patch. Kurt might have seen Blaine wear it *once*... but he doubted it.

The picture that was framed was holding a picture of a little girl, probably around eight or so, who had a round facial structure and blue eyes and straight black hair pulled into a pony tail with long doll-like bangs, cut straight across, ending a little above her eyes. The smile on her face was eerily similar to Blaine's that Kurt could vaguely remember from last year...

Was that his sister? It seemed like it... though Kurt couldn't be too sure. He might just be seeing things.

One of the other pictures was a little below that one, out of a frame and probably taped to the metal. It was a rather pretty picture of Santana against a bright background that looked distinctly like the grassy clearing in the park that looked about... two years old or so. The picture itself, that is, judging from the way Santana looked—plus her hair was put in a high ponytail. She only wore it like that as a Cheerio; otherwise she had her hair down. She was smiling a smile that Kurt had never actually seen on her face, looking directly at the camera. Judging from the wrinkles at the corners of her eyes, she had been laughing at least a little bit.

The other easily seen picture was one of a completely Asian teenager, who was wearing a white v-neck t-shirt and was leaned back against his hands, apparently in the same place that Santana had been in on the same day, smiling at the camera with his eyebrow raised slightly, giving him an interesting expression. Kurt guessed that the guy was probably Wes, Blaine's other best friend that didn't go to McKinley. Kurt's eyes scanned the locker door again, and just before Blaine noticed him standing there, he saw a picture in the very bottom right corner, mostly covered by a ribbon of some sort. It was obviously raining in the picture—or, well, maybe it wasn't, it was really hard to see and Kurt was still beyond tired—and Kurt could have *sworn* that he saw the tip of a black boot. Before Kurt could get an actually good look at what he was seeing though, the locker door was pushed closed suddenly, and quite loudly.

Not loud enough to make it sound like Blaine was angry, though. Kurt looked up to find Blaine staring at him with a weird expression on his face, obviously a little confused by the fact that Kurt had been staring at his locker door unguardedly without really meaning to... Well, okay, Kurt meant to stare at the locker. He didn't mean to make it so obvious, though.

Kurt tried to read the emotion in Blaine's eyes, but to no avail. Blaine was guarding his emotions carefully once again (much to Kurt's slight

disappointment), his hazel eyes only showing a little bit of confusion, but mostly blankness despite that.

"Hey," Kurt breathed, a little embarrassed because Blaine just caught him staring at the inside of his locker. Kurt had basically been openly snooping, which was just as bad as snooping secretly, to Kurt himself, "I didn't really mean to pry or anything, the pictures just caught my eye." He was trying to explain himself but he was probably doing a pretty bad job of it.

Or a *really* bad job.

Blaine's expression said one pretty obvious thing. He was just wondering what Kurt was even *doing* there.

If Kurt had been in the same position, he'd be wondering, too.

Kurt coughed a little bit, shifting around his pile of stuff momentarily, "I thought that maybe we could walk to English together, since my hall is on your way and your locker is ridiculously close," he explained hurriedly, "which I really just figured out today."

Blaine blinked a few more times before nodding a little bit, apparently understanding before he walked forwards, his right shoulder brushing against Kurt's, basically physically telling him that they should get a move on.

Kurt turned quickly and followed. Being left behind wasn't really part of his plan. Well, actually, he didn't even *have* a plan, for once. That just made everything so much better.

Of course.

The only other thing on his mind, though, was that Rachel had been wearing black boots that day, if Kurt remembered correctly.

He was pretty sure he did. About 99% sure, *especially* because he hadn't owned his black boots until the summer *after* the picture was taken and because Rachel loved wearing her black boots on rainy days (she had told him herself), if that picture had been taken in the rain like it looked.

A split second glance really wasn't much, but still. That *had* to be Rachel; it couldn't have been anyone else and still make complete, logical sense.

That Wednesday, Blaine came over to Kurt's house after school, since Kurt had made plans with the girls already to go dress shopping for winter formal that weekend. They figured that it'd be a good idea to get together earlier in the week rather than just not meeting outside of school that week.

They found themselves sitting on Kurt's bed, the door half-closed, working on their project with immense concentration, even though they still weren't very far into it at all. Finn was in his room "studying"

(meaning playing video games, Kurt knew well), Carol was downstairs making dinner, and Burt was at the garage, though Kurt knew he'd be home soon.

They worked silently for a while, until Kurt dropped "Julius Caesar" onto his bed with a loud *plop* and leaned back against the wall. Blaine looked at him curiously, and he sighed, "I don't know how much more I can take of Caesar's vanity and Brutus' sleep deprived behavior," he said melodramatically, before smiling a little bit at Blaine, who smiled back almost appreciatively.

Almost appreciatively? What would Blaine even be *appreciating*? That Kurt broke the silence?

... Well, that just made no sense.

Did it?

Blaine set "Macbeth" down next to him and turned completely towards Kurt, pulling the one ear bud that was in his ear out, letting the headphones fall into his lap. "Shakespeare gets a little bland after a while," he said softly, leaning forwards a little bit.

Kurt's eyebrows rose because—well, Blaine just talked to him. Again. In a complete sentence that was more than two words this time. That was pretty damn amazing, to him, "It does," he agreed easily, ignoring the impulse to say something about the fact that Blaine just talked to him. That wouldn't exactly be *smart*. "Analyzing these things are more boring than Mr. Schue's outfit choices."

Blaine shrugged a little bit, a smile playing on his face a little bit, one hand absentmindedly grabbing an ear bud, twirling it around one finger in the air, "Analyzing isn't that bad," he said, his voice a little rough, Kurt finally noticed, probably from the fact that he didn't exactly use it very often. "I analyze a lot daily, though... so it's probably... worse for you..."

Kurt noted that there were random pauses in his sentences. He hypothesized that it was because Blaine didn't really speak long sentences often... well Kurt would just have to try and fix that. No use loosing the conversation yet, "You analyze a lot?" he questioned simply, pulling his legs towards himself, gazing at the dark haired teen.

There was a pause, as if Blaine was thinking about how to word what he was saying, or as if he were wondering if he *should* say it. "When... when you're quiet," Blaine looked up from Kurt's bedspread, meeting his blue eyes, "you kind of start to watch people. Watching people leads you to analyzing their physical reactions to things, which then leads you to connecting certain things to other things and... is this even making sense?"

Kurt found himself actually interested in what Blaine was saying. He nodded, "It's making sense... it's actually kind of interesting, really. So... you analyze people a lot?" Blaine nodded, "And that helps you analyze books, too?"

Blaine smiled vaguely again, "Yeah, it does," he replied with a small nod, "it does kind of help that I was taught Shakespearean language back at my elementary school, though."

Oh, that was right. Blaine had gone to a fancy private elementary school before switching to normal, public middle school.

"You're lucky," Kurt sighed wistfully, smiling slightly still, "no wonder you got through 'Romeo and Juliet' so quickly. I'm still stuck on 'Julius Caesar'."

There was a short laugh, and Kurt looked to Blaine quickly, finding him covering his mouth and looking momentarily—guilty? Did Blaine feel *guilty* for some reason? The expression disappeared quickly though as he cleared his throat thickly, looking back at Kurt with a small, more forced smile, "I could probably finish it... for you..."

Kurt blinked, before shaking his head quickly, "No, no... we're supposed to do equal parts of the work, remember? I don't want to make you analyze more books than me..." he trailed off, looking away from Blaine for a moment before looking back at his partner, who seemed to have zoned out. It didn't look like Blaine was about to say anything...

Kurt said the first thing that came to mind.

"Your laugh," he blurted out, and Blaine looked at him curiously.

"Your... laugh, it's..." Kurt scrambled for words because he couldn't say *beautiful*. What *could* he say? "... Charming."

He nearly smacked himself. What a *smooth* save.

Blaine blinked a few times, before blushing a little bit—blushing? Goodness gracious, this was just *odd*. It was actually probably because of the lack of lighting in his room... there were always weird shadows on peoples' cheekbones when they were in his room late in the afternoon, "Thanks..." Blaine thanked him quietly, looking away from the brunet, looking back at "Macbeth" for a few moments before picking it up and flipping it back open.

Kurt mentally berated himself. Sure, the conversation had been fading well before that point, but what he just said was kind of like dumping a huge bucket of water onto a dying fire. They had been going *okay*... well, fine, maybe it hadn't been going great, but Blaine had been speaking complete sentences.

He actually kind of... enjoyed their short conversation, though...

Whatever. He still had his goals in mind. For one thing, finish his project. The other, try to figure out what happened to Blaine.

Blaine Anderson wasn't going to distract him from either of his goals (even though his own past was one of them, technically). So Blaine completely spoke to him for once. It wasn't *that* big of a deal. It just proved that Blaine was still just as nice as he used to be, which Kurt had already expected.

Not a big deal. Not at all.

On Saturday afternoon, Kurt found himself sitting outside of the dressing room at Macy's. He and the girls had driven down to Columbus *just* to get the best choice of dresses that they could without going *too* far away. They made a good decision. There were plenty of *extremely* nice dresses on the racks to his left.

Each girl (almost all the New Direction girls except for Lauren since she had a wrestling meet or something) had around five dresses to try on, some more, some less. He sat right outside of the door, so he could hear the girls talking and chattering.

"Hey, Kurt," Tina called, causing Kurt to look up from his phone and turn around in his chair slightly.

"Need me to zip you up?" he called out, knowing that they could just help each other, but he may as well reply with something other than 'yes'.

Tina stepped outside of her dressing room in a knee-length lacey black dress, smiling at him, "Nope!" she replied easily, walking past all of the dressing rooms and towards Kurt, stepping into the waiting room and taking a turn. Kurt clapped for her, telling her that she looked great. "Thanks—oh, but I wanted to ask you about something," there was a teasing tone in her voice that made Kurt raise his eyebrow slightly.

"I heard from my mom that her friend's, friend's, friend," Kurt blinked a few times and Tina waved her hand in the air, "Asian network—anyways! Knows Blaine Anderson's mom," Kurt slumped back *very* slightly. Gossip. Great. "He's apparently stopped listening to music strictly via-ear buds at home."

Kurt gave her a weird look and nodded slowly, "That's... great, Tina. Why are you telling me this...?"

"Well, because—"

Rachel walked out in a floor-length pink dress (that, admittedly, looked really good on her), "What I want to know is what happened to Blaine. He used to be *just* as much of a star as I'm destined to be," Kurt heard Mercedes groan from inside her dressing room, "then, it's like he became a whole other person during the week that he was gone for absolutely no reason."

Mercedes walked out, standing next to Rachel in a very nice, satin-looking purple dress, and Kurt was about to compliment her as well as Rachel, but she spoke before he could, cutting him off quite efficiently, "I've heard some *crazy* things about what happened to him."

Quinn pushed through in her light blue dress, and Kurt tried to talk again but was cut off, *again*, "So have I," she sighed, smoothing the skirt of her dress before looking around at the girls gathered around Kurt's chair, "I heard that he joined an anti-religion cult and they tore out his vocal chords as payment for joining, and that's why he hasn't said a word since last year."

Kurt's mouth dropped open slightly at this. *That* couldn't be true.

Blaine could talk. That was a *little* far-fetched, anyways.

Brittany poked her head out from the doorway. Kurt could see that she was wearing an orange dress and tried to talk yet *again*, because he wanted this conversation to *stop*, "I heard that he was abducted by cat-like aliens and was never actually returned," she looked scarily serious when she said this.

What the *fuck*?

Kurt (as well as the other girls were) was staring at Brittany oddly.

"Those aren't *nearly* as bad as what I've heard, you guys. In my honest opinion, anyways," Mercedes said in a hushed voice, and everyone looked from Brittany to her. Immediately, the girls obvious wanting to know what Mercedes heard. Kurt *really* didn't want to hear this, but he was completely surrounded and there was no use talking anymore—where the *hell* was Santana? "I heard that he pushed his little sister down the stairs," Mercedes whispered and everyone, even Kurt, absolutely *gasp*ed because, seriously, *what*? That couldn't be right.

Blaine was *too nice* to do such a cruel thing. Kurt couldn't even *imagine* it...

Or, maybe, he could imagine it...

That was a horrible mental image that made Kurt absolutely *cringe*.

His best friend nodded slowly, "Apparently, his family tried to keep it on the down low, but rumor seriously has it that Blaine pushed his little sister down the stairs. Apparently, his dad got really angry and—" "Shut the *fuck* up," Santana shouted suddenly from behind all of the girls, and each of them stiffened, "I've been *trying* to get you *idiots* to *stop talking*, but I somehow got overlooked every time I tried to get you guys to *stop*. How many times do I have to tell you *not to spread rumors about him*?" She looked absolutely *pissed*, more than she had in a *really* long time.

All of the girls muttered quick apologies before disappearing back into the row of dressing rooms, keeping their heads down.

Kurt stared after them for a few moments, and then at the ground, before slowly meeting Santana's eyes, which were focused completely on glaring at him and him alone, "I tried to get them to stop talking," he insisted quietly so the other girls wouldn't hear, "but they kept overriding everything that I said, just like they did to you. I don't know how they did that, but they did."

Santana's eyes narrowed into slits, and she scoffed a little bit, "*Right*. Well... just... whatever. Next time it happens, I swear that each of you will have your heads shaved and be thrown in front of a bus or onto the moon or in the Antarctic or something. I have my ways."

Kurt didn't doubt that.

The still angry Hispanic turned away from Kurt, and was probably about to walk back to her dressing room, "Santana," he said in a hushed tone, and she stopped and looked at her out of the corner of her dark eyes, "... none of those things are true, right?"

Briefly, for just a split *moment*, Santana looked tortured, worried, *angry*, "... I already told you that I don't know a single thing, Hummel," she hissed softly under her breath, "I can't confirm nor deny anything that you may hear—except the alien thing. That was Brittany being special as per usual."

Kurt stared at Santana's profile for a few more moments, kind of thinking about something to say, "... You look great," he said honestly, finally taking note of the black, body-clinging dress that stopped just above her knees.

She hesitated for a few more moments before scoffing again and strutting straight forwards, leaving Kurt alone in the waiting room, simply with his thoughts until the next girl stepped out of her dressing room—which probably wouldn't be for a while since they were all most likely a little freaked out by Santana's anger attack.

He turned forwards, staring at the mirror that was right across from him on the opposite wall, and he stared at himself for a few moments. None of those rumors could be true, could they?

They were just... rumors.

Blaine *could* talk after all... but that didn't mean he wasn't part of a cult—no. Kurt *couldn't* think about that stuff.

Plus, Blaine was *way* too nice to push his sister down the stairs... wasn't he? He was, right?

Right?

Kurt groaned softly and face palmed.

Damn gossip. It just messed with the head.

Chapter Six: Too Late, To Apologize

It was two weeks after the dress shopping incident that Kurt found himself staring at Blaine's profile, his expression serious and pensive and *concentrated* on Blaine as he read the next Shakespeare book they had to annotate: "A Midsummer's Night Dream". Blaine didn't seem to notice how *avidly* Kurt was staring at him, since his nose was basically pressed into the book, except for when he would underline something or jot something down in the small margin the book gave them. He was just so... oblivious to his surroundings at all times. It was actually oddly alluring, for some reason.

It had taken Kurt a while to remember that Blaine had always been vividly oblivious to everything, though. Actually, Rachel was the one to remind him.

"I remember how spacey Blaine always used to be, despite being on the top of the social hierarchy," Rachel had said when they were getting lunch one day, carefully choosing an apple out of the bowl. Kurt had glanced over at her, slightly confused, "Spacey?" he echoed. Rachel nodded, looking over at him with a serious expression on her face, "Yeah. He never really seemed to notice much that went on around him. There were those multiple times that he stood up to bullies for a few kids, but otherwise he always seemed oblivious to just about everything else, somehow."

"... You were watching him so much because...?" he had asked, glancing at her, clearly scrutinizing her small stature as he grabbed a salad from the line of food in front of him, not bothering to look at the dressing.

Rachel blinked and then coughed a little bit, staring down at her tray that really only had a few pieces of fruit on it, shrugging a little bit at the question, "I *might* have had some kind of interest in Blaine back then, it's not that bad. I met Finn soon after, anyways," she insisted, reaching forwards and grabbing a plate of celery.

Kurt sighed, shaking his head, glancing down at his tray before looking at Rachel out of the corner of his eyes, "I bet you a regionals solo that in at least one of your notebooks last year, you wrote Mrs. Rachel Anderson somewhere."

Rachel didn't say anything in return.

Kurt was trying to figure Blaine out once again. He had been trying *really hard* every since shopping with the girls, actually. He honestly didn't want to pay attention to what Quinn and Mercedes had

said (Brittany didn't count, Santana had repelled that one automatically), but it was hard not to. Santana didn't even *try* to deny either of those things...

Yet, at the same time, Kurt couldn't imagine Blaine doing anything so illegal. Nor could he imagine Blaine being cruel enough to push his little sister down the stairs. Honestly, Kurt kind of doubted anyone in the school was *that* bad...

Except for Sue Sylvester. She pushed people down stairs scarily often. That was against the point, though. The point was, was that Kurt couldn't figure Blaine out, at all. Blaine never spoke a single word in school and it was still rare for him to talk to Kurt when they were working together at Kurt's house—that was another thing. Blaine was almost unfailingly polite at all times, yet he had never even bothered to ask Kurt if he wanted to come over to his house.

Kurt couldn't really help but wonder why Blaine never seemed to bother.

Sure, it would be impolite to invite himself over, plus he didn't even know where Blaine lived, and Blaine would have to *agree* before giving Kurt his address. Now, Kurt could always ask Santana, but that would just be really... peculiar. So, he settled for wondering for two complete weeks.

It wasn't even really that hard to get him to stop thinking about it. He and Blaine became pretty good friends, even if they had a slight lack of conversation in general. Blaine had even been opening up to Kurt some more, Kurt had noticed. His hazel eyes had become less guarded, and he was *slightly* more open with his smiles and how he was feeling.

It was a lot more than Kurt had expected to get, actually, and he really didn't want to mess it up by being stupid or taking things the wrong way or anything. He was always careful with what, exactly, he said around Blaine... or, he tried to be, at least.

Every so often he'd accidentally slip up and try to figure out more of Blaine's past without exactly being subtle about it, but Blaine never really seemed to mind *that* much... he'd really just get more quiet and then try to change the subject to the best of his ability. Kurt just went along with the subject change to make things a little less awkward than they were...

Kurt was jolted out of his odd train of thought when he became acutely aware to the fact that Blaine wasn't looking at his book anymore. He was looking directly at Kurt, his head tilted to the side slightly, a questioning gaze in his eyes.

Worrying his bottom lip for a few moments, Kurt cleared his throat, a sign for Blaine to take out his ear bud—only slightly, though. Blaine

always seemed very... weird about taking off even one ear bud completely in school. "Why... don't you ever invite me over to your house to work?" Kurt asked slowly, trying to figure out if he was using correct wording. "I mean, my house isn't that interesting, and we always work there."

Blaine blinked a few times again, his eyes flickering to the side for a split second before returning back to Kurt's face, staring at him dead on for quite a few seconds. Kurt guessed that he was wondering what exactly to think about the implication. Then, he nodded a little bit, turning forwards to grab his notebook—it was new. He had used up all the pages in his other one quite easily—flipping it open to a fresh page before carefully tearing said page out. He picked up his pencil and wrote on the piece of paper quickly, before handing it to Kurt, who took it and looked at the words written in between the lines.

It was Blaine's address, with a short note after it:

You can come over tonight, if you want. We'll get our outside-of-school work done then.

Kurt reread the note a few times, before looking at Blaine, who was once again looking at him steadily. The brunet nodded in agreement to the plan, smiling a little bit. Blaine smiled a little bit in return, before going back to annotating the book and letting Kurt go back to writing down notes about Shakespeare that they were getting from one of his many biographies.

That went so much better than Kurt expected... which was kind of odd, actually. There wasn't an explanation about why Blaine had never had Kurt over before, not even a vague one. Just an okay and a simple, short plan. Sure, Blaine seemed a little hesitant, since he hadn't exactly gotten right down to writing immediately, but *still*, the hesitation was just natural.

Hesitance didn't mean anything was going on.

There was nothing wrong with Blaine—okay, so there was a lot of things wrong with him, but he wasn't part of an anti-religion cult, Kurt was pretty sure.

And he didn't push his own sister down the stairs. Kurt absolutely refused to believe that.

Kind of.

Kurt drove over to Blaine's house after school with mainly no difficulty, almost getting lost a few times in the actual neighborhood because... well, damn, Blaine lived pretty close to the back of all of the giant houses and there were a lot of unnecessary roads. He managed to pull up to the Anderson house, though.

Only problem was, was that it wasn't really a *house*. It was a fucking *mansion*. Or, it was really, really close to that, at least. Before stepping out of the car, Kurt looked at the two houses that flanked the Anderson home. Both were pretty far away, since the house had a lot of land for some reason, and Kurt couldn't really tell which one was Santana's... then again, who could unless they had personally been to the girl's house, really?

With a small sigh, Kurt opened his car door, stiffening at the cold air that sent a chill up his spine, and stepped out into the nearly sunlight, turning around to grab his bag. He turned and walked up to the house, tilting his head back as he got closer and the top of the house became harder to see. Actually, since he wasn't really concentrating, he almost smacked into the door, but stopped himself just in time. He took a small pause to compose himself, before reaching over and pressing the doorbell, faintly hearing the echoing ring that resounded within the confines of the house.

Kurt stood there for a few moments, looking at the ground in front of the house that he could see while he waited. He saw bare bushes with snow covering them, and there was just... snow everywhere, except for the long driveway and the walkway. It was actually... really, really pretty.

The door opened, and Kurt looked towards it, seeing Blaine standing there in the same outfit that he had worn to school that day, a faint smile on his face—his somewhat dead eyes ruined the affect of his normally nice smile.

That worried Kurt, just a little bit.

Kurt didn't look away from Blaine's face when he walked into the house, letting the warm air wash over him as he pulled his scarf off, unbuttoning his jacket slowly and toeing off his ankle-high boots. When he did finally pull his gaze from Blaine—who was staring back at him the entire time—he looked around the front hallway, taking in the simple, but elegant décor. It was... truly, a very nice house.

Kurt approved, very much.

Blaine suddenly took his hand gently, and Kurt jumped a little bit, staring at the back of Blaine's head as the shorter teenager pulled him towards the stairs, which he half-stumbled on at first, though he straightened himself and went to walking like a normal person behind Blaine, trying not to get distracted by the paintings that lined the wall next to the stairs...

Of course, Kurt's curiosity got the best of him and he ended up staring at the biggest painting as they passed it.

The largest, most impressive painting was obviously a family portrait from around the time Blaine was in middle school, or something. His

father (Kurt guessed, it couldn't really be anyone else) looked European, with combed back brown hair that curled slightly despite the probably careful gelling, paired with cold, serious blue eyes and a strong jaw, was standing behind a chair. Blaine's mother, who was obviously of Asian descent, was seated in it, her probably long black hair pulled into a neat bun at the back of her head. A little girl was seated on the woman's lap who looked like a younger version of the little girl that was pictured in Blaine's locker, even though her bangs appeared pinned off to the sides of her forehead. A little boy who was probably around fifteen or so at the time stood to the right of the father, with short cropped and neat black hair, housing the same expression as his father.

Blaine, however, stood to the left of his father, notably shorter than his dad. His curly hair was gelled off into a side part, taming them efficiently enough, and his hand was lightly placed on his mother's shoulder. A warm smile was on his face, contrasting sharply against his brother and his father.

They looked like such a... *regal* family. Kurt kind of continued staring at the huge portrait even after they walked past it, only looking back in front of himself when it started to hurt his neck to stare behind him properly.

Not a word was exchanged between them as they reached the second floor and Blaine pulled him towards yet another set of stairs that was down the hall from the front stairs, leading him up those as well. It seemed almost annoyingly easy to get lost in the house, which was really just as big as it looked from the outside, somehow.

Kurt felt like it would be weird to say hello in such a quiet house, so he didn't bother to say a hello... instead, he found himself staring at their loosely joined hands, tilting his head slightly because... Blaine was touching him, straight on, no gloves or jackets separating them from skin-on-skin contact. It was... weird, but interesting, all at the same time.

It wasn't like Blaine wasn't a touchy person. He *constantly* touched people before the incident, always patting people on the shoulder when he walked by, or high-fiving people, or giving random friends close, warm hugs. Blaine had always clapped Kurt gently on the shoulder during glee club, constantly causing Kurt to jump and stiffen a little bit, turning around as Blaine walked past him, normally towards Santana. It was just... kind of how he was, all the time. He just *touched* people in friendly ways. No one really knew why.

More questions. Would they ever stop?

Probably not.

Obviously, he had stopped touching other people so often after whatever happened, happened, so it was kind of odd that Blaine was holding his hand (plus, he never seemed big on actually holding hands. Just fleeting touches, normally). Especially since Kurt wasn't very touchy unless it was a ridiculously close friend (like Mercedes or Rachel occasionally), unlike Blaine, and basically everyone knew that, even if they didn't know Kurt personally.

However, the touch of their hands didn't make Kurt uncomfortable for some reason, like touching people in general normally did. It was oddly comforting, in such a big, quiet house, only filled by the sound of their padding feet on the lavishly carpeted floors.

It honestly seemed like they were completely and utterly alone, even though Santana had, at one point, blatantly told Kurt that Blaine's little sister was homeschooled for some unknown reason. Maybe the little sister was out with the parents or something... it was just *too quiet* for anyone else to be home.

Kurt wondered if Blaine had been lonely, before Kurt arrived. Maybe he had been, maybe he hadn't been. It wasn't like Kurt was about to ask, even though he kind of really wanted to.

Blaine lead them through a slightly open door, pushing it open with his freehand when they got close enough, and Kurt looked around what was, apparently, Blaine's room, taking everything in carefully when Blaine slowly let go of his hand.

The bed was probably queen-sized, and the walls were painted a deep, kind of foreboding yet calming, in some crazy way, shade of blue, and the sheets on the bed matching the color of the walls. There was a dark, wood desk off in the corner of the room, a laptop open on top of said desk, casting a bright light on the room. A guitar and a keyboard rested next to the desk—they looked untouched, though—and when Kurt glanced over his shoulder, he saw an unnecessarily large bookcase right next to the door that Blaine was closing, every shelf filled with books of all color and sizes. From what Kurt could see, it was organized alphabetically.

"Nice room," he commented softly, looking at Blaine, who walked past him to the bed. Kurt followed automatically, as he always did in a new environment.

Blaine made a sudden turn a few feet in front of the bed, motioning with his hand for Kurt to sit down anyways, grabbing a pile of papers and books from his desk before returning and sitting next to Kurt, who was pulling his own pile out. "Thanks," he replied softly, glancing over at Kurt. His eyes were still guarded, "My mom hired a designer a while back."

"Oh?" Kurt said his eyebrow raising as he smiled a little bit at Blaine. "Whoever that designer was, they did a *great* job with the place." Amusement flashed in Blaine's eyes, and that honestly delighted Kurt, just a little bit, "I know," he said, his voice not as quiet as Kurt expected, before Blaine was scooting backwards on the large bed, backing up against the pillows. Blaine looked over at him and patted the spot on the bed next to him silently, and Kurt understood immediately.

The brunet held onto his stuff as he started to scoot backwards until his back hit the numerous pillows stacked against the headboard. He settled himself down and set a few of the papers and books off to the side, picking up the biography of Shakespeare once again when he heard the telltale sound of flipping pages when Blaine turned to the page he left off on.

They worked in careful silence for a few minutes, before Kurt felt a movement besides him and looked up from the biography, seeing Blaine leaning over to the bedside table, grabbing something—it was his iPod. Kurt watched Blaine turn onto his side, the book obviously placed to the side, as his arm stretched out for the white iHome that sat on the bedside table. There was the sliding sound of the iPod fitting onto the plug-in and then a few buttons were pressed, before the soft sound of music flowed into the room.

When Blaine sat up, he shifted to the side slightly and Kurt found the sides of their hips pressed together, and inhaled sharply for a split second, still staring at Blaine who was suddenly aware of how *close* they were and Blaine was staring back and it was just... tense between them, despite the broken silence.

"I thought it'd... make you more comfortable if I turned on music," Blaine breathed softly, his warm breath spreading across Kurt's face, warming his cheeks and forehead *much* more than the heating in the huge house was.

Kurt blinked and licked his lips automatically, nodding a little bit, shifting a little bit. The small shift caused their shoulders to brush slowly, "It's... nice," he muttered honestly, before quickly looking down at the book in his lap, his hand reaching for the pen that was wedged between his thigh and the mattress.

Blaine took a deep breath and scooted away from Kurt slightly, picking his own book and pen back up, going back to annotating silently.

They were still *so close* though.

Kurt shook his head slightly and forced himself to get back to his book. No distractions.

Kurt was hopelessly lost.

About an hour after he and Blaine started working, Kurt started to feel frustratingly thirsty. It wasn't really even a thirst that you could ignore, because his throat randomly got *really* dry and he knew that if he tried to talk, he'd sound horrible.

That didn't mean that he didn't *try* to ignore it, though, because he did for a good ten minutes until it just became absolutely *unbearable*.

At that point, Kurt put his book down with a sigh and pushed himself to the edge of the bed, setting his feet down and standing up. He turned back around to see Blaine staring at him curiously, and Kurt cleared his throat as best as he could, before half-forcing a smile, "I'm just thirsty."

Blaine nodded understandingly, smiling a little bit as well, though only faintly like before, "First floor, the kitchen is hard to miss," Kurt nodded at this and started towards the door, "Do you want me to come with you?"

Kurt stopped at the door and turned around, thinking about it for a few moments before shaking his head, "No, I'll be fine. I don't get lost quite that easily," with that he slipped out of the doorway and took a right to the stairs that lead to the second floor.

Getting to the kitchen was no big deal...

Trying to find Blaine's room again was where Kurt got annoyingly lost, of course.

It wasn't really even his fault. Kurt tried to backtrack *exactly* the way he came, but there were way too many hallways and stairs and doors in the place. Plus, everything *in* the halls looked the same, except for what paintings were where.

It came to the point where Kurt had to stop and just look around. He had no problems getting to the second floor from the kitchen... but he took a wrong turn and couldn't find the stairs to the third floor, which was his main problem. If he could just *find* the stairs, then he'd have no problem getting to Blaine's room...

Taking a deep breath, Kurt closed his eyes and just tried to *think*—Until he heard the soft playing of music from down the hall.

His blue eyes opened slowly and he looked down the hall curiously because... Blaine's music hadn't been that loud, but no one else could be playing music... so he headed that direction. He followed the music to the stairs that lead up to the third floor—the music was a little further down the hall, though. Following his natural curiosity, he decided to figure out where the noise was coming from since... well, who wouldn't want to know?

He found himself walking as quietly as possible towards a slightly open door only a few doors down from the stairs, and the only door that was open. Kurt pressed his back against the wall and sidestepped

slowly towards the doorway that was open *enough*, and turned his head to the side and looked inside, ignoring the slight feeling that he *shouldn't* be doing what he was.

The walls of the room were painted a cheerful green, with blue flowers painted *just* perfectly in the top corners of the room, giving the room itself a childish feel. A small, round white table with a plastic tea set stood near the door and there was a short bookshelf with purely colorful books—well, one shelf was dedicated to huge-looking books, but still—was against the wall.

Kurt moved slightly again and looked inside of the room more, seeing a green iHome on a white bedside table next to a queen-sized bed—which had a little girl on it who looked almost heartbreakingly solemn, leaned over a book at was in front of her crossed legs. Her long dark bangs fell in front of her eyes, mostly hiding them and—
Before he could be seen or heard, Kurt backed away from the doorway and turned sharply, heading back to the staircase because... it felt weird, watching Blaine's little sister when she was totally unaware of his presence.

Kurt walked up the stairs as calmly as possible and easily navigated his way back to Blaine's room, hearing *his* music almost immediately. After calming himself down and making himself appear normal—or as close to normal as he could get—one again, he pushed open the door and walked back inside, causing Blaine to look up from his book, "I got a little lost," Kurt admitted, walking over to the bed and sitting down on it, "I found my way again, though."

Blaine ducked his head down suddenly and Kurt had a feeling that he was chuckling very lightly, before he looked at Kurt, probably trying to hide any emotion in his eyes even though there was some unmistakable warmth there, "That's all that matters, that you found your way."

Kurt's eyebrow rose very slightly at what Blaine said, before he nodded, settling down next to him and picking up the biography once again, "That's true," he agreed, smiling over at Blaine, who stared back at him for a little bit before nodding and looking down at his own book quickly.

The silence between the two of them stretched on, and Kurt was okay with that. He just tried to concentrate totally and completely on the book on Shakespeare that he was reading, and pushed all questions that were begging to be asked out of his head. They had to get *done* and Blaine probably wouldn't answer them, anyways...
However, no matter how many times Kurt tried to ignore the nagging questions, they would just get more persistent and his strong desire to

know Blaine more grew slowly as the questions started poking at his head more. It was a bother and a headache, to say the very least. Finally, Kurt just put down the book and looked over at Blaine, who seemed to be concentrating too much to notice that Kurt wasn't really working anymore. Blue eyes trailed Blaine's profile as they did quite often, and Kurt tried to think of something to say to alert his partner that he really wasn't in the mood to work anymore. "... I want to know more about you," he finally said, just going with the blunt approach that really sounded better in his head than out loud.

Blaine blinked and looked over at Kurt, his eyebrow rising a little bit and his mouth opening just *slightly*, "You want... to know more about me?" he echoed, a questioning gaze in his eyes.

Kurt didn't break his gaze as he dug in his mind for more words, "I mean... I know where you live, now, but I don't know much about *you*. You don't have to give me your entire life story or anything, but... basic information, I guess."

After a few moments of silence, Blaine put his book by his side slowly, clearing his throat a little bit, his eyes flickering briefly to the side—briefly enough that if Kurt hadn't been watching so closely, he wouldn't have noticed—before returning to Kurt's face. "There's not really much to tell..."

"Tell me only as much as you want to," Kurt encouraged, still smiling and staring at Blaine, even as he turned on the bed so that his entire body was facing Blaine completely, hands grasping his crossed calves. "Well..." Blaine began, turning as well, putting an inch or two of space between their knees as he contemplated what to say. "I grew up in Ohio, obviously," he began, and Kurt nodded, leaning forwards and concentrating completely and totally on Blaine alone, "I have an older brother and a little sister," suddenly, Blaine was biting his bottom lip. It was almost like he hadn't meant to say that, for some reason... "I went to a fancy private school not too far from here..."

"What were you like as a kid?" Kurt asked, trying to keep the conversation going so Blaine wouldn't trail off and end up changing the subject suddenly. Kurt had a genuine desire to *know* Blaine... it wasn't really even about figuring out what happened in his past, it was an actual *yearning* to know Blaine Anderson personally.

A ghost of a smile skittered across Blaine's face in an almost cute way as he looked down at the space between his thighs from the way his legs were crossed as well, "I was a really clumsy kid, actually," he admitted and Kurt's eyebrows rose at this. Well, now his curiosity was being seriously poked at. "I used to fall down all the time, no matter what, especially when I ran. I mean, I learned how to read much faster than my brother did, but I was a lot more of a hazard than he was."

Kurt laughed a little bit at this. "When my... parents got me into soccer, I was always falling and tripping over the ball. I broke my arm quite a few times and my leg as well."

Kurt found himself laughing lightly and smiling largely, his eyes closing due to this. When he opened them again, he found Blaine staring at him pensively, and he inhaled deeply, and slowly, "... I'm guessing that you grew out of that, then? You were the star soccer player, after all," he pointed out softly, licking his lips subconsciously because Blaine's eyes were so *intense*.

Blaine laughed shortly, a smile pulling at his lips more, "I guess I did," he said with a small shrug, "Even though I don't think that I was the *star* of the soccer team last year."

Everyone had always said that Blaine was too modest for his own good.

"You *were* the star, Blaine. Trust me," Kurt insisted, denying the urge to reach forward and mess with Blaine's hair or *something*.

"If you say so."

There was a pause between them, and Kurt started scrambling for *something else to say* because there was just pure nothingness in his head suddenly and—

"So what religion are you or whatever you call it?" Kurt found himself blurting out, out of absolutely *nowhere*, and he *really* wanted to hit himself for just asking that. Where had that even come from?

... *Shit*. Kurt's subconscious had been thinking about those stupid rumors and Kurt wished that he could just *take those words back* because the look on Blaine's face at that moment was heartbreaking and pulse racing and holy *fuck* was that actual anger in Blaine's eyes *at that moment*?

Fuck. Fuck. *Fuck*.

The next time Kurt blinked, Blaine was suddenly up and off of his bed, walking briskly over to his window, his shoulders—hell, his entire *body*—noticeably tense, "I should have known," he muttered darkly and Kurt felt a mixture of worry and a little bit of fear at that tone because... Blaine just didn't get angry.

Not that often.

"Blaine, wait, I'm sorry, I didn't—" Kurt tried to explain, getting up from his bed and walking after Blaine, who had pulled back the curtain in front of his window and was staring out at the darkening evening.

"I tell you things that I've only told my closest friends," Blaine cut him off, not turning around, "and of *course* all you want to know is if those stupid rumors are true." Kurt stopped and stared at Blaine, who still wasn't even glancing at him, "I know about the rumors. Santana tries to keep it all a secret, but I still log onto Facebook every so often. I

know about that blog that spreads rumors about people in school. I *know* this stuff, Kurt." There was another, long, stifling pause, "I thought you were better than that."

"Blaine, please, just—"

"You should go."

Not a word was said after that. The only sound in the room as the iHome, still softly playing music into the room, making the atmosphere even *tenser* than it was. Kurt stood there, staring at Blaine in shock because he sounded so... *pissed off* and there was *sadness* and *disappointment* and Kurt just felt like absolute shit and...

Kurt just walked over to the bed quickly after a few moments of silence. He grabbed his bag and his stuff, dumping it all in there, not caring for the careful neatness that the inside of his bag normally had, before pulling it up onto his shoulder and over to Blaine's door. He placed his hand on the doorknob and stood there a little while longer, honestly wondering if he should just say that he was sorry... before he just opened the door and walked out of the room, shutting it gently behind him.

As if he were on autopilot, Kurt made his way down to the front hall and to the door, pulling it open slowly as his mind tried to comprehend what, exactly just happened in Blaine's room, his heart heavy and some part of his mind telling him that he was an idiot for even bothering to ask that question.

There was a slight noise from the floor above, however, and Kurt found himself turning and staring at the roomy opening at the top of the stairs, seeing for only a split second (well, Kurt could have been imagining it) the fabric of a green dress running down the hall. Apart from that, there was nothing. Just silence and stillness.

That night when Kurt got home, he stumbled past the kitchen where his family was eating, telling them that he wasn't hungry and that maybe he'd eat later, ignoring their questions about why he was home earlier than they anticipated. Instead, he went upstairs and into his room, dumping his bag down next to him, not caring that half of its contents spilled out over the normally spotless floor.

His jacket fell to the ground and he himself fell onto his bed, lying there for a few moments, before he dragged himself up and over to his closet, pulling off the clothes he wore for the day and pulling on satin pajamas that always felt nice against his skin and calmed him down... Well, they normally did, anyways.

He didn't sleep well, if he slept at all.

Chapter Seven: Like they Know the Score

Kurt honestly couldn't sleep after the few hours he spent at Blaine's house. He tried to, he really, really did, but he just... couldn't. Every night he'd lay awake, staring at his ceiling almost passively, closing his eyes in a weak attempt every so often. He got into the habit of playing soft music, as well... but nothing really helped. By the end of the night, he had only gotten maybe an hour or two of rest.

Why he couldn't sleep, Kurt wasn't entirely sure about. Maybe it was the guilt, maybe it was the utter restlessness of his mind, bothering him to go figure out if Blaine was okay or if *they* were okay, as friends... if they were really even friends to begin with.

Regardless, he really couldn't sleep that well. School was a constant blur for him, personally, simply because he couldn't really bring himself to pay attention to *everything* that happened in the crazy place...

English was even worse than before Blaine had started talking to him, which was just... *lovely*. Blaine honestly acted as if Kurt didn't exist, and he seemed completely unfazed by every attempt that Kurt gave to talk to him in the entire week following Kurt's little trip to Blaine's house. That didn't stop the brunet from *watching* his silent partner, though.

From Kurt's scrutinizing gaze, Blaine started to slowly look more and more tired with each day that passed. Bags started to form under his hazel eyes and they darkened in the five days before winter break that Kurt saw him. When he was reading, his eyes would blink for long periods of time and his head would loll forwards occasionally, which was highly unusual for the dark haired teenager. He was normally always so... alert, *there*. His hand got slower and more sluggish as he wrote, and even though Blaine *tried* to hide it, he failed.

By the time was over and winter break had started, Kurt was absolutely *exhausted*, both physically and mentally. All he could really think of during school, especially in English, was about *Blaine*. And about how he messed up because being around Blaine made him *nervous* for some reason. Kurt wasn't really even sure what to say or how to act when they had been working together, and Blaine said things in a way that basically *screamed* that he wanted basically every conversation to end almost immediately...

Well, okay, most of the reason why he was more tired than he should have been was because Santana basically cornered him before last period before they were all let off for their two week long break from

school. *That* wasn't a particularly nice encounter, in any way, shape, or form.

Kurt had been innocently switching out stuff for his last period class, his eyelids feeling heavy and his breathing slow. Mercedes' had given up on convincing him to just go home and sleep off everything that she had been trying to figure out since the beginning of the week. She had already departed for her class, leaving Kurt to slowly grab his stuff from his locker. He had closed his eyes, simply for a few split seconds. Next thing he knew, Santana was grabbing his upper arm and dragging him away from his locker, barely giving him enough time to grab the metal door and slam it shut. He struggled, of course, but Santana's grip was *strong* and she was not about to let go any time soon.

The brunet found himself shoved roughly into the empty astronomy classroom, and he almost crashed into one of the tables. His instincts took over, however, and he braced his hands against the desk. Taking a few deep breaths, Kurt turned around slowly and half-sat on the desk, staring over at the noticeably angry Hispanic.

It wasn't like he hadn't been expecting this. He had just been expecting it sooner.

"I was wondering when you'd do this," Kurt drawled, a slight frown pulling at his mouth, before he blinked heavily, clearing his suddenly faintly blurry vision.

Santana crossed her arms, her eyes narrowing into her normally intimidating glare. It might have been because of sleep deprivation, but Kurt really wasn't that shaken by her at the time. Regardless, she stepped forwards and stood right in front of him, barely any space between their legs, "What the *hell* did you do to him, Hummel?" she demanded, clearly frustrated once again.

Kurt blinked again, taking a deep breath, "You mean he hasn't told you?"

Clearly he hadn't, if Santana's angry groan was anything to go by. She walked away from him and reached up, pulling one of the planets down from the ceiling, her hand curling into a tighter fist. There was a loud crunch, and Kurt was sure that she had just crushed—he glanced at the ceiling—Jupiter.

"No, he hasn't. He's been *avoiding* me even though I can tell that something is wrong. I know you were at his house last week, and that's when he started pulling away more than he already did. Now, if you know what's good for you, Hummel," she spun back towards him on her heel, "you'll tell me what you did to him. *Now.*"

"I didn't do anything," Kurt insisted. The temperamental girl glared at him more, and he sighed softly. "Okay, fine. I accidentally vaguely mentioned a rumor to him—"

"Are you fucking serious?" Santana demanded, stomping over to him and it honestly looked like she was about to *kill* him.

Kurt was kind of too tired to care that his life was in danger, "He reacted badly and he told me to leave. That's basically just about it. There's nothing else to it, Santana, seriously."

Suddenly Santana was grabbing Kurt's shirt and was pulling him forwards and off of the table, half bringing him down to his knees as she leered down at him, their height difference prominent due to how she positioned them, "Fix this. I don't care how you do, but *fix this*." She let go of him, and he tensed his legs again, almost falling back against the table, "Believe it or not, he was *happier* for a while after you guys became partners until that happened, almost unnoticeably happier, but *still*."

They stared at each other for a while.

"Fine."

The biggest problem was that Kurt wasn't sure how to fix what was wrong.

One plus was that he basically passed out a few hours after he got home from school that day, though... if you really called that a plus. He basically slept for fourteen hours, which was just *weird*. It was around 10 a.m. when he woke up, so it wasn't like it was five in the afternoon and he was waking up, but when it did occur to him that he actually slept for that long... it was a little shocking. Normally, Kurt had such a strict sleeping schedule... then again, taking everything into consideration, the entire past week screwed it up big time.

However, since Kurt actually got a good amount of sleep (maybe too much, or maybe even too little somehow) and found his brain functioning *properly*, he also found himself picking up his phone and texting Blaine because... really, this was only something that could be solved face-to-face. Even if Kurt didn't want to deal with it because somewhat angry Blaine was kind of intimidating and—well, it wasn't like the dark haired teen was *furious*.

If Blaine was as angry (when angered) as he was happy in freshman and sophomore year... then Kurt really didn't want Blaine that angry with him.

Scary shit to imagine.

Well... wait, in that case, maybe it was possible that Blaine pushed his sister down the stairs—

Kurt felt like a dumb ass and a jerk simultaneously for once in his life. Thinking about if the rumors were true or not was what got him into this unnecessary mess that could've been easily avoided—which he did acknowledge as partially his fault despite the fact that he hadn't known that Blaine would get upset like that—so he may as well just *forget them*. They obviously weren't true.

At least, Kurt would keep believing that in his mind.

The text was simply a request for Blaine to meet Kurt at the Lima Bean in two hours so they could talk, and nothing more. There was no apology in there yet, since that would just defeat the entire purpose of meeting up with Blaine in general.

There was no reply to the text.

Obviously Kurt panicked a little bit, but he got ready regardless because *maybe* Blaine would still meet him, despite the slight vibe that Kurt was getting that clearly said that his silent partner totally ignored the text and was probably just going to ignore Kurt for the rest of their high school life.

That thought kind of depressed Kurt.

So, thus, Kurt found himself sitting in the small coffee shop at a two person table, a warm coffee cup in his hands, his jacket draped on the back of the chair he was sitting in, and in jeans, a button up white blouse and riding boots (they were cute, end of), waiting for the infamous Blaine Anderson.

No, Kurt wasn't being optimistic, he was just being *hopeful*. There was a total difference.

After ten minutes of waiting, Kurt was just about ready to get up and leave since it was *clear* that Blaine wasn't going to show up and most certainly didn't want *anything* to do with Kurt outside of the project—Until the door to the small place opened and Blaine walked inside, looking almost stony and a little too serious for his young face, his ear buds in his ear. Kurt watched him as the dark haired teen walked up to the cash register, took out his ear buds, wrapped said ear buds snugly around his neck, and seemed to quietly say his order to the cashier/barista—which was just kind of weird... then again, how else could he order? It wasn't like he could write it down on a piece of paper. That would seem odd to the person working... then again, everyone in Lima knew about Blaine's silence.

In such a small town, news spread *fast*.

Plus, the person working behind the desk didn't really seem surprise that Blaine was talking to her.

Odd.

Kurt kept watching Blaine when he got his order and turned around, hazel eyes locking onto the brunet who was just watching him... it

probably looked weird to anyone else in the shop, but it was evident that neither really cared. Kurt was used to the stares and Blaine—well, he was used to them, too, actually.

When Blaine started to approach Kurt, everyone watching seemed to look away hurriedly. Kurt himself stiffened slightly, his eyes not leaving Blaine in general as he took the vacant seat across from Kurt and sat down, legs crossing similarly and cup immediately being brought to his mouth and tipped, the warm liquid inside, without a doubt, draining into Blaine's mouth.

Kurt wouldn't exactly admit it, but he *did* stare at the movement of the muscles in Blaine's neck with a keen eye, watching the way his Adam's apple bobbed up and down with each small swallow. It was totally subconscious staring, though, and Kurt glanced down at the table, away from Blaine, quickly to recompose his thoughts.

He really had no idea what to say to Blaine. Not a clue.

Blaine's cup was put down on the table and they were staring at each other yet again, unwaveringly. Kurt's heart rate sped up slightly, and the sound of his heart pumping in his ears drowned out the soft music playing from the speakers of the small coffee shop. There was a complete moment of stillness, as if neither of them dared to breathe as Kurt tried to figure out what Blaine was thinking, only finding blankness in his eyes.

Trying again, because Kurt Hummel was stubborn, his chest tightened a little bit when he saw a measured amount of sadness lurking in Blaine's hazel eyes, and then it was like a play button was pressed, or like a damn was broken, or maybe even his mental net capturing most of the thoughts that he shouldn't say aloud, snapped in too many places to hold any longer.

"I'm sorry," Kurt blurted out softly, not wanting anyone to overhear whatever was about to go from his brain straight to his mouth without another thought. Blaine blinked at this, his defense falling slightly because of the abruptness of Kurt's apology.

"I didn't mean to ask you about... the rumor, it just came out because I didn't know what else to say at the moment," he muttered truthfully, kind of wanting to look at the table, but he didn't. He kept his gaze trained onto Blaine and Blaine alone, everything else in the café seemingly blurring out, becoming useless noise in the background. "I didn't want you to change the subject or to stop talking because I *do* want to know you, not to know if the rumors were true or not, but just because I want to know *you*," Kurt wanted to cringe at how honest he was being.

Nothing was said for a few seconds. Kurt stared at Blaine, hoping to see *something* but his eyes were so carefully guarded once again.

"I want... I want to be your friend, Blaine," Kurt admitted after a moment of struggle to find words, and there was a very slight cheer in the far back of his mind, because Blaine's eyes flickered slightly with an emotion—it looked similar to surprise, if anything.

"I... I feel horrible for accidentally making you think that... I was only trying to get you to talk so rumors could be either confirmed or denied but..." he licked his lips, flexing his hand slightly from where it laid on the table, accidentally making the tips of their fingers brush. Kurt looked away from Blaine for a split second, if that, before looking back, leaning forwards a little bit, "I'm not like that, Blaine, I promise." Blaine didn't appear to react for a few moments, and Kurt was seriously about to give up hope, until Blaine took a deep, shuddering breath, not moving his own hand from where it laid on the table, even though his fingers twitched slightly, just barely touching Kurt's with the most gentle of brushes, "... I was..." he began so softly that Kurt had to lean forwards *more*, "undeniably sad, and disappointed, and *angry* when I heard you ask that question. I let those feelings control me, which wasn't the best idea, I'll admit.

"It was so new, and amazing, and maybe even a miracle, when you suddenly seemed to *want* to talk to me. No one had really tried hard enough to talk to me since last year apart from Santana and Wes and..." he trailed off, looking down at the table, his hand flexing outwards a little bit, touching Kurt's again. He looked back at Kurt, "It didn't seem like you listened to everyone else. It didn't... seem like you listened or knew about the gossip that involved me, and I let myself believe that and I let you in..." there was another pause. "It was like the fragile illusion of my normalcy was shattered when you asked that one question."

Kurt's eyes widened at this, and his hand shot forwards a few inches, covering Blaine's completely, "Blaine... you *are* normal, please believe me. I—"

"Don't apologize again," Blaine interjected softly, cutting him off effectively, "you don't need to apologize." Kurt opened his mouth to disagree with that statement, but Blaine continued, not paying any notice to that motion, "I should be the one apologizing. I overreacted and... it almost cost me a kind and sweet friend, because I should have known that you weren't one of those people."

Kurt's heart stopped. Or stuttered. Or *something*.

Blaine's eyes looked *so warm* and gentle suddenly and it was almost heartbreaking, the difference between how he looked only minutes, maybe even moments before, compared to *that moment*.

"I'm sorry," Blaine breathed softly.

Kurt licked his lips a little bit, before taking a deep breath and nodding, pulling his hand back a little bit, "It's... okay. It's completely understandable why you reacted like that. My apology still stands, though."

With a small, very light chuckle, Blaine leaned forwards for the first time since their arrival, his back leaving the wooden back of the chair, "Apology accepted."

It was like a weight had been lifted from Kurt's chest, at that moment. It felt *amazing*.

Kurt half-blamed it on the fact that now Santana wouldn't be hunting him down, ready to stab him in his sleep.

The other half?

He wasn't sure.

Chapter Eight: It All Just Fell Apart

Things began the change after winter break. The change was nearly unnoticeable at first, not able to be seen easily if you were a bully at McKinley, most likely, but it steadily became more obvious as January turned into February. Eventually, everyone started noticing the change because it was just so evident.

What was the change?

Kurt Hummel started to spend copious amounts of time with Blaine Anderson—so much more time than absolutely necessary to work on their project. They were suddenly always together, stopping by each other's lockers and walking in and out of the school together. No, Kurt wasn't about to leave his other friends behind; he was just spending an obvious amount of time with the former popular kid.

People half expected Blaine to start talking because Kurt was smiling to often at that point that it was just weird.

He didn't, though.

Some people said that sometimes, between classes or during lunch or even during English, they'd see Blaine lean over and whisper something into Kurt's ear. Sometimes Kurt would smile, other times he'd laugh, other times he just responded quietly and effortlessly. It was such a weird friendship to people who didn't know either of them well... well, it was weird even to people who *did* know them well.

It wasn't like anyone expected it.

By the time everyone noticed their new, almost scarily constant friendship, they also began to notice how Santana always seemed to be watching Kurt closely, always with an aggravated expression on her face. Some people said she was jealous, other's said that... well, actually, most people just said she was jealous. That, of course, pissed her off tremendously and everyone stopped talking to openly about her and her apparent "issues" with Kurt and Blaine.

Nothing was perfect with the two of them, though. They were in a highly homophobic school, and they were two guys (one most definitely gay, the other rumored but not confirmed—actually, not even Kurt knew) who were constantly together and close and secretive about everything that they said to each other...

There was bound to be some people to speak (more like act) out against them. They both expected it, easily. At least, Kurt did.

Sadly, Kurt was more of a target than Blaine.

Slushies were numerous as per usual and Kurt stopped trying to count how many times daily he got shoved into a locker violently since he basically became best friends with Blaine. The football players were

back to tossing him in the dumpster constantly—which was just worse in the winter. There was so much ice and snow and the fact that he constant took off his jacket so it couldn't get messed up made it was worse than usual. He didn't actually tell Blaine about how bad the bullying was, though. Kurt kind of really refused to...

Yes, sure, it was common sense to tell your best friend about how badly you were bullied—and he did tell Mercedes (even if he only told her after she gave him her "bitch please" look)—but Kurt *couldn't* tell Blaine. From how much time he spent with Blaine (mainly at his own house), Kurt knew that Blaine worried a lot more than he should and kind of... took the blame for everything.

In all honesty, *everything*.

Kurt cut himself making dinner while talking to Blaine at one point because Carol had to go get something at the store and Blaine had conveniently been over as he had been nearly constantly. Blaine had immediately said he was sorry so much louder than he would usually talk, and scrambled to get a Band-Aid and Neosporin.

Despite the fact that the cut wasn't even *bad*, Blaine insisted that he patched Kurt up, all the while saying softly that he was sorry and that it was his fault.

Another instance was when Kurt dropped his water onto his carpet because he half tripped over his own backpack. Blaine blamed himself *there*, too, because he apparently hadn't been making sure that Kurt wasn't going to trip over anything on the floor or something. The water stain wasn't even *bad*.

It just seemed like every time something even a little bad happened to Kurt, Blaine automatically took the blame for it even when it clearly wasn't his fault at *all*.

That was why Kurt couldn't tell Blaine that the bullying got worse, even though it was physically worse, especially when Kurt would limp every so often. Of course, Kurt always made up random excuses to get out of Blaine's worry radar, even though he did feel guilty for lying to Blaine...

Honestly, he'd just feel worse if Blaine blamed himself for what was happening to Kurt. So, no, no matter what anyone told him, Kurt would not tell Blaine what was going on. In all actuality, the person who suggested that Kurt told Blaine was Mercedes, but he declined the idea *immediately*. Seeing Blaine's guilt every time something weird happened to Kurt... it was like seeing his dad upset at those homophobic phone calls from sophomore year after Kurt actually came out of the closet.

He just couldn't handle it. Kurt could barely handle *thinking* about it.

That in and of itself was more than enough to convince Kurt to just keep everything happening to him on the down low, even as bruises started to color his back and shoulders and arms. Sure, his posture got a little stiffer than it usually was, but if Blaine noticed he didn't say anything about it... he just stared at Kurt a lot, but that could be for any reason under the sun. Well, Kurt continued to tell himself that, anyways.

It wasn't like the bullying was anything Kurt couldn't handle, even though no one ever seemed to notice... or care... but that was *fine*. Kurt was used to being alone ever since elementary school. He was absolutely used to the abuse...

That sounded horrible, but it was true.

It wasn't really unbearable or freak out worthy until late February, anyways.

From: Blaine

To: Kurt

Hey, where are you? Running late today?

To: Blaine

From: Kurt

Yeah, my alarm messed up. Go on ahead to first period; I'll see you later. Don't act too shocked that I'm late, by the way.

From: Blaine

To: Kurt

If you say so~

From: Kurt

To: Blaine

Don't act cute with me, mister.

From: Blaine

To: Kurt

Who says I am? ;)

From: Kurt

To: Blaine

Pf! Whatever, see you soon x

It was a seemingly completely normal winter day. The sun was out and shining, the snow on the ground almost annoyingly bright due to this. Kurt took it in stride, however, and walked across the parking lot void of teenagers towards the building with purpose. He had been running late since his alarm hadn't gone off on time, but it wasn't like it was a big deal. The entire school year he hadn't been tardy, so he definitely wasn't in big trouble.

He unwrapped his scarf from his neck carefully when he walked inside of the building, holding onto it as he stepped down the hall as quietly as possible, his shoes still a little wet from the snow. By the time he was rounding the corner into his classroom, he was pretty sure that he was home free of any shoving or shouting at the time—until he saw Karofsky and Azimio of all people standing there, flanking his locker. He glanced down the hall and saw a few other football players standing at the end of the hall, and sighed softly to himself.

What a lovely way to start the already messed up due to his messed up alarm clock day. Just lovely.

Still, he walked over to his locker, chin up and head high, coming to a stop in front of it and turning, glaring at the tall and broad meatheads leaning against Mercedes and some random girl's lockers. "Out of my way, Neanderthals," he spat, since Karofsky moved his arm *just* right to cover up the only way Kurt had to get into his locker, "I'm late for first period, and I, unlike you idiots, actually like school for something other than sports and am *smart*."

"Excuse me?" Karofsky said, taking a threatening step forwards at the insult.

Kurt didn't move. He didn't back down.

"What do you want?" Kurt drawled, crossing his arms, clearly aggravated because he really just wanted to get to class. Obviously, that wasn't happening any time soon if the other football players stalking down the hall was anything to go by.

Azimio stepped towards, punching his fist into his open hand, trying to be intimidating, "To teach you a lesson, faggot," he said as if it were the most obvious thing in the entire damn world.

"Oh, really?" Kurt asked, his eyebrow raising incredulously at this, "What, exactly, did I do *wrong*? I've never done anything to you imbeciles."

Someone from behind him gave Kurt a harsh shove, causing his arms to become untangled as he automatically twisted in the air, his shoulder and the side of his head colliding with the pair of lockers in front of him. Faintly, he heard both his bag fall to the ground, his stuff scattering, and someone saying, "We've given you warnings, Lady."

Kurt took a few deep breaths, feeling pain radiate from his shoulder and his head start to throb slightly, before looking up at his attackers—who were circling him. *Yay*. "Warnings against *what*?" he spat out, trying to still seem both unfazed and confident. He wasn't sure if he was accomplishing either, though.

"Being around Anderson, *of course*," shouted a football player whose name escaped Kurt at the moment.

Next thing Kurt knew, a foot collided heavily with his stomach, sending him backwards again with a loud crash.

Where the *fuck* were the teachers in the hallway they were in? There was too much noise going on for them not to hear—oh wait, never mind. They wouldn't have helped Kurt, anyways.

Kurt coughed heavily, breathing harshly as he peered up at the jocks once again, some of his bangs falling in front of his eyes due to them escaping from the light coat of hairspray he had applied that morning. "Blaine isn't even one of you idiots anymore—he never *was*. I can be friends with him if I want to."

A textbook was being smacked over his head suddenly, probably one that fell out of his bag since none of the jocks had been carrying any books when Kurt was walking over, if he remembered correctly. Kurt found himself sprawled completely on the ground, his vision going hazy and every single part of his body suddenly *throbbing*, his head in particular because, *damn*, getting hit by a book hurt.

"Anderson was one of us, even if he wasn't a football player," there was another foot kicking him, in his side this time. Oh, *fuck*, that was probably their new kicker because Kurt could swear that he felt or heard a rib break or something, "We can't have you getting your *gay* on one of the most influential people in school. It'll start with Anderson and then suddenly everyone is fucking gay, you fairy."

All Kurt really wanted to do at that moment was glare up at all five of them—at least, he thought it was five—and point out that Blaine wasn't influential anymore. He really couldn't do that, though, for two reasons. Firstly, because it was really painful to move since the side of his head got kicked. Secondly, it took him a moment to realize (mostly because his head just really hurt) that Blaine was still wildly influential in McKinley high. Someone like that didn't just fade away... everyone still watched him, *not just Kurt*. It had never been just Kurt.

He had been an idiot.

"Seems like we finally silenced the fag," Kurt just barely heard someone taunt. From the voice, it was honestly probably Karofsky. Hearing that *one* comment made Kurt's mind snap back to its previous way of thinking: He couldn't let the ignorant bastards at his school *win*. He just couldn't. If he did, it would be going against everything he had fought for from the very moment everyone learned at his sexuality was confirmed.

His hand twitched determinedly, and Kurt lifted his head up slowly, blinked his eyes several times because everything was *so blurry* and there were sudden shouts and more kicks and maybe a few punches and someone was rounding the corner just as his head was absolutely *punted* once again and slammed into the locker so much

harder than before. Kurt felt something slide down his cheek and tried to breathe in sharply when he realized that it was probably blood—it really, really hurt to breathe, though. The kicks to his side and the several times they all but stood on his back with all of their muscle weight made it ridiculously painful...

"Blaine..." Kurt whispered, just barely audible to himself, barely even aware that he had said anything at all. Then again, everything became fuzzy, but he was vaguely aware of classroom doors finally opening and teachers running out and kids standing at doors and whispering and pointing, some freaking out because there was a bleeding boy on the floor—

It probably wasn't the jocks' *brightest* idea to beat Kurt up in a hallway with tons of classrooms in it.

Warm, strong arms were suddenly wrapping around him so *gently* and Kurt couldn't help but relax completely and try to open his eyes again. There were some more cries and shouts and holyfuck the school lights were bright as hell suddenly. He was acutely aware of harsh, stabbing pain in his chest and sides and *head* and his back and oh, *god* if there is one, it was just too much to bear, especially because drops of water were falling on his face and people were *screaming* and...

Just before he passed out, though, he saw a faint outline of curly hair, "... Blaine..."

Everything blacked out.

Standing at his open locker, Kurt was putting his stuff away for lunch, not wanting to particularly rush, but not wanting to take forever, either. Mercedes would meet him at his locker as she normally would, so Kurt wasn't entirely sure why he was feeling anxious to get away from the area...

His question was answered when he heard the telltale sound of someone being shoved into a locker. At this, he turned around, seeing Karofsky pinning some poor nerd to a locker, Azimio standing next to him and just appearing like a bodyguard for some crazy, out there, somewhat insane reason. The kid looked like he was about to cry.

"You see, Azimio and I seem to have forgotten our chemistry homework *and* some money for lunch. We were thinking that you'd be *kind* enough to give us both," Karofsky said with a really, really creepy smile, looming over the small kid who was probably a freshman.

"B-But, I need both of those things because I don't want to get a bad grade and I need to eat and..." the kid's voice steadily got quieter because Karofsky's smile started to slip and became a ridiculously angry expression.

Kurt had a feeling that he should step in, but it really wouldn't help the freshman at *all* if he defended him. Kurt was the one out gay kid in school, and that would make the rest of the kid's high school love absolute torture... but Kurt didn't want to be seen as a bad guy like everyone else because he didn't help at all...

Finally, Kurt took a small step forwards—but was intercepted when Blaine basically sauntered over to the scene, and tapped Karofsky on the arm. The football player's head snapped to the side and downwards, and it looked like he was about to *flip shit* because someone was interrupting him. The expression disappeared when he saw it was Blaine, though.

"What do you want, Anderson?" Karofsky asked, one hand dropping from where it was braced next to the kid's head, notably more polite than he usually was, but still clearly annoyed.

Blaine smiled an easy smile, and stepped between the freshman and the football player a school year ahead of him, "C'mon, Dave," he said in a perfectly friendly way, "there's no reason to pick on this poor kid. Hey, I have an idea," Blaine was grinning suddenly, and Kurt really couldn't look away, "I'll buy both of you guys lunch and help you with your chemistry homework!"

There were a few moments of stillness between the four teenagers.

"Sure, that sounds fine," Karofsky finally said, digging his hands into his pockets, shrugging a little bit. Azimio agreed, doing a similar thing with his posture.

Blaine nodded, and waved his hands, causing the two football players to take a step back, and Blaine took a step towards, turning towards the freshman, patting his shoulder gently, "You can go onto your class now."

The freshman nodded, mouthing (probably actually muttering, but Kurt couldn't really hear) a thank you, before running off as fast as possible down the hall, past Kurt and taking a sharp turn around the corner. Kurt imagined that the kid almost fell onto his side from the angle he was running at.

When Kurt looked back at the three jocks (really only two, Blaine was kind of like an everything, somehow), he found them walking towards him. Karofsky looked like he was seriously about to shove Kurt, *hard*, but Blaine stepped between the two just in time, and Karofsky just scoffed a little and looked away. Blaine, on the other hand, locked eyes with Kurt and they stared at each other for a while as the dark haired teen passed by, and it honestly felt like the seconds were ticking by like hours and...

Kurt's eyes snapped open—and closed almost immediately because the room he was in was *bright as hell again*. Ignoring any discomfort in his torso, he listened for any indication of his surroundings, trying to... There was steady beeping above him, and people talking lowly besides him, obviously not aware that he was awake. It became evident to Kurt that he was lying in a hospital bed, which was just... *great*. Lovely. Amazing. Because Kurt *loved* hospitals because they weren't emotionally scaring at all...

Damn football players. Damn homophobes.

And just *fuck*... who was in his hospital room? Kurt was honestly in too much pain to open his eyes so he just listened to the voices intently... There was his dad Burt... his step mom Carole... the tapping foot was probably Finn...

Abruptly, somebody's hand was running itself through Kurt's hair gently (it still hurt, though), and someone's face was right next to his ear, breathing huge puffs of air onto his pillow and partially into his ear. Kurt tried to inhale deeply to figure out who the hell that was, but it still hurt too much and—

"Be okay," was all that was whispered in his ear before retreating footsteps and the soft click of the door met Kurt's ears as well. That whisper sounded so... *tortured* and *sad* and it was just heartbreaking to hear...

Blaine.

The brunet was about to open his eyes and make is known that he was awake because absolutely nothing was being said for a while—until his dad started grumbling something and Carole soothed him, saying "Blaine is Kurt's friend, we both know this."

"Seems to me like they're more than friends."

Another pause. Kurt's heart basically stopped beating because *what*? Even his father was thinking that he and Blaine were more...? What was the world coming to, honestly?

"Kurt would tell you, Burt, you know that," Carole said softly after there was the noise of a body moving in a chair awkwardly. Probably Finn again.

"Yeah."

At that point, Kurt *really* wanted to say something in his defense because he and Blaine were just *friends* but there was a harsh, *searing* stab of pain in his side suddenly, and next thing he knew, he was passing out again, falling into the tight embrace of a dreamless sleep.

Chapter Nine: Turn My Sorrow Into Precious Gold

When Kurt came to once again, he was a lot more cautious about opening his eyes, since last time it had just been *painful* because hospital rooms were bright as hell... but this time the lights were off and the curtain in front of the window was closed. Kurt carefully turned his head to the side, wincing a little bit at the throbbing pain that stabbed him, but still looked at the clock on the table determinedly. It was the only thing lighting the room directly, and after blinking a few times to clear his vision, he mind slowly registered the boxy, red numbers.

2:57

It was probably early in the morning (late at night?) if he lack of light from behind the curtains was anything to go by.

Kurt slowly turned his head back so that he was staring at the ceiling blankly for a few moments, trying to block out the incessant noise of the machine probably keeping track of his heart rate because... it was annoying. And really didn't help his head ache at *all*, in any way, shape, or form. It really just made it worse.

His ear twitched just slightly when he heard the door open, and looked over to it, blinking a few times at the light that suddenly flooded the room from out in the hallway, "H'llo?" Kurt asked thickly, kind of surprised at how rough his voice sounded. Then again, he had been out for god knows how long... well, at that point he was just wondering how long he had been passed out/sleeping/comatose/whatever you would call it.

"Kurt?" came a woman's voice, and Kurt was pretty sure that it was Carole. The light switch was flipped, and bright light flooded his vision, causing him to blink heavily five times before there was a presence at the side of his bed. He tried to turn his head again, but found it a little too painful to do so, so instead he glanced out of the corner of his eyes—yeah, it was Carole, and she looked so relieved and like she had been *crying*...

Guilt stabbed Kurt.

"Oh thank goodness," she said softly, her voice wavering, "you're awake and okay—are you in pain at all, sweetie?"

"J-Just a little bit," Kurt replied, only lying to her a little bit (more like a lot), wincing again when he tried to move. Carole's kind and motherly hands were gently holding him still, as if silently telling him to not move, "How long have you been here? How long was I out? *Why* are you still here?" Normally Kurt didn't ask so many questions, but he was just *confused*.

Carole moved her arm and patted his hand gently—looking down at his body as best as he could, Kurt could plainly see that one of his wrists was bound. How the *fuck* did he hurt his wrist?—a soothing expression on her face, "I've been here for about five hours—I went home earlier to freshen up. You've been out for about two days, and I'm here to watch over you, of course."

"Two days," Kurt repeated, a little disbelieving, "I've been out... for two days..." she nodded solemnly, "... Well, that's just... great."

"I know this is a shock for you, Kurt," Carole said softly, sighing a little bit, "it was actually a shock for all of us. When we got word of what happened, your father was so upset and I think Finn and the rest of your friends almost punched Karofsky, if what the principle told us is true. Your friend, Blaine, was devastated as well, even though he didn't say anything—"

Kurt's eyes widened half-way through Carole's probably sleep-deprived explanation, and he felt a light sense of panic start to overwhelm him, "Wait, all of you guys have been worrying about me this entire time?"

His step mom appeared somewhat confused as she tilted her head to the side, staring at him, "Of course we were, dear. You're an important part of all of our lives, why wouldn't we be worried about you?"

Kurt took a deep breath—or he attempted to, at least. His rib cage *really* hurt, so he couldn't do much—before closing his eyes slowly and turning his head a little bit away from Carole, "Never mind," he whispered softly, before feeling another wave of pain hit him. He bit his lip to keep from making any unnecessary noises, "I-I think I'm going to get some more sleep," he stuttered out, tensing a little bit—which was a *horrible* idea.

One deep, shuddering breath from his lungs and tired body later, Carole agreed and stood up to turn off the lights. Kurt fell back into a pain-induced sleep almost automatically.

A few days later, and several friend visits later, Kurt was feeling horrible worn out and *still* in pain. The only time they bothered to give him strong enough painkillers to make everything *not* hurt was when he was about to go to sleep. Otherwise, they said it was a bad idea because he was tiny or *something*. Honestly, Kurt actually hadn't listened to most of what the doctor said because it was really, really hard to concentrate. He had figured out what exactly was wrong with him from Carole, though.

Apparently, he broke two ribs (maybe three), a minor linear fracture in his skull, internal and external bleeding in his head, which he was already dimly aware of the external bleeding because of the blood he felt drip down his face shortly before he passed out, a broken wrist

because some idiot stepped on it for *some reason*, and plenty of bruises. *Plenty*. In all, complete, total honesty, Kurt was surprised that his back wasn't broken or anything.

Regardless, Kurt wasn't allowed to leave the hospital for another week, maybe even more than that. When he was discharged, however, he would be on bed rest (issued more by his family than by the doctor, he was sure) for a while after that. No specific time limit on the bed rest, he would just be trapped in his house for quite a while. Which was just... *great*. Lovely.

The thing that was bothering him the most, still, was that everyone was so *worried* about him. Yes, he appreciated their kindness and willingness to help him with just about everything, but it was really bothersome *and* it was messing with his conscious. Having people care so much about him... it also went against his nature to do things on his own, with minimal help from others. So, yes, he was thankful for their concern, but he wasn't exactly happy about it.

When Mercedes visited him, yes it brightened his dull day a little bit, but it was clear that she had cried at least a little bit which just... kind of bothered Kurt. He didn't *say* anything about it, of course, but it did bother him.

"How are you feeling?" Mercedes asked a little shakily, sitting next to Kurt and putting her hands on the bed—not anywhere close to him, though. Just on the bed in general.

Kurt sighed, looking over at her with a little less difficulty than he had been having the days prior, his nose only wrinkling a little bit, "Somewhat better," he responded, trying to move his entire body, but absolutely failing. "Still in pain, of course," he rolled his eyes at this, "and utterly bored out of my mind. Hospitals are so monotonous and *bland*, 'Cedes. I'm losing my mind slowly." He said it in a melodramatic tone, making it beyond obvious that he wasn't being entirely serious.

Mercedes cracked a small smile and laughed a little bit, even though it seemed a little forced, "Sorry, Boo. I wish I could help you there but I can't really break you out of here. You need to heal, anyways," she patted his arm lightly, as if she were dropping a tiny feather on top of him.

Again Kurt sighed, a small smile still playing on his face, regardless, "How are things at McKinley without me there?" he asked, changing the subject easily, honestly wanting to know what was going on. His best friend was the school's biggest gossip, so she was *definitely* the one to ask. He would have asked Tina when she visited, but she had been with Mike, so... yeah.

Mercedes blinked a little bit, and when scooted her chair forwards, a telltale grin spreading across her face as she leaned forwards, still keeping in mind that she shouldn't touch Kurt too much. "Complete craziness," she whispered, obviously a little excited. "Finn wants Quinn back, and it's rumored that Miss. Queen Bee cheated on Sam *with* Finn," Kurt rolled his eyes. Of course. There was *that* kind of drama. Though... Finn and Quinn? Good grief. Poor Sam. Poor Rachel. "And the football players who attacked you? Only *three* of them were suspended," Kurt felt a little pissed off by that comment. *Suspended? Thee* of them? Excuse him? "Karofsky and Chandler ran away before any of the teachers could see their faces—Azimio, Allen, and Ian were *super* pissed—and that hallway has no cameras pointed to the surrounding area of our lockers,"

of *fucking* course, "So no one could prove that they did anything. Well, actually, Blaine told the principle that they were involved since he saw them, but, again, no one could prove it..."

"Fucking Karofsky," Kurt muttered angrily under his breath, before taking a deep breath (it was actually pretty shallow, but whatever) to try to clam himself down. "So... Blaine tried to get them in trouble?" His best friend nodded, her expression suddenly a little too serious, "Yes, he did. He also apparently approached Karofsky about the whole ordeal—and he *talked*. One person who accidentally witness the entire thing in the locker room said that Blaine was *pissed as hell*, ready to cut a bitch pissed, and almost punched Karofsky but really only shoved him... which I can't imagine since Blaine is so tiny, but anyways. Heated exchanges were made and the guy left the locker room as far as he possibly could since he was so scared. He said that just before the locker room door closed behind him, though, there was a moment of silence and then another shout. I don't know what happened, nobody does I'm pretty sure, but it didn't sound very good, apparently..."

"Is Blaine hurt at all?" was all that spilled out of Kurt's mouth. Mercedes gave him a weird look, as if scrutinizing him with her gaze, before shaking her head, "Apart from a few bruises, he was pretty much untouched. He also ended up missing a day or two of school after the incident, though, so you never know..."

Kurt glanced away from Mercedes and stared at the wall in front of him, grateful for his elevated bed, even if it did hurt to sit up and even if the doctors said that he probably shouldn't. Blaine didn't miss school, he just *didn't*. Something had to have happened to make Blaine miss a day, maybe even two, of school... but *what*? Kurt didn't know. He didn't have a single clue, which really just bothered him greatly.

"Kurt..." he looked over at his best friend, who seemed to be looking at him questioningly again, "I tell you... about a lot of things that have happened, and all you care about is if Blaine is okay?" Kurt blinked, and then looked away again, not sure where Mercedes was going by saying this, "Baby... a few months ago, the first thing that you would have done is go off on homophobes or something... what happened?" He didn't look at Mercedes. He just stared at the wall for a few more moments, "Nothing happened, 'Cedes. I'm still me. Nothing has changed" That was all he responded with, and Mercedes knew to change the topic.

At least, he didn't *think* anything changed. He was still Kurt Elizabeth Hummel, he was still gay, he still hated his hometown because of most of the population's morals, and he still wanted to get to Broadway... Nothing changed. He just gained a new *friend*.
Nothing changed.

Kurt Hummel was absolutely positively sure that he was *dreaming* or something, because he was standing in a kitchen, not in any pain what so ever, which was a good tip off to the fact that he was dreaming, if not better then the fact that he was... watching an older version of himself, probably around twenty-five or so, cooking at a stove.

Wearing a t-shirt, jeans, and an apron. And singing random show tunes under his breath. Seriously, what the *fuck*?

A door opened somewhere behind him and some shuffling accompanied the sound of the closing door. Older Kurt seemed to perk up just a little bit at this noise, and younger, apparently present day. Kurt turned around, looking at the rest of the homey kitchen in the process. It was a rather nice place, he couldn't lie about that... but he was really just wondering why the *hell* he was dreaming about it. It looked so unfamiliar, despite being well decorated and—

He jaw dropped when an older version of Blaine walked into the kitchen, wearing black slacks and a white button up shirt, loosening the tie he was wearing with one hand. His left hand. Which had a gold wedding band on the ring finger.

And, again: what the *fuck*?

Older Blaine, with his still tamed dark curls, smiled lovingly at the sight of his husband's (?) back, and walked over to the Older Kurt, *through* the freaked out Kurt, wrapping an arm around his waist, raising up to the tips of his toes (because, *damn*, older Blaine didn't seem much taller) and running his free hand down Older Kurt's left arm, clasping their hands together and bringing it up, kissing his ring finger—which had a matching gold wedding band on it.

Seriously, the *fuck*?

"Hey, Blaine," Kurt—*Older Kurt*—said, turning his head to the side, smiling back at his apparent husband.

Older Blaine pressed a sweet kiss to Kurt's cheek, smiling against the pale skin, "Good evening, Mr. Anderson-Hummel," well that confirmed *that*. "I missed you today," another soft kiss, against the corner of the taller brunet's mouth now. "How was rehearsal?"

The older version of himself seemed to sigh softly, contentedly, "It was okay. We ran through everything pretty quickly, and since everything seemed up to speed this far along the line, we were let out early."

Older Blaine seemed to chuckle lightly, his one arm tightening around Older Kurt's waist lovingly, "I'm still so proud of you for getting the lead on a *Broadway production*."

"I know you are."

More light laughter, accompanied by the sound of a knife being set down gently, finally, and then nothing happened for a few moments... until Older Kurt turned around slowly, pulling his left hand from Blaine's, letting Older Blaine wrap both of his arms around his waist and lower to his original height. The Older Kurt wrapped his arms around Blaine's neck slowly, before leaning down, tilting his head to the side. Their lips were about to touch and Kurt swore that his eyes were about to pop out of their sockets—

Until the scene started to dissolve before his eyes, and Kurt found himself standing in a completely white room, so white that it hurt his eyes. He blinked a few times, effecting the white to turn into something else... but it didn't. Not completely, anyways. In front of him, suddenly there was a piano and someone with dark hair sitting on the piano wearing a white button up shirt and white slacks... really just all white in general, playing a soft, beautiful, but *sad* tune...

It was Blaine. A normal Blaine, not older or younger. Just... Blaine. The dark haired teen didn't seem to notice Kurt's presence behind him, and continued to play softly, pressing the keys of the piano with purpose, and Kurt allowed himself to simply stand there and listen, his eyes slipping closed because it was so *beautiful* and he didn't want to leave and return to the real world... because in the real world, there wasn't a place as beautiful as this white space. In the real world, he was hurt and hospitalized, in the real world Blaine would never play the piano for him...

Hell, Kurt wasn't even sure if the real Blaine could play the piano.

The song slowed slowly to a stop, and Kurt opened his eyes again in time to see Blaine turning around on the piano bench, his bright hazel eyes watching him calculatingly... before breaking out into a small grin that made Kurt inhale deeply, finally not hurting himself by inhaling.

Dream Blaine stood up and walked over to Kurt slowly, his small grin turning into a larger one as he approached Kurt. Kurt expected Blaine to stop a suitable distance away from him, but he didn't. Instead, the dark haired boy continued to approach him, and Kurt backed away instinctively, until he ran into a table that just suddenly seemed to be there for no particular reason.

Blaine walked straight up to him, and Kurt slid down a little bit, though not enough to fall down. Blaine's hands braced themselves against the table on both sides of Kurt's body, and Blaine's nose was *maybe* an inch away from his. Yes, Kurt was confused. Yes, Kurt was panicking a little bit. No, he wasn't scared.

"B-Blaine?" Kurt whispered, breaking the silence that had previously surrounded them.

A warm look appeared in Blaine's eyes, and the teenager leaned forwards more, their noses brushing together before his head tilted to the side and moved to the side, his nose brushing against Kurt's cheek. "You're beautiful in white," he breathed into Kurt's ear, causing the paler boy to shiver a little bit before looking down at what he was wearing.

Seems like he was in white... actually, the same outfit he wore for the New Direction's "One of Us" performance... weird.

"Th-Thanks," was all Kurt could manage to say into the air, sounding too loud for the empty space around them—where did the piano go? Blaine chuckled softly again and moved a little downwards, ghosting his lips against Kurt's neck, making the brunet squirm a little bit, "You stutter a lot."

"O-Only around you." Kurt was never that honest in real life.

He didn't even think he had told *himself* anything that was going through his mind mid-dream.

"And why is that?" Blaine was suddenly nose-to-nose with him again, the movement far too fast to be real. His head tilted again and he was moving forwards, lips mere centimeters from Kurt's, "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to..."

"It's because I l—"

Kurt's eyes opened abruptly at the sound of a chair being noisily scraped across the floor next to his bed, and winced painfully because... *seriously*? He already had a headache... no need to add to it. Letting out a small groan, he turned his head to the side—and blinked a few times when he saw Santana standing in front of his window and the chair that had been a constant bedside companion was on the floor, "S'ntana...?" he rasped, before clearing his throat with a little bit of difficulty. "What are you—"

"I was to ask you a few questions," was what she said automatically, turning away from the window, staring at Kurt levelly.

"Really?" Kurt drawled, his mind automatically more alert.

"Yes, really," Santana shot back, walking back over to the side of the bed, grabbing the chair and sitting it back up, before sitting down in it, crossing her arms and legs, a small frown pulling at her lips, "I'm not about to blame you for Blaine's sudden extreme isolation," Kurt's eyebrow rose and he felt worry eat at him again, "because I know that it's Karofsky's fault this time."

Kurt blinked, really wanting to sit up, but he knew that was a *horrible* idea, so he settled for looking an even mix of confused and angry, "Karofsky's fault? What did he do to Blaine?"

Santana glared at him, leaning back in the chair that she was sitting in, "Hey. I'm the one asking the questions here," she said, and Kurt gave her a look. She sighed, "Ugh, fine, only because you're lying in a hospital bed bandaged—my dad is totally your doctor by the way" that explained why he was Dr. Lopez. And looked a little bit like Santana. "I don't know what Karofsky did, exactly, all I know is that it drove Blaine back into staying in his room at *all times* except for at school. I tried to get him to tell me, but he only let me into his room once and all I got out of his muttered explanation was Karofsky's name—his last name. Blaine *never* uses people's last names, but that probably doesn't have anything to do with it. The point is, is that Karofsky *did something*... plus, another reason why Blaine stopped his apparent "recovery" is because you're not there anymore, but whatever."

Kurt's eyebrow rose at this. He had been helping Blaine... "recover"? ... Well, whatever Santana said. He wasn't about to believe her necessarily, but there was no point fighting with her, especially when he couldn't move without freaking out with pain. "Well, okay. What was the thing that you needed to ask me, anyways?"

The angry expression on the Hispanic girl's face faded slowly, and she looked off to the side for a few moment, biting her bottom lip just a little bit, "... How can you stand it?" she asked, suddenly extremely quiet.

Kurt frowned a little, clearly confused, "Stand what?"

"The bullying," Santana said a little louder, looking back at Kurt, her tortured expression honestly shocking him. "The taunts, the attacks... everything that people do to you just because of your sexuality."

Nothing was said for a few moments, the only sound around them being the noise of the machines and people walking around outside of his room.

Santana closed her eyes for a few moments, before leaning forwards slightly, her eyes opening again, "I'm a dyke, Hummel."

Kurt's eyes absolutely widened, because even though it was clear to him that Santana felt something for Brittany, he hadn't been expecting *that*. Maybe bisexuality, but not full out lesbianism.

"Seriously?" he breathed, raising an eyebrow at her.

She groaned, obviously a little annoyed by his reaction, "Yes, Hummel. I play on, Hummel. I play on *your* team," Kurt just stared at her some more. She sighed softly, running a hand through her thick, dark hair, "Why didn't you pull away from Blaine when the bullying got worse? Why did you just... deal with it, rather than just run away?" she asked, quiet again.

Kurt stared at her for a few more moments, before he looked away, slowly turning his head and staring above his head, thinking deeply for a few moments... yes, Blaine was one of his closest friends. He had never left a friend behind just because he was being bullied... but at the same time, being friends with someone had rarely been the actual *cause* of bullying. It wasn't like not being friend's with Blaine was that hard... yes, Blaine had been the one to ask him to hang out for the first week or two of their closer friendship but it would've only taken telling Blaine about the bullying to get him to stop hanging out with Kurt...

Suddenly, Kurt gasped, ignoring the pain in his chest, and snapped his head back to Santana, ignoring the pounding in his head, even though he had to close his eyes for a few moments because his vision went a little spotty. He looked at Santana, though, with a completely serious expression, "You go through... anything and everything when you're in love, Santana."

Her eyes widened spectacularly and her mouth formed a perfect 'o'. It took her a few long moments to blink, bite her bottom lip, and nod a little bit.

Kurt could've sworn that he heard her say something like "I should have expected this," but he couldn't be too sure, since he had closed his eyes when she spoke, and when he opened them, she was already out the door, a nurse coming in with his step mom to take her place in his room.

He laid there, staring at the ceiling as the two women bustled around his room, gently lifting him into a sitting position. He didn't register the pain what so ever as the nurse did her normal check ups, and answered her questions in a flat, monotonous tone. Carole seemed a little concerned by his behavior and asked him if anything was wrong. Kurt simply said that he was thinking.

Kurt hadn't even been lying. He was thinking. Hard.

Love. Had he honestly said that to *Santana* of all people?

He couldn't love Blaine. He *couldn't*.

Blaine was... he was *safe*. Or safer than Kurt was. Kurt wasn't even sure if Blaine was *gay* and that just... messed up everything and... it could happen. It just couldn't, because *things* got around school— holy *fuck* he basically told Santana he loved Blaine—which he doesn't—and he tells people *everything* and shit, shit, *shit* Blaine was going to get the heat. Then again, Santana wouldn't *do* that to Blaine and...

Just... just... no. *No*. Kurt didn't even know what happened to Blaine, so it wasn't a valid thing because Blaine could be a fucking *serial killer*—oh, fuck it all. That was just a ridiculous excuse and Kurt *knew* it.

Kurt thought back to his dreams... the first dreams (or was it only one dream) in *such* a long time that he remembered that hadn't been memories... they had to mean something, right? Or maybe he was overanalyzing...

He was dimly aware of being laid back down on the bed, and Carole taking a seat next to him by the bed. Kurt just stared at the ceiling and struggled mentally with everything that was just suddenly dumped on him when he was in the *hospital* of all places.

Blaine.

Blaine Anderson.

Kurt's eyes slipped closed as he became somewhat aware of a pain reducing drug being injected into his arms that made him pass out ridiculously quickly and normally into a dreamless sleep.

His last thought before he fell into the tight, welcoming embrace of an empty sleep?

I'll be okay, Blaine. I promise. There's no use mentally denying that I love you when I'm basically drugged as fuck. So... I love you.

Chapter Ten: Who's Sorry, Now?

The next time he woke up, completely coherent and able to talk, he found his dad leading a pair of policemen into his boring as a rock hospital room. The mere fact that there were two policemen in his room didn't really send Kurt into a panic, per say, it just really, really confused him, a lot more than the painkillers did. When he was carefully lifted into a sitting position, the bed elevated to follow him and support his back, the two serious-looking men were seated at the foot of his bed, one of them holding a pad of paper and a pencil, the other just... sitting there.

"Hello, sirs," Kurt greeted almost casually. His voice was raspy, though, as it normally was when he woke up from a large amount of sleep. Due to this, his dad held a cup of water in front of his mouth, with a straw in it, letting Kurt drink it. Yes, it was kind of humiliating, but it wasn't like anyone was about to let Kurt move that much on his own, even if it was only to get a drink of water. "How can I be of assistance to you today?" Kurt asked again when he was sure that he could talk semi-normally.

The man holding the pad of paper answered him, "Good afternoon. I am Drew Smith, and this is my partner, Leon Wright. We're here to ask you questions concerning your attack and your designated attackers, Mr. Hummel. We have been needing to do this since the day of the incident. However, your father kindly requested that we waited until everyone was sure that you could talk and we abided by his wishes, waiting until today."

Kurt glanced at his dad out of the corner of his eyes, and Burt nodded a little bit at him. His blue eyes returned back to the two men, who were still sitting as if *they* were being interrogated or something, "I'll answer each question to the best of my ability," he responded honestly.

The guy with the pad of paper nodded, and then glanced at his alleged partner, who cleared his throat, his green eyes landing on Kurt squarely as he seemed to sit up straighter. They seemed to be taking this too seriously... then again, it could be the still slightly drugged Kurt who wasn't taking it seriously *enough*. Yes, Kurt wanted the Neanderthals who did this to him to get what they deserved, but there had to be some balance between seriousness and not *as* serious... ness.

Yeah, Kurt's mind was still a little foggy. Just a little.

"Who were your attackers?" asked Mr. Wright, his voice deep and a little gravelly.

Blinking a few times, Kurt opened his mouth, recalling the names that Mercedes told him right before she left, "Azimio Creswell, Allen Allemande, Ian Connell, Chandler Duff, and David Karofsky were my attackers."

Mr. Smith nodded and wrote the names down, even though they already knew three of the five, most likely, and it was probably that those three ended up telling the police, as well, but whatever. Kurt had to answer the questions, anyways.

"Where was the location of your attack?"

"McKinley High School, in front of my locker, which is locker 186," Kurt answered immediately, barely having to think about it to answer. More pencil scratches against paper.

It continued like that for a while, with Mr. Wright asking basic questions about what happened and where exactly Kurt was hurt, and Mr. Smith wrote down all of his answers alarmingly fast. It was like he knew that Kurt was going to say without him actually *saying* it... not that that was even possible. Still, it was a little weird and boarder-line creepy... or maybe it was just flat out creepy.

Finally, about an hour and a million different questions later, the pad of paper was flipped to its cover, and the two men were thanking both him and his dad. They stood up, careful not to let the chairs scrape against the floor, each of them nodding once more before turning and heading to the door. Automatically, his dad stood and got him ready to lay back down (apparently the nurse had instructed his dad and step mom on how to do it while causing him minimal pain).

"Wait," Kurt called out, causing everyone moving around to *stop*, as if he were in control of every single movement they made, but he was well aware that they were really only listening because... well, firstly, Mr. Wright and Mr. Smith were policemen, and his dad was his dad. Plus, the fact that he couldn't move well by himself probably had something to do with it.

The two officers turned towards him, "Yes?" asked Mr. Smith, a questioning look crossing his brown eyes for a moment.

There were a few moments where Kurt struggled to pick words out of his head, because he *knew* what he wanted to ask, but he wasn't sure how to word it. It was kind of like writing an essay where you actually need to think about what wording goes where... basically a bit of a headache. "What's going to happen to them? The five guys who attacked me?"

The two men shared a look, before Mr. Wright cleared his throat—he seemed to have a bad habit of doing that regularly—swallowing, and then turning completely towards Kurt. "Well, Mr. Creswell is the only one over the age of eighteen at this time, and is already in jail waiting

for his trial," Kurt nodded slowly, "Mr. Allemande and Mr. Connell were in your school year, and are in the custody of their parents under close watch until their own trial. There has been no direct evidence for Mr. Duff and Mr. Karofsky, however with your testimony they will most likely be put under the care of their parents. It is very likely that Mr. Creswell will end up serving time, while the other four will most likely go to a juvenile detention center due to being underage, despite the fact that Mr. Karofsky is only a few weeks away from being eighteen." Kurt's eyes slid closed for a few moments as he felt the pain start to become apparent to him, since it was starting to feel like pins were basically being stabbed into his skin, "Alright. Thank you, officers," he said, opening his eyes again. They nodded, and left.

Burt started moving around again, and the telltale sound and movement of the bed moving backwards was dimly heard and felt by Kurt. His eyes fell back closed until he felt like he was completely on his back, and at that point he opened his eyes and looked over at his dad, who was at that point seated next to him.

"How are you feeling?" Burt asked, leaning forwards a little bit and leaning his forearms on the bed next to Kurt, just like basically everyone else had been doing the entire time Kurt had been in the hospital and conscious. And not delusional.

Kurt sighed, wanting to shrug a little to accompany the sigh, but he obviously couldn't. Instead, he opted to flicker his eyes to the side slightly in a way that blatantly indicated that he was a little frustrated, "Not as bad as I have been... still in pain. I feel a little high from the medication they gave me but that's always an after-effect when I wake up... I just need to stay awake for a while to make it go away."

His father nodded a little bit, before reaching up and taking his hat off, sighing, "Are you... comfortable here?"

"Well, it's a hospital," Kurt pointed out, looking around again for a moment, "I don't think these things are that comfortable to begin with..."

Burt laughed, a little emptily, and there was a moment of silence between them. Finally, Kurt's father spoke again, breaking the silence that was only tainted by the incessant beeping of the machines surrounding them, "Why didn't you tell me, Kurt?"

With a small sigh, Kurt looked away. He had fully expected the question to be asked *eventually* because he hadn't told his dad about how bad the bullying was getting... actually, Kurt was basically a master at hiding any injuries that he got around his dad. He had been doing it for years, after all. "I didn't think that it would escalate to this level," he said honestly as he looked back at his father, licking his lips

a little bit, "It had only gotten a little worse than it usually was... I didn't think that I needed to tell you."

His dad sniffed a little bit, and Kurt was only a little surprised to see his dad reacting this way... sure, they weren't *extremely* close when it came to their interests, but had been all that they had before Carole and Finn came along. Even then, Kurt kept plenty of things a secret from his dad. "Kurt... I am your father. You can tell me anything, and I will do my best to help you or protect you... I know that I zone out when you talk about fashion or something, but I will be here if you need me, and I'll try to help you out to the best of my ability."

Kurt took a deep breath, before nodding a little bit, "I'll try to... tell you things, dad. I will," he promised, actually meaning it because... he wanted a good relationship with his dad—actually, a better one. He really, really did... it was just hard, since they were so different in so many ways. "... Dad?" Kurt looked back at Burt, speaking before his mind really had time to process what he was about to say, "Do you know why Blaine hasn't visited?"

Well, it was basically official. The drugs were driving him insane.

... Yeah, Kurt would just keep thinking that.

Burt looked a little skeptical at the sudden question, and stared down at his son a few long, long moments, before clearing his throat and shrugging, leaning back in his chair, his arms leaving the bed, "I don't know, Kurt. Last time I saw... Blaine," Kurt noticed that the corner of his dad's mouth twitched downwards when he said Blaine's name, "was the first day you were in the hospital... haven't seen him since."

Kurt looked back away again, trying to ignore the feeling of disappointment that started to plant itself within his chest, "Okay." There were a few more moments of silence that both were extremely used to at that point in time, "There's nothing going on between you and that kid, is there?"

Kurt sighed, briefly wondering if the mattress beneath him could swallow him up into an endless abyss of darkness or something because it was obvious that the protective side of his father was coming out from the mere thought that Kurt *might* be interested in another guy. "No, dad, there's nothing going on between Blaine and I."

He heard his dad grumble something, and he was sure that Burt wasn't particularly happy that he had asked about Blaine, but before Kurt could even try to change the subject, the door to his room opened again, and Carole stepped in, Finn walking in afterwards, his hands deep in his pant pockets.

Kurt sighed inaudibly as Carole rushed over to him, and responded to her worried questions that were similar to what the doctors

themselves asked him. Finn walked over and asked him if he was okay, before sitting down in a chair placed in the corner. Not to distance himself, merely because he was used to sitting there since that was where he always was when he was visiting. Kurt was used to it.

Throughout the entire day, he watched people shift in and out of his room. Dr. Lopez, a few different nurses, his family, Mercedes and Rachel paid him a brief visit... he was glad to see his two best friends, but the one person who he *really* wanted to see never really showed up.

Yes, Kurt did want to see Blaine. That wasn't a surprise. Blaine never did show up, though... as much as it hurt Kurt's feelings and made that seed of disappointment in his chest bloom into a full-out flower with huge petals, it really just worried him more than anything. He couldn't stop wondering *'What if Blaine isn't okay'* or *'What if he's hurt more than people are telling me'* or sometimes even *'What if he doesn't care about me anymore? What if he never did care about me?'*

It was a huge game of "What if" and it was ridiculously *annoying* because it just made him think so much more than he should have been when lying in a hospital injured. It made him upset when he should have been rejoicing because the meatheads who attacked him were probably getting what they deserved. It made his family and friends suspicious because every sarcastic remark or laugh or smile was obviously forced, without even an attempt to make it seem believable.

It all just really sucked. As per usual.

Kurt slept a lot more than usual that night, probably due to emotional and mental exhaustion from thinking about Blaine far too much. Due to sleeping more than usual, even on drugs, when he woke up his room was empty of another human body, and when he looked over at his clock he noticed that it read 4:32. Mostly in the afternoon since his curtains were open and there was bright sunlight streaming in, but he really didn't pay notice to the bright light since... wow, he slept more than twelve hours. Maybe the nurse accidentally overdosed him a little bit...

No, no, that couldn't happen.

Still, it was a little mind boggling.

The door was pushed open slowly, and Kurt turned his head to look over at it, careful due to the fact that the small fracture in his head was in that general area that he had to turn on to look at the door properly. It was just cracked open, and Kurt wondered for a moment if someone had just opened the wrong door and didn't close it all the

way, but after blinking a few times, still a little groggy from sleep, he saw something blocking light in the doorway.

He opened his mouth, ready to ask who the *hell* was standing in front of his door like that, but the words died in his mouth when the door was pushed all the way open and he saw who was standing there. It took him a few breaths, more swallows, and even more blinks before his mouth opened again and his brain was working properly, "...

Blaine?" he whispered, his eyebrows rising as the flower of disappointment in his chest wilted a little bit.

Finally, Blaine stood there, in all of his... wonderfulness wearing a striped long sleeved shirt and jeans and a scarf, his black jacket hanging over his arm. Kurt's eyes found his face, and he really couldn't help but smile just a little bit... until he noticed how *tired* Blaine looked and the fact that he wasn't smiling, not even a little, and his eyes were so... blank and cold. And he had his ear buds in—well, until he reached up and pulled them out.

"Hey," Blaine whispered, walking over to the side of Kurt's bed that *everyone* always sat on. However, he stood, in contrast to everyone who had sat down.

Kurt smiled a little bit again, "Give me a second, I'll—" he was already reaching for the button to elevate his bed, even though he really wasn't supposed to do this by himself and it *really* hurt.

Blaine's hand was gently grabbing his wrist though, suddenly, and Kurt looked back at the teenager, who was shaking his head a little bit, "Let me," he muttered. Kurt was about to ask if Blaine even knew how to manage to do this, but was silenced when Blaine was grabbing him gently and was doing *exactly* what the nurses, doctor, and his family had been doing, if not doing a better job to the extent that there was basically no pain. Basically.

"Where did you learn how to do that?" Kurt breathed, staring over at Blaine when he was properly positioned as Blaine himself sat down in the chair next to his bed quietly.

Blaine shrugged in response, watching Kurt with his hazel eyes, which just... somehow gleamed and glittered like jewels in the sunlight... it was honestly breathtaking. "How do you feel?" he asked softly instead, not looking away from Kurt for a moment.

Kurt sighed, looking down at his lap for a moment, "I've... been better," he finally said, hoping to make Blaine smile just a *little* bit.

He looked over at the dark haired teen. Blaine wasn't smiling. If anything, he just looked even more tired than before... so Kurt changed the subject, "So... someone told me that something went down between you and Karofsky," Blaine stiffened a little bit, and Kurt almost regretted bringing it up. Almost. "Are you okay?"

There was a moment of silence; all through it Kurt watched Blaine and Blaine watched Kurt. "I'm fine," Blaine finally responded, a small sigh following it, "It wasn't... anything major... I'm just glad that you're okay," the cold look in Blaine's eyes seemed to melt, just a little bit. Kurt tilted his head to the side a little bit, really wanting to shift closer to Blaine. He couldn't though, "You didn't have to do that for me, you know. Stand up to Karofsky... talk to him."

"I couldn't let him get away with what he did for you... standing up to him was something I wanted to do, Kurt... for you." There was so much *weight* in those words and Blaine's eyes were so beautiful, even more beautiful than before, for that mere moment, and Kurt *had* to smile again because... this was Blaine.

This was why Kurt loved him. Or one of the reasons, at least.

"I'm glad that you're here," Kurt commented honestly, wanting Blaine to keep looking like that for as long as possible... though the moment he said that, the warm look in Blaine's eyes was gone, just like that, without a single trace following it.

Slowly, Blaine looked away from Kurt, and out the window across the room from him. It didn't seem like he was about to say anything, and Kurt started to scramble for words to say because as much as he was used to Blaine's silences, there was something distinctly wrong with that particular silence that just made Kurt's heart feel like it was dumped in ice water.

"I have something to tell you," he suddenly blurted out, and his heart basically stopped because, *hell*, how was he going to get out of this one? Was it even a good time to tell Blaine? Probably not. It wasn't like Kurt was about to die, and they were in a *hospital* and it wasn't romantic at all and Blaine probably doesn't even like Kurt back whatsoever and—

"I have something to tell you, too," Blaine said, interrupting Kurt's thought process and causing his eyes to snap back to the dark haired teen, who was watching him once again, his eyes carefully guarded.

Kurt bit his bottom lip for a moment, "You... you can go first."

Blaine nodded slowly, his eyes not leaving Kurt's in an almost unnerving manner, because he just would let Kurt in on what he was thinking or feeling at that moment, at all. "I've been... thinking a lot, since you were attacked. I thought about you... me... *us*..." Kurt inhaled sharply, wincing a little bit at the pain it caused him, but ignored it because he just really wanted to know what Blaine was about to say because it *sounded* good, according to cheesy movies. "And I've... come to the conclusion that..."

There was a pause. A stop in time.

Kurt licked his lips a little bit, still watching Blaine closely, trying to gauge what he was feeling. The guardedness could correlate with the overly optimistic thoughts Kurt was having because *maybe* Blaine just didn't want Kurt to know that he might feel something for him—since when was Kurt so optimistic about this kind of thing? "The conclusion that..." Kurt urged, about to die from the suspense that Blaine was keeping him in, which just meant that something good was about to happen—

"You shouldn't be around me anymore. At all."

... *What?*

It was obvious that Kurt's face reflected the one thought that just ran through his head, because Blaine continued talking, only then looking away from Kurt, "Look at where you are, Kurt. Look at what happened to you. Why exactly are you like this right now? Because of *me*."

"This isn't your fault, Blaine," Kurt found himself shouting for the first time since he was admitted to the hospital, and had to bite back a groan of pain. Really, it came out as a pretty embarrassing, high-pitched keening sound.

Blaine looked back to him, his eyes cold as they were before, before he stood up, grabbing his jacket from the chair, "It is my fault, Kurt, you and I both know that. It would be in our best interest if I left you alone. We'll finish the project separately. After the project is over, I will try to stay out of your way the rest of the school year, probably the rest of high school in general."

He was walking towards the door. Blaine was about to walk out of Kurt's life, just like that.

"Blaine!" Kurt shouted, his entire body *shuddering* because it felt like someone was stabbing him in the side or something, it hurt *that much*. He could feel tears start to well up in his eyes and he didn't want them to fall. He blinked them back because he wasn't about to cry, he couldn't. He refused.

Blaine stopped, and turned around slowly, keeping his head away from Kurt, as if he were trying to hide something. When he started walking towards the bedridden brunet, Kurt honestly felt hope start to well up in his chest. Blaine stood next to his bed, where he had been before, and Kurt started up at him, wanting Blaine to look at him. He didn't, though. Instead, he helped Kurt lay back down, and ended up standing there for a few more moments, leaned over the injured, vainly hopeful brunet, his eyes conveniently out of sight.

Finally, Blaine turned his head *just right* so that Kurt could get a look at his hazel eyes—and Kurt's heart basically broke, right then and there because... in that second, in that *one* second, there were so

many things in Blaine's eyes. There were tears forming and there was so much regret, and sorrow, and sadness, and desperation... *so much*. "I never should have asked you to hang out over winter break," Blaine whispered, his voice cracking. Kurt wanted to say something so *badly* but couldn't find the words. Hell, he could barely form a coherent thought, especially when Blaine touched the side of his neck softly, mirroring the dream of the white space that Kurt had, just with his hand instead of with his lips. Blaine also ended up making him gasp a little because Kurt's neck was almost stupidly sensitive from any and all touches, "This wouldn't have happened to you if I hadn't. I'm sorry... so sorry." His voice had broken again, just faintly, but it definitely broke.

Blaine walked away. Out the door.

He didn't look back.

Kurt couldn't do anything about it. He couldn't move, he could see, he couldn't hear or *feel*. It was like everything shut down totally and completely. It was like *nothing* was going through his head at all, because nothing was.

Barely, he was aware of wetness on his cheeks, but his mind didn't register that he was crying.

Vaguely, he was aware of the fact that he was idiotic enough to try to roll over onto his side to curl up since that's kind of what he did when he was upset enough and because of that he screamed out in pain, causing a nurse to run into his room, obviously freaking out because Kurt just screamed.

Hazily, he was aware that they were injecting his pain reducing medication because he kept freaking out with absolute pain due to his stupid attempt to lie on his side.

Distantly, he was aware that his parents rushed into his room just as he was about to pass out, panicking and asking the freaked out nurse questions that she tried to answer to the best of her ability.

He wasn't aware, however, that the last word that he uttered (more like sobbed) before passing out was "Blaine."

Blaine.

Chapter Eleven: Don't Ever Look Back

Kurt's eyes blinked open drowsily, and he blinked at the ceiling a few times, his brain working just about as slowly as a snail moved. Those meds must have *really* messed him up... actually, Kurt couldn't really remember what happened before he passed out—oh, wait. Yes, he did remember. Blaine... Blaine had left, and had told Kurt that they couldn't be around each other anymore after the project, no matter what. Just a day or two after Kurt had realized that he actually felt something more than friendship for the quiet dark haired teen...

Talk about a stab to the heart.

He swallowed, his mouth feeling like it was stuffed with cotton somehow, and exhaled slowly, his eyes falling closed. Really, he just wanted to go back to sleep and never wake up, because the real world *sucked*. "... Blaine," he whispered, an eyebrow raising when his voice sounded faint and echoed a little bit... which made no sense, because he was in a tiny hospital room.

"Yes?" came a soft, faraway reply from his side.

Kurt stopped breathing for a few moments, and slowly turned his head to the side where the voice came from, his eyes blinking open slowly. There he was. Blaine was sitting there, a book in hand, smiling over at Kurt softly, and the sunlight from the window streaming in at just that right angle that made him look absolutely divine. There was absolute warmth in his hazel eyes as he leaned towards Kurt, who still laid there, shocked beyond all belief, "Blaine... you're here..." he breathed, shaking a little bit because it just couldn't be real.

"I was being stupid before," Blaine whispered, scooting the chair towards the side of the bed. It made no noise, somehow. "I can't stay away from you, Kurt... it would be impossible for me to. Please, forgive me."

Kurt swallowed thickly, willing himself not to cry, "Why... why can't you stay away from me? You seemed... so sure about it, before... so sure..." Blaine leaned over and down, their noses brushing together softly, a light chuckle escaping his lips, "Because I love you, Kurt. I love you so much..."

A small snuffle filled the room, and Kurt was pretty sure it came from him, "I lo—"

With a small noise of shock, Kurt eyes snapped open and he found himself staring at the ceiling of his own room, instead of the hospital's ceiling. He took a few deep breaths, trying to gather his thoughts and leave the dream world behind, as he had been doing every time he

woke up ever since he was discharged and came home. Due to that, he was also taken off of those painkillers that made him absolutely loopy and gave him a restful, dreamless sleep.

He really, really missed dreamless sleep, because that one dream about Blaine refused to leave his subconscious and always left him in a ridiculously upset mood when he woke up that took forever to get him out of. Even then, it was pretty much impossible because there was no one around right when he woke up who could actually brighten his mood. Carole was a great caretaker and was nice to talk to, but it really just wasn't the same. At all.

So Kurt had to deal with being in a bad mood because of a stupid dream that wouldn't leave him alone about what he *wished* had happened when he woke up after being sedated due to massive amounts of pain.

Instead of waking up to a perfect and warm and wonderful world full of romance and happiness (with Blaine), he woke up beyond the realms of loopy, and it took him an hour of sitting there staring off into space and saying random things that had nothing to do with anything to actually be able to interact with people properly. His dad had questioned him what had possessed him to be stupid enough to roll onto his side, Carole asked if he had been in any pain, and then the doctor gave them a status update on how he was doing.

The little stint that he pulled somehow didn't hurt him much more than he already was. It did cause a little bit of trouble with his healing ribs, since he rolled onto the abused side somehow (it was like he subconscious was masochistic) but it wasn't anything major or life threatening.

A few days later, he was released and went home with his family. Not that it was really anything to celebrate about, since he was immediately put in bed and wasn't allowed to leave. It was like he was still in the hospital, just without the annoyingly constant machines and homier. It was infinitely better to be at home, but it was just... annoying that he couldn't move around as much as he wanted to.

Still, he turned his head to the side, and glanced at his bedside table for the time. It was pretty early in the morning, around nine, on a weekday, so his dad was definitely gone, and so was Finn. Carole, judging from the silence downstairs, was most likely out getting groceries since Kurt didn't normally wake up this early. Actually, the dream usually played out longer... Kurt supposed that he automatically woke himself up because of the dream.

His head slowly turned back so he was staring at his ceiling, and he laid like that for an extremely long time... or it felt extremely long, at least. It was probably only a few minutes... he checked the clock.

Yeah, he had only been lying there for five minutes. Yet another curse of being stuck at home... time passing by ridiculously slowly. It was kind of painful.

When his phone suddenly vibrated on the bed next to him, he jolted a little, irritating his injuries enough to make him since, before he glanced down at his phone... which he had forgotten was even there to begin with. "Who's..." he muttered, squinting a little bit in the slight darkness in his room due to the fact that his curtains were drawn. His iPhone gave another vibrate, and he reached for it with his uninjured hand, picking it up and staring at it for a few moments, letting it vibrate once more before his mind registered what it said.

Head Bitch

Well, that was probably Santana... why was she calling him during school, though? That made no sense...

With a sigh, he pressed the answer button and pressed the phone to his ear, shifting on top of his soft bed and pillows a little bit, "Santana? Why are you calling me when you're in class?"

"Shut up, Hummel," Santana snapped in a hushed tone, and there was some shuffling, "I'm spying on some people—"

"And you called me because...?" he drawled, wanting to rub his face exasperatedly. He didn't, of course, because his free hand had a healing broken wrist. He settled for rolling his eyes.

Santana shushed him quietly again, and there was more movement, "You'll want to hear this."

Kurt was about to ask what the hell she was talking about, but other voices suddenly started to become evident to him, and he had a feeling that Santana didn't have her phone pressed to her ear anymore. If anything, it was basically being held out. His curiosity had been poked that, though, so he closed his eyes and listened hard for the conversation. Santana didn't just call people for nothing.

He almost hung up when he heard Karofsky start to speak.

"Damn it, Anderson, just talk to me for a minute!" Kurt faintly heard in a voice that obviously belonged to a certain David Karofsky. He was still in school? How the *fuck*... well, the officers had told him that he'd be under close watch. They probably had an ankle brace on him or something...

There was nothing said in response, only the faraway sound of a closing locker door.

"... Please," Karofsky suddenly sounded so... desperate, and much quieter. It was hard to Kurt to hear him, actually, "I'm going to be going to court soon and I know I'm being sent off to juvie no matter what, but—"

"Rightfully so," came Blaine's quiet voice, and Kurt's heart *hurt* at the sound of that voice. Blaine sounded so... tired, and angry but empty at the same time... did that even make sense? Kurt was pretty sure that if he said that to someone, they'd be confused. He also supposed that his heart hurt because... Blaine was talking to Karofsky, just like that. Maybe the fact that he talked to Kurt wasn't really even that special... "What you did to Kurt wasn't okay."

"... You hate me for hurting him? Are you *serious*?" Karofsky demanded, and it was clear to Kurt that he was annoyed by the mere mention of him. There was more silence, before Karofsky seemed to sigh (he still couldn't hear every single detail), "What I did wasn't right," Kurt's eyebrow rose in surprise. Karofsky actually sounded a little sorry about what he did. "I know that, but why do you have to be mad at me for... for *that*? Why can't you be mad at me for what I did to *you*?" and there was the anger again.

There was another moment of silence, and Kurt closed his eyes again to see if he could hear anything more than what he was getting. "What you did to him overshadows what you did to me," Kurt's heart skipped a few beats as he heard another disgruntled noise from Karofsky. "... You absolutely torturing him and beating him nearly to death is worse than you ki—"

"Shut *up*, dude!" Karofsky interrupted in a loud whisper, "You said you wouldn't *tell* anyone!"

"And I haven't," Blaine responded easily, and there were footsteps coming towards wherever Santana was hiding. "I don't break promises, Karofsky."

Shuffling feet became a little obnoxious and it stopped... probably right in front of Santana, somehow. "You're suddenly calling be Karofsky all the damn time," yeah, Blaine and Karofsky were definitely right in front of Santana, or at least oddly close, "That fa—Hummel as been influencing you."

Kurt noted that Karofsky actually didn't use a condescending name in terms to him. Oh the things that Blaine could cause.

"Maybe he has been."

More silence. There was no movement; only the slight buzzing that probably came from the air conditioner. Kurt found himself holding his breath in anticipation, and he wondered if Santana was, too. She probably wasn't, but it didn't hurt to be curious about it. Not that Kurt was about to actually ask... he didn't know how that would turn out.

"Answer a few questions for me," Karofsky suddenly demanded, but not in a mean way, necessarily.

There was a small sigh that sounded like it came from Blaine, "You have no right to demand answers from me right now, you are aware of that."

Karofsky groaned a little bit, and seemed muffled, as if he were pressing a hand to his face. "I'm probably never going to see you again, Anderson. I know you hate me for what I did to your *friend* but it's just a few damn questions."

"Fine. I have the right to deny any questions you ask me, though."

Kurt noticed that Blaine didn't try to deny that he hated Karofsky... though, honestly, with the tone that he used and because it was Blaine, Kurt was absolutely sure that he didn't hate the bully. Blaine probably couldn't hate anyone. Harboring a strong dislike was completely different than holding hatred.

"Are you really... y'know..." Karofsky asked a little hesitantly, which was just... odd, coming from him.

"You honestly don't have a right to know about this," Blaine began, sounding flat and emotionless once again, "only Santana and a few other people know... but, yes. I am mostly gay." Kurt swears that his eyes bulged out dangerously far into the air. Blaine was gay (no Kurt hadn't really registered the mostly part). Holy shit. Blaine was gay and Kurt only found out because he was eavesdropping via-phone on a conversation he was having with David Karofsky...

Well, that was a little awkward.

"... Do you... y'know... like him?" Karofsky asked, seeming a little embarrassed for some reason, which was a huge *what the fuck* moment.

Another silence stretched on, and during the silence, it became apparent to Kurt that the 'him' Karofsky was referring to was Kurt himself. Well, that was one way to get him to stop breathing once again. His heart pounded loudly in his ears, and he pressed his phone harder against his ear, just in case he missed the answer because even though this wasn't the ideal way to find out, he wanted to know. Really badly.

"I'm not answering that."

Kurt exhaled surprisingly loudly, and ended up holding his breath for a few more moments, just incase they somehow heard him. That was... a little bit of a let down, but it was Blaine... Why was Kurt even listening to the conversation? He should have hung up a long time ago...

Karofsky seemed to grumble about something for a while, "No point in my other questions, then," was all Kurt could pick up.

Feet were moving again, but only one pair this time. "Goodbye, David," Blaine said in parting, apparently far away at that point, before footsteps echoed again and faded into the distance.

Blaine had called Karofsky David as a goodbye. A final goodbye, Kurt could tell, because Blaine almost never said goodbye... Kurt had actually asked him about that at one point and...

"Blaine," Kurt asked, flipping a page of the magazine he was reading on his bed. He heard Blaine put his book down and looked over at his friend who was sitting on his bed, next to Kurt who was lying on his stomach, "Why don't you ever say good bye to people? I remember that you used to last year, but not anymore..."

Blaine stared at Kurt for a few moments, as if he were thinking about the answer himself, "Goodbyes are so... final," he finally said, sounding quiet as he normally did, "I don't really like saying goodbye unless I know for a fact that it is a true parting. Saying goodbye... and then seeing the person the next day seems pointless."

Kurt nodded slowly up at Blaine, understanding what he meant by saying that. Sure, it was common courtesy to say a word of parting to a person, but his reasoning made sense, too, though... "What if you don't say it but it really is the last time you see someone?" Kurt asked, raising an eyebrow slightly.

Blaine seemed to stop breathing for a few seconds, and Kurt was about to take back the question since Blaine had a pretty bad physical response to it, "Fair point. I like to think... that I'll see a person again, though."

"*Hummel!*" Santana suddenly shouted into his ear, and Kurt winced, pulling his phone away for a moment.

When he returned the phone to his ear, he sighed, "Was that necessary, Santana?"

"Yes," she said simply, "I've been trying to get your attention for the past minute. Regardless, it seems like we have our answer to what Karofsky did to Blaine—plus, now you know about Blaine's sexuality. *Don't* say a word about that, by the way. If you do, bedridden or not, I will appear in your room in the middle of the night and stab you with a blade in my hair."

"I know, I know," Kurt said, wanting to tilt his head back more, but he couldn't since... well, he was laying down on a bed, with his head propped up against a million pillows. That wasn't exactly ideal for him to tilt his head back—plus, injuries, still. "I'm not talking about what Karofsky did to Blaine right now because... that's disgusting to think

about," Santana hummed in (probably) agreement, "I'm just surprised that you actually called me."

"So am I," Santana sighed, and Kurt rolled his eyes for what honestly felt like the thousandth time since he had woken up. "After you basically admitted to me that you're in love with Blaine, I didn't think I'd help you ever again," Kurt was about to make a snappy remark about how she wasn't exactly helping him, but she continued talking easily. "I can't really blame you, though. Blaine's not only sweet, but he had one nice ass."

"... Santana, you're a lesbian."

"Shut up, Hummel," she snapped, as if Kurt had said it in a quiet crowd of people, "So what? I still had a countless amount of sex with guys. I know what a good ass is. Sexuality doesn't stop me from admiring."

"Right, Santana," Kurt sighed, really wanting to roll over suddenly, "Just go to class. No point in skipping because you're talking to me." Santana sighed, "Well, fine. Thought you'd be happy to hear another voice," her voice was absolutely dripping with total sarcasm, "Later, Hummel."

The line went dead.

Kurt locked his phone and let it drop onto the bed again... and just laid there as he normally did since he came home, staring passively at the ceiling. Well, maybe not passively this time, since he was just... thinking, again.

Blaine was mostly gay. What does *mostly* mean? Did he feel physical attraction to guys but romantic attraction to girls? Or the other way around? What the hell did Blaine mean? ... He was always so mysterious with everything, even his sexuality. Then again, maybe Kurt was just over thinking the entire thing... or maybe he had heard wrong. Eavesdropping via-phone wasn't exactly easy, nor was it the best thing he had ever done concerning Blaine.

Not the worst thing, either, but still.

Something suddenly hit Kurt, though, jumping out at him like a Jack-in-the-box that was being turned by a small child. It completely correlated with the memory from earlier... though he had to wonder why this didn't occur to him sooner.

Blaine didn't say goodbye unless he *meant it*.

When Blaine had left Kurt's hospital room, he hadn't said goodbye. He had said sorry.

Yes, Kurt did remember the entire conversation. He didn't relive it very often because it normally resulted in tears, but he remembered it.

Did Kurt even dare to hope? Maybe just a little bit. The more logical side of his mind told him that he was already suffering from a broken

heart and there was no point in getting his hopes up based on probably a slip of tongue on Blaine's part. The other part of his brain told him that he might as well grip onto this small piece of hope, since there was nothing else to hold onto.

Impulsively, he grabbed his phone and unlocked it, pulling up his messages and tapping on Blaine's name.

From: Kurt

To: Blaine

You didn't say "Goodbye".

He sent that. Just that. All he really wanted to do that make a point, because... Blaine hadn't said goodbye. It was such a small detail, but it meant *everything*. If there was still a chance to at least mend his relationship with Blaine... then he'd take it. It may have been a week and a half since he last saw Blaine, and that entire time *sucked* and Kurt did cry (when he was sure no one was going to walk into his room) and...

Kurt just wanted Blaine back in his life. As a *friend*.

He stopped breathing again when his phone vibrated on his bed once.

From: Blaine

To: Kurt

I didn't.

Well that... wasn't helpful at all. It did make Kurt smile uncontrollably, however, because Blaine actually texted him back, but... what was Blaine trying to say by sending back those two words? Was he expressing that, no, he didn't and he had only just realized, or was he expressing that he meant not to say goodbye at all?

Too many questions. Too much speculation too early in the morning. With a small sigh, Kurt dropped the phone on the bed just as he heard the garage door somewhere below him open. He let his eyes slip closed as well as his body to relax into his bed. There was no use stressing himself out even more about Blaine than he had been due to the whole situation he had ended up in when he was still recovering at a pretty steady pace. It he went crazy and rolled on his side again, nothing good would come out of it.

So, Kurt forced all thoughts about Blaine and his stupid mysteriousness out of his head...

Well, he tried to.

Chapter Twelve: Finally, I Can See You Crystal Clear

By the weekend, Kurt was able to walk a little more than he had been able to. At least, he could get down the stairs and to the kitchen, and then *maybe* back up the stairs if he really wanted to. If he didn't want to... well, then he just laid down on the couch carefully and turned on the TV or something. He was mobile enough to the point that he could convince Carole to leave the house on Saturday to go do something with her friends.

Coincidentally (or maybe not. Maybe Kurt just planned it all with Rachel) Finn and his dad were out that afternoon, too, leaving him alone in the house for longer than an hour for the first time in *quite* a while. He was glad for the alone time, even if he was just going to end up sitting at the couch watching TV, especially since it was really cloudy outside (not that he could go outside by himself). It was better than lying in bed all day staring at his ceiling.

So, due to the alone time, he situated himself in the living room with snacks besides him in case he got random cravings, the TV turned on. After channel flipping for what seemed like hours to find something, Kurt settled on watching America's Next Top Model simply because literally nothing else was on...

Plus, Kurt liked the show a little bit. More like a lot, but no one else needed to know that... ever.

He was expecting it to be a *completely* alone afternoon, actually, until his phone started vibrating next to him on the couch. Not looking away from the photo shoot that was going on for a moment, he picked up his phone and blindly pressed the answer button, pressing it to his ear, "Hello?"

"Incoming," came Santana's voice, and Kurt's eyebrows furrowed a little bit in confusion. He was about to ask her what she meant, but the line went dead before he could manage to get the first syllable of "what" out.

The ring of the doorbell suddenly echoed through the house, and Kurt locked his phone, putting it down slowly, glancing at the main hall briefly. His uninjured hand gripped the arm rest, and he pulled himself to his feet, swaying a little bit, an arm loosely wrapping around his middle section, before he took a deep, shaking breath, and walked over to the door. Incoming? Well, the only reason Santana would give him a warning was if she were coming over... wait, even then she probably wouldn't give a warning. She'd just pop up because that's who she was.

His arm dropped from his middle section when he reached the main hallway, and he walked to the front door, his uninjured hand reaching out for the lock. After turning the lock, his fingers trailed the brief part of wood between the lock and the doorknob. His hand gripped the doorknob, and turned it, half-tensing because he knew that it was chilly outside.

The door swung open automatically from a sudden gust of wind, and Kurt took an automatic step back due to this, his eyes falling closed tightly so the cold gust of wind wouldn't hit them unyieldingly. Kurt didn't particularly like the burning feeling the wind gave his eyes... well, no one did, but that was against the point.

His eyes blinked open slowly, a little blearily, and he sniffed a little bit, trying to figure out who was at the door. His vision was a little hazy for a few moments, though everything cleared out soon enough and he could finally see who was at the door—

Within moments of figuring out who was there—maybe not even moments—his mouth dropped open and his eyes widened in surprise. Kurt took another deep breath, feeling a slight ache in his ribs when he did so, though he really couldn't care less at that moment. "Blaine..." he breathed softly, one hand reaching up immediately to push his somewhat messy bangs out of his eyes.

Blaine stood there, his hands in his jacket pockets, ear buds around his neck, with his head turned to the side and tilted downwards slightly, as if he didn't want to look at Kurt... though his eyes were directly trained onto the brunet's face, he could tell easily. "I... I just..." Blaine tried to say something, but it wasn't exactly coming out coherently.

Kurt took another step back, gesturing with his healthy arm for the dark haired teen to come inside, still shell shocked, "C-Come in... it's cold outside, anyways..."

It took a few moments of silence, only broken by the wind that Kurt's sweater really just couldn't keep from making chills run up his spine, even if he was wearing a long-sleeved black shirt underneath it, before Blaine finally stepped inside of the house, toeing off his shoes as Kurt closed the door carefully. Afterwards, the brunet walked slowly towards the kitchen, wobbling a little bit and going straight over to the cabinet, "I'll... get you something to drink," he muttered, reaching up for the cabinet and then wincing. It strained his ribs to do that and it wasn't a particularly pleasant feeling.

A warm body made itself obvious behind him, suddenly, and Blaine was leaning across his shoulder for the cabinet himself. There was enough room left between Blaine and the counter for Kurt to slip away comfortably, and he took the hint that Blaine could get a drink himself

and stepped away from in between the slightly shorter teen and the hard counter. Instead, Kurt walked towards the round table, and pulled out a chair, sitting in it slowly.

There was a clinking of two glasses gently before the refrigerator door was open with ease. Kurt sat there, stiff and worrying his bottom lip endlessly because... what was Blaine doing there? Maybe Kurt was just dreaming again because his subconscious was *that* evil. Or... maybe he was just delusional or something. There was almost no other explanation as to why Blaine Anderson, of all people, was standing in his kitchen, moving around as if he knew where everything was.

Well, okay, he kind of did know where everything was after how many times he watched Kurt bake or cook and after how many times Kurt asked Blaine to help him with something. But it was still *weird* because... Blaine still knew where everything was, apparently. Did he just have a crazy good memory?

... Actually, that made a lot of sense...

A glass of fruit juice was suddenly set in front of Kurt, and he blinked a few times at the glass before looking up, watching Blaine walk around the table and set down his cup of (most likely) soda, before pulling out the chair across from Kurt to sit in it. Kurt watched Blaine situate himself across from Kurt, before picking up his glass and taking a long gulp of it, trying to make sense of everything...

The only things he was really thinking about, though, was that Blaine still knew what his favorite drink was in the fridge.

Kurt looked down at his drink, and blinked in surprise when he saw a straw there... seemed like Blaine was being extremely considerate.

Sighing softly, he leaned forwards a little bit and pulled the straw into his mouth, drinking from there, before straightening up again. Not once did his eyes leave Blaine, who seemed to be avoiding looking at him, "... Why are you here, Blaine?"

Blaine's gaze fell to the table as he put his glass down, not letting it go for a moment. Kurt wished that Blaine would look at him, because otherwise he couldn't even attempt to decipher why the mysterious teen was even in his kitchen, sitting across from him. "Santana... got tired of my... whining, as she put it, and convinced me... to come talk to you," he said softly enough that Kurt had to *really* listen.

Of course Santana was behind it, that really only made all the sense in the world especially because she always ended up snapping at people who complained—wait, Blaine had been whiney? "... You were whiney?" Kurt asked, an eyebrow rising in disbelief at the thought.

Still, Blaine wouldn't look at him, and coughed a little awkwardly, shifting again in his seat, "I... I m..." he mumbled something after that, but Kurt couldn't hear him clearly.

"... Come again?" Kurt asked, giving Blaine a weird look—not that Blaine could see the weird look, since Blaine wasn't looking at him. Blaine sighed in an odd mixture of frustration, embarrassment, and nervousness, a hand reaching up and running itself through his curly, gelled hair, messing it up quite a bit. "I... I missed you," he whispered more clearly this time, not slurring his words nor speaking under his breath unnecessarily.

Kurt head tilted slightly, his eyes really taking in Blaine's appearance for the first time since he got there. His jaw was still strong, and his shoulders were wide as always, and his eyes were still the absolutely lovely hazel they'd always been... just, not as lovely as they *could* be from that Kurt could just barely see. "Blaine... look at me," Kurt commanded softly, just wanting to look at Blaine and for Blaine to look at him, without any hesitation or fear or whatever was making him not look at Kurt.

Slowly, Blaine lifted and turned his head, his eyes meeting Kurt's slowly, and there was clearly internal struggle shimmering in his hazel eyes, "I still don't think that you should be around me," he said softly, obviously honestly, "because of everything that happened because of me."

"It wasn't your fault that they attacked me, Blaine," Kurt insisted softly, frowning a little bit at Blaine. He just... really wished that the dark haired teen would stop blaming himself needlessly.

Blaine shook his head in response to this and his expression became morose, his hand tightening around the glass briefly, from what Kurt could see, "It was my fault. I *know* it was my fault this time because I got confirmation." Blaine caught Kurt's confused expression, and sighed again, "Karofsky... was the one who convinced the others to attack you."

"I'm not surprised by this," Kurt drawled, leaning forwards and taking another sip of his juice, his eyes still trained onto Blaine.

"I figured you wouldn't be..." Blaine muttered, looking away for a moment, "Remember the conversation you heard between Karofsky and I the other day before he went to court?"

Kurt nearly spit out his juice at this, his eyes widening. He forced himself to swallow with a little bit of force, "Wh-What are you talking about?" he asked haphazardly. Honestly, Kurt was an awful liar, especially when it came to Blaine. "I-I didn't... listen to a conversation between you and Karofsky, I was at home in bed..." He laughed nervously. Yeah, he sucked at this.

Blaine gave him a total poker face, before shaking his head, "Santana told me that you both eavesdropped on the conversation—she won't

tell me where she was, though. I swear the only things around were lockers, but whatever... either way, I know that you listened."

The only thing Kurt wanted to do at that moment was sink down into his chair, but of course he couldn't. Well, it wasn't the only thing, but he did feel the overwhelming urge to, regardless, "Sorry about that... I didn't know what was going on until Karofsky started talking and then my curiosity got the best of me..."

Blaine shrugged a little bit, before taking another sip of his drink, setting the cup back down slowly, "It's... not that big of a deal. It makes this a little easier to explain this entire thing, actually..."

Kurt looked at Blaine expectantly, and the somewhat fidgety teen took that as a sign to start talking.

"Karofsky... well, the day that I approached him in the locker room, I wasn't really thinking, so I did end up basically yelling at him and I shoved him. He shoved me into the lockers and I retaliated, ramming into him as hard as I could with my shoulder because I was just... so... *angry*. He grabbed my shoulders and I thought he was about to throw me. I think he was about to throw me, actually... and then everything just seemed to stop. Next thing I know he was kissing me," Kurt winced at the mental image, "I panicked, and then pulled away and demanded to know what the hell he was doing..."

Blaine trailed off, and then rubbed his face with his hand before continuing slowly, "He... he punched his locker, and looked me dead on, before telling me that if I hadn't gotten as close to you as I had, that he wouldn't have had to get his gang to do that to you... then he stormed out of there, clearly upset and I was left alone, kind of freaking out and..."

Kurt's mouth fell open slightly, and he stared at Blaine, who was staring at the table again, for a few more seconds, before leaning forwards, reaching out his hand, ignoring the slight pain that it caused him, placing it gently over the hand opposite to it that happened to not be clenching a glass dangerously tightly, "Blaine... no matter what Karofsky said, it wasn't your fault, believe me. Don't... hate yourself, Blaine... if anyone, hate... Karofsky. He let his jealousy or whatever it was get the best of him and attacked me."

That was something else that Kurt realized. Blaine hadn't hated Karofsky at all. The tone that he had used when talking to the bully had a small sense of hatred from what Kurt could remember properly, but it wasn't hatred for Blaine because Blaine just didn't hate people. Self-hatred was the only answer. *That* was the anger that was mixed with emptiness.

Blaine looked at Kurt weakly, slowly turning his hand over on the table and grasped Kurt's hand gently, as if he were afraid that he could still

break Kurt, "I just... I can only," he choked a little bit here, blinking heavily before looking almost tiredly at Kurt again, "I can't hate other people, Kurt. I can... I can only hate myself."

For what felt like the millionth time in such a short period, Kurt felt his heart break. This time, though, his heart didn't break for himself, it broke for Blaine because he sounded so *lost* and there was clearly something horribly wrong if Blaine hates himself of all people. "Blaine... what... what gave you this complex?" Kurt asked softly, squeezing Blaine's hand in his own.

A small, bitter smile spread across Blaine's face and Kurt's heart felt constricted again. Yes, he wanted to see Blaine smile, but not like that... he never wanted to see that smile on Blaine face ever again. "I... Kurt, it's such a long story... I don't know if I'm ready to... tell anyone, not even you."

"We have all the time in the world, Blaine," Kurt soothed, feeling Blaine's thumb stroke the skin on his hand softly. They didn't exactly have all the time in the world... but they had a lot. "You only have to tell me as much as you want to tell me, don't forget that."

Blaine's gaze fell to the table again, and he shifted in his seat a little, "... Can we... wait for another day? I just... I can't," his voice wavered and Kurt saw Blaine close his eyes tightly, "not yet." His voice had fallen to a broken, raspy whisper, and Kurt could only nod in agreement, licking his lips a little bit.

They sat like that for a while, in Kurt's family's kitchen, with Blaine's eyes closed and Kurt's eyes watching Blaine closely, their hands intertwined on top of the table. Neither knew how long they sat there for, whether it was for minutes or hours. They only knew that it was felt like a long time, the noise of America's Next Top Model not even registering in their minds from the still on TV.

Eventually, Kurt got Blaine to move into the living room, even though Blaine insisted that he should leave. The brunet made his closest friend sit on the couch, before carefully lying himself down, resting his head gently in Blaine's lap. Of course, he glanced up at the dark haired teenager to see if he had any objections to the position at all. Blaine hadn't done anything for a small amount of time, only staring down at Kurt blankly, before he nodded and looked at the TV.

Kurt himself had stared up at Blaine for a little while longer, before carefully turning his head towards the TV screen, watching the reruns of America's Next Top Model play quietly. At one point, Blaine's hand had started wandering randomly and he wove his fingers through Kurt's hair... not that Kurt objected at all. It felt rather nice, even

though he rarely let people touch his hair. It was Blaine, though, and that just changed everything in and of itself.

After a few hours of watching drama between young women trying to beat each other at what they were best at, he felt Blaine shift oddly between him, and he turned his head carefully, mindful of the hand snuggly woven through his hair. When Kurt glanced at Blaine, he couldn't help but smile because... well, Blaine had dozed off. Or had just flat out fallen asleep. He had looked ridiculously exhausted earlier...

Kurt stared up at Blaine for a little while longer, letting thoughts run through his head as they wished... and he realized something kind of important when it came to Blaine and himself.

Blaine needed a *friend*. A confidant that he could trust and confide in no matter what. Blaine needed someone he could depend on no matter what who could make him smile and laugh sometimes and make him feel better about himself, and made whatever it was that made him hate himself go away. Sure, Santana was probably that, and Wes might be, but... Blaine didn't need a lover or a boyfriend. He just... needed Kurt as a friend for a while, and Kurt could live with that easily.

Honestly.

All that Kurt really needed—wanted, because needed just sounded so... he didn't know how to word it—was to have Blaine in his life. It wasn't necessary in any way for there to be a beyond epic romance... an epic friendship would work, if there were such a thing. Just... Blaine was enough.

Kurt sighed contentedly and let his eyes fall closed.

Everything was okay for that moment, even if he still had to figure out what was wrong with Blaine mentally.

Well, hopefully everything was okay.

His eyes blinked open again when he felt his phone vibrate, coincidentally between his thigh and the back of the couch. He not-injured hand reached over carefully, not wanting to make any too-sudden movements so Blaine wouldn't wake up, and picked up the phone, glancing at the message on the screen.

From: Head Bitch

To: Kurt

You can send me a gift basket as a thank you getting Blaine to talk to you.

Kurt snorted lightly and locked his phone, dropping it besides him as his head turned carefully to the side again, catching the end of the episode where they find out who goes home just in time. He might actually send her a gift basket. Maybe. With a knife sharpener in it.

Chapter Thirteen: I Want to Hold Your Hand

Finally, *finally*, Kurt was allowed to go back to school, both by his family and the doctor. He had been out for a ridiculously long amount of time, and it just felt weird not going to school. Luckily, his friends and dropped off some homework for him to get done over time, and he finished the worksheets diligently, doing nothing else until he did finish them apart from the necessities.

Before school in the morning, Kurt was leaning against the counter, munching an apple quietly. His father had already left for the morning, but not after giving Kurt a carefully worded warning that told him if *anything* bad happened, then Kurt was supposed to come home immediately and notify Burt of exactly what happened. Carole had wished him a sweet goodbye before kissing his cheek and leaving house for work, as well, since she had taken vacation days to take care of Kurt...

Yes, he felt bad for that.

Somewhere above him, he heard Finn moving clumsily around his room, probably dropping his school stuff into his backpack. There were the telltale sounds of feet shuffling down the stairs and then loud thumps of his tall stepbrother coming downstairs, before Finn appeared in the kitchen, automatically walking to the freezer and pulling out a frozen waffle, dropping it into the toaster.

"Good morning," Kurt greeted casually, finishing his apple and walking over to the trashcan to drop it inside.

Finn grunted something, and Kurt just sighed. His stepbrother wasn't exactly... eloquent in the mornings. He could be peppy some, but most of the time he was just kind of... out there.

The waffle popped out of the toaster, and Finn grabbed it immediately, giving Kurt some time to reach for his keys—until he remembered that he could start driving yet as per his father's orders. Instead, he sighed and leaned against the counter again, his bag already ready in the main hall next to the door as it normally was in the mornings. They both stood in silence for a while; the only thing breaking the silence was Finn eating his toasted waffle pretty loudly.

"Hey," Finn suddenly said, turning around, waffle still in hand.

"Hey," Kurt replied flatly, an eyebrow raising, "We're going to be late if you don't hurry up—"

"Just... just wait a second," Finn said, shaking his head, before stuffing the rest of the waffle in his mouth and chewing it. He swallowed it heavily before looking Kurt dead on again, a serious expression on his face, "You know that if anything happens, I'm here for you, right?"

Kurt raised an eyebrow slowly, before nodding, "Yes, I do know that," he responded, shrugging his shoulders a little bit.

"Well..." Finn sighed and stuff his hands in his pockets suddenly, "I'm being serious... we're brothers, now, and I'm going to look out for you since I didn't before... and I really feel like a bad person for not looking out for you and you have every reason under the sun to be mad at me—"

"Finn, you're rambling uselessly," Kurt pointed out, stepping away from the counter before smiling just a little bit, "But, thank you. I'm not angry at you at all... I really haven't been since last year," Finn winced a little bit at the mention of that particular discussion, "It wasn't your fault you didn't see what was happening to me. I hid it particularly well." His arm lifted and his hand patted Finn's shoulder gently, his ribs giving out a slight pain since Finn was just that tall, but he dropped his arm before he could properly respond. "Come on, let's get to school," Kurt said, before turning and walking to the front hall, grabbing his back and hiking it up on his shoulder before opening the door.

Finn walked out before him, shuffling his feet a little bit, his backpack only on one shoulder and not the other, one hand in his pocket, the other holding the keys to his car. Kurt walked out after, turning when the door closed soundly and locked it carefully, before he pocketed his keys and walked to the car after Finn, who was already sitting in the driver's seat.

The drive to the school was mainly quiet and uneventful in many different ways; the only thing breaking the simple silence between them once again was the radio. When Finn pulled up to the school, he turned off the engine before turning towards Kurt, a serious expression on his face again, "Remember, don't let anyone do anything... y'know, stupid today. The New Directions will try to be stationed at every corner to make sure that you're okay—"

"I'm not a child, Finn," Kurt interjected, shaking his head and trying not to sound angry because he wasn't. He was just a little frustrated with how much everyone was worrying about him, "I know that I'm injured, but I'm pretty sure I can take care of myself. Try not to worry so much about me, I'll be *fine*."

With that, Kurt opened the car door and stepped outside to the familiar sight of kids running towards the building... and he smiled a little bit, adjusting the bag on his shoulders. He walked towards the doors, his head held high and a small smile on his face... and people stepped to the side for him—not out of respect, not even close. They were more so doing it out of immense amounts of pity.

Whatever. No big deal. It was better than being shoved around.

Even if the pitying looks were annoyingly demeaning.

Still, the brunet walked towards his locker, his boots clicking against the ground as they always did, a hand reaching up and taking the top hat he was randomly wearing off of his head before a teacher found him and gave him a possible detention for breaking dress code rules (not that he always followed them to begin with), before smoothing his tight white jacket as best as he could. He turned a few corners, knowing automatically where his locker was, and when he turned into the hall way to get to his locker, he stopped and reached up to make sure his bangs were pulled back properly.

Blaine was standing at his locker, ear buds pushed into his ears, staring down at the ground. Mercedes was nowhere to be seen, though that was probably because the diva already left for class... a larger smile still graced Kurt's face, though, as he continued his walk towards Blaine and his locker, stopping in front of his friend, "Hey there," he said teasingly.

The dark haired teen looked up, his eyebrows rising, before a small smile appeared on his face for a moment. He pushed away from the pair of lockers he was leaning on, instead leaning close to Kurt so that his mouth was near Kurt's ear, "Morning," he breathed softly, before stepping to the side so Kurt could actually get to his locker properly. People were staring.

Kurt felt his face heat up slightly, though he wasn't exactly sure if it was from Blaine breathing on him or if it was... because of the faulty heaters in the school... right. That was totally the cause of the sudden heating of his face.

Licking his lips and sucking it up, Kurt stepped forwards and twirled the combination he still remembered by heart somehow, opening his locker... and he was pleased to see that it was exactly the way he had left it a while ago. That meant that no one bothered to mess with anything inside of it. He hooked his bag strap onto the hook to the side of the locker and pulled out his books, keeping only the ones that he needed in his arms.

When he finally closed his locker, Blaine still seemed to be waiting patiently for him, his shoulder leaned against Mercedes' locker, and Kurt smiled, walking down the hall and letting Blaine walk besides him, their shoulders brushing and free arms that weren't holding onto their books dangling in between them precariously... not that Kurt was expecting anything. They were just two close friends walking to class together... who were getting weird looks from the stupid body apart from the glee club—okay, wait, some people in the glee club were giving them weird looks, too.

How uplifting.

Kurt had the best friends ever.

That wasn't meant to be sarcastic... or, well, maybe it was. It always depended on how the New Directions acted, actually, since some people in that club seemed bipolar a lot more than stable.

They finally reached Kurt's first period class, and he turned towards Blaine, smiling gently down at him, "You should get going, class starts soon and, if I remember correctly, your class is way on the other side of the school," he teased.

That faint smile appeared on Blaine's face again, before he nodded. He didn't walk away immediately, though. Instead, he reached into his pocket quickly and pulled out a piece of paper, before grabbing Kurt's hand and placing it in the palm of his pale hand, closing it with care.

Then, he walked away, waving at Kurt briefly, before turning and walking down the hall, weaving in and out of people nearly effortlessly. Kurt stared after him, not moving until Blaine was no longer visible in the moving crowd of people that was slowly thinning since people had to get to class as soon as possible. He turned into his classroom, and took his old, vacant seat next to Tina, pulling out his stuff for class after he smiled at his Asian friend.

When class was started and notes were being taken, Kurt discreetly grabbed the folded piece of paper that he had set in his book, unfolding it underneath his desk, squinting at it slight in the darkness of the room. He and Tina sat in the far back corner, so the light of the projector that was giving them their notes didn't meet their papers all too well.

Let me take you home after school today, I want to spend some time with you.

-Blaine x

Kurt raised his eyebrow slightly at the note, even though he still smiled quite a bit at it. Blaine wanted to spend more time with him? That was possible?

Well, then again, they had only hung out twice since they had reconciled, so Kurt supposed that was understandable... though why Blaine just couldn't send a text, Kurt didn't know. What grade were they in, second?

Oh well, if Blaine wanted to pass notes, then they would pass notes. Getting to his locker involved passing Blaine's locker, anyways, so he could always just drop by there briefly...

So, he wrote a quick and simple reply as neatly as he could, before folding it just right. Tina looked at him curiously a few times, but he just looked at her with a "It's nothing" look and she left it alone.

Sure, you can take me home. Just pick me up by my locker, I'll tell Finn.

-Kurt xx

Kurt wondered if the double-x was a bit much, but shrugged at the thought and pocketed the note, waiting for class to be over—heck, waiting for the entire school day to be over in general, especially since he was apparently spending some time with Blaine before actually going home.

The bell rang, finally, and Kurt stood up, telling Tina that he'd see her later, before pulling his stuff into his arms and leaving the classroom, walking down the hall briskly. He turned into the hall that Blaine's locker was in, and marched straight over to Blaine, who was leaning into his locker. Kurt stood directly behind Blaine, leaning forwards and over him. He could see and *feel* Blaine tense slightly before Kurt dropped the note onto a stack of books, before Kurt himself turned and walked away, a smile still evident on his face as he approached his locker, and Mercedes.

"Hey, 'Cedes," he greeted, opening his locker and setting the books in his arms inside of it.

She smiled happily over at him, "Morning, Boo," she responded warmly, grabbing her own books for her next class, "How are you feeling so far?"

"Fine," he responded because... well, he was feeling fine. Perfectly fine. Nothing was causing him too much pain and people stayed out of his way easily, even if there were some football players leering at him every so often. "Everything is going smoothly, actually."

Mercedes smiled contently, closing her locker and looking over at him with a gentle facial expression, "I'm glad that you're okay now, Kurt. I was so worried about you..." His heart panged slightly at that, and she wrapped her arms around him loosely so she wouldn't hurt him in any way, "I'll see you at lunch," she muttered, before turning and walking away, down the hall.

Kurt blinked a few times, before smiling softly and a little sadly, before he bothered finishing grabbing the proper things for his next class. It was actually nice, being back at McKinley.

Kurt and Blaine walked to English class together, shoulders brushing every so often, their hands still hanging between them, knuckles brushing a few times during their walk. Out of the corner of Kurt's eyes, he noticed a football player cracking his knuckles. He sighed at the idiotic behavior his school still portrayed, before concentrating on getting to class with Blaine.

No use snapping at any of the idiots watching them closely in the hall. Kurt didn't want to get shoved and then end up out of school... *again*.

They took their seats at the table they had been working at to begin with, and took out their respective things—including their finished project. Seeing as Kurt hadn't really been allowed to go anywhere at all... well, he had worked a lot on the project after everything else was done, and so did Blaine outside of school due to never going out. So they were the first pair done.

In all actuality, most of the other pairs had barely even started working on the project because *everyone* decided they'd procrastinate on the big project because everyone needed to do the same exact thing together.

Pure ridiculousness, in Kurt's honest opinion.

Mrs. Coleman started class, warning everybody that their projects were due in two weeks and that if they didn't turn them in on time... well, whoever didn't would automatically fail the school year.

Mrs. Coleman never accepted late work.

She did accept early work, though.

When their teacher was done talking, Blaine stood up, their pretty large stack of papers that was the completed monster of a project, in hand, and walked over to her desk, holding the assignment out to her. She glanced up at him, her eyebrow raising, before looking down at the papers and blinking in surprise. Kurt saw her say a few things, before taking the papers and smiling up at Blaine kindly, and Blaine nodded respectfully, before turning and going back to his spot next to Kurt, sitting down in his chair easily.

Blaine passed Kurt a note that he apparently pulled out of nowhere (Kurt was pretty sure it was from his pocket, but there was no way to be totally sure) quickly, and Kurt blinked a few times, before setting the book he was reading down, grabbing said note and unfolding it.

We won't go directly to your house, just a warning.

-Blaine xxx

Kurt glanced over at Blaine, who didn't seem to notice the glance, since he was reading his own book suddenly. With a small smirk that was barely even visible on his face, Kurt reached for his pencil and wrote a response on the paper, before passing it back to Blaine, who's eyes slid from the book to the piece of paper effortlessly, almost unnoticeably.

Well, it was unnoticeable to people who were watching him closely... though Kurt always subconsciously watched his friend closely unless it as seriously concentrated on something else.

Good to know so I can tell my dad at least vaguely where we're going.

Why are we passing notes, by the way? We do have those things that are called cell phones, or do you somehow not remember?

-Kurt xxxx

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed Blaine smile just a little bit, before picking up his pencil and writing a note one-handed, his other hand still holding his book open.

Kurt swears that only Blaine would do that.

When he was done, the pencil was set down and the paper was slid towards Kurt, who simply put his own book down and read it.

Notes are more fun to write than texts are, of course. Do you have something against notes?

-Blaine xxxxx

Kurt laughed softly underneath his breath. Of course Blaine would say that just to mess with him, the looser.

The rest of English class continued like that, with notes being passed back and forth as other groups worked furiously on their projects, a few sending angry glares towards the only pair that was done and was, at that point, having plenty of fun on their own.

Their losses. They decided to procrastinate.

They'd just have to deal with Kurt and Blaine having an odd amount of fun in almost complete silence.

After school, Blaine picked Kurt up at his locker like they had planned, and they walked out of the building together in the same state that they had been walking around in the entire day, their hands brushing a little bit more this time... it felt nice, to Kurt, for some reason.

A simple touch of fingertips was pretty sexy, after all.

Blaine opened the car door for Kurt in an impeccable display of his manners, and Kurt mock-gasped before stepping into the car, laughing a little bit again, setting his bag at his feet as Blaine walked around the car, iPod out and turning off. Blaine opened the back door and set his bag down there, and looked at Kurt, silently asking if Kurt would prefer to have his bag in the back. Kurt shook his head in response, and Blaine nodded, closing the rear door before opening the driver's seat car door and sitting down, pushing his keys into the ignition and letting the car gently purr to life.

"Where are we going, anyways?" Kurt asked as they pulled out of the school parking lot and onto the road.

"The park," Blaine answered simply, taking a turn in the direction that was opposite to Kurt's house.

The park. Well, that was an obvious choice, especially since this was Blaine. That was where he would always go to hang out with his friends if no set plans were already made, if Kurt could remember correctly...

"Come on, Kurt, you need to go out more," Mercedes chastised as she half-dragged him to the park with her.

The resisting teenage boy sighed, finally stopping his struggles and just locking their arms together, walking next to his best friend easily, "We should just go shopping, 'Cedes. You never know who you run into at the park."

His best friend laughed and started walking faster, "We always go shopping, Kurt. We can always go after we sit in the park for a little bit."

She was clearly bribing him with shopping, but he agreed anyways, for some crazy reason.

Mercedes made him sit on one of the swings in the park, and they swung back and forth lazily, letting their body masses to the work as they talked idly. Eventually, the sound of a car pulling up to the parking lot behind them was heard and they both turned, seeing a shiny black car being turned off.

The doors opened, and Blaine stepped out of the driver's side, Santana leaving the passenger's side and an unrecognizable teen leaving the back seat. They heard Blaine shout something incomprehensibly, but clearly excitedly, before he took off for the grassy field that was to their left, Santana and the other guy following after at a clearly slower pace... until the Asian kid started running after Blaine.

Both Kurt and Mercedes watched as Blaine was tripped and fell on his face in the grass. They winced in sympathy, especially as Santana walked by and stepped on his back, and Kurt wondered if he should say anything... until Blaine hopped up and started laughing, running after them again as if nothing happened, throwing his arms over their shoulders as he caught up with them, pulling both close.

None of them seemed to notice Kurt and Mercedes watching them silently.

... He was so... *odd*.

"There has to be something wrong with that boy," Mercedes muttered, shaking her head.

Kurt shrugged, "He just seems like a free spirit to me."

He really, really did.

Kurt was vaguely aware of the car turning off, and snapped out of his slight gaze, noticing that they had parked in front of the park, which was empty and looked exactly as it had the last time Kurt had been there. He opened the car door as Blaine opened his, and they stepped out.

"Anywhere in particular you want to be?" Blaine asked as they came to stand closely together once again.

Kurt scanned the area briefly, "... The swings," he responded easily, already starting to walk over to the row of swings. He heard Blaine behind him, and didn't bother to slow down until they approached the swings... and both sat down, swaying back and forth slightly.

They sat there in silence for a while, until Blaine's hand reached over and tugged Kurt's jacket, causing the brunet to look over at his friend... before dropping his hand from where it held onto the swing. Their hands clasped together loosely, platonically, and they both stared ahead of them silently.

"Can you tell me about your family? Just... just a little bit." Kurt suddenly questioned softly, not looking at Blaine.

There was a deep, sharp inhale of breath, and a slow, steady exhale from Blaine, "... There isn't really much that... I feel ready to tell," he muttered softly, not looking at Kurt, either, "My mom... is a kind, gentle mother who likes to make my father happy, and my brother is serious and hardworking and can be harsh when needed. My... my sister," there was a small pause, "she's sweet, and intelligent well beyond anyone her age. She loves cats and she loved playing and..." there was a pause, and Kurt caught the past tense in playing... did that mean something? "My... my father is strict and serious and a lot like my brother... he's also persuasive. Very persuasive," Blaine finished suddenly, if not a little messily.

Kurt looked over at Blaine, finally, due to the way that he said persuasive... and suddenly an image of their family portrait flashed in front of Kurt's eyes when he saw Blaine's strong, firm jaw and serious eyes. Kurt felt compelled to tell Blaine that the looked quite a bit like his father... but he didn't. He had a slight feeling that if he did Blaine would get really, really upset, so he didn't.

Instead they sat there together in mainly silence, the wind breezing around them gently, their hands twined together as they swung, sometimes opposite of each other in such an awkward manner, sometimes in synch, perfectly and lovely.

They didn't let go of each other once.

Chapter Fourteen: I Wish You All the Love in the World

The final light spray of hairspray had been coated just as Kurt heard the honking of a car horn on the street below. He set down the can loudly, before turning and hurrying out of his room, trying to move slowly as to not irritate his mostly healed injuries. However, due to the minor (major) fact that he woke up much later than he was supposed to... well, he was going to have to rush.

"Dang it," he muttered under his breath as he checked his phone after looking over his outfit once more to make sure that everything was okay. He typed a quick response to the new text that he received in his inbox.

From: Blaine

To: Kurt

Someone woke up late today, I can tell. ;)

From: Kurt

To: Blaine

Not the time to tease me if you want me to get downstairs within ten minutes, Blaine. : |

He hurried down the stairs, his hand gripping the banister so that he wouldn't trip and fall, dropping into the kitchen quickly to grab an apple and to say a quick goodbye to Carole, who was leaving work later than usual that morning, and to Finn who was getting a ride from Puck, who was always late picking Finn up.

"Bye, Carole," he said quickly, pecking his step mother on the cheek, before rushing past Finn, waving a bye to him, "See you at school, Finn. Try not to be late for first period."

"Be careful!" he heard Carole shout from behind him, "Make sure Blaine drives safely!" she added as she normally did when she left for work late enough to see him off to school.

"Dude, you know it's not my fault that Puck is always late! If you'd just let me go to school with you and Blaine again then this wouldn't be a problem," Finn shouted at the same time that his biological mother did, and their calls mixed and overrode one another, making for one extremely interesting combination of words and voices that didn't really make sense.

Kurt grabbed his bag from the front hall and pulled it onto his shoulder, not bothering to reply to either of those things, mostly because he was in the rush, opening the door quickly before closing it behind him. It wasn't necessary for him to lock the door, for once, so

he walked briskly down the front walk, biting into the apple and swallowing before smiling at the person leaned against the passenger door of the car.

"Morning," he greeted when he was close enough.

"Good morning, sleepy head," Blaine said in response, lowly but clearly.

Kurt couldn't help but smile even more, even though Blaine was *clearly* teasing him for waking up late.

Blaine smiled at Kurt in return, and pulled open the car door, stepping to the side to allow Kurt to slide into the car and sit down with ease, setting his bag down on the floor like he usually did on mornings when Blaine swung by to pick him up. He watched Blaine walk across the front of the car, the tips of his fingers trailing the hood of the car, before he opened the driver's door and slid in himself, turning the keys in the ignition.

Kurt leaned back comfortably as Blaine pulled away from his small house and drove them towards the school. They sat in a comfortable silence, not even bothering to turn on music for some reason. It was just nice, being in silence together.

With a short glance, Kurt noted that Blaine wasn't wearing his ear buds, and sighed happily at this, even though he was more than aware that before either of them even stepped out of the car they would just be back in. Kurt didn't mind too much, though, because any progress was good progress. As long as Blaine no longer constantly had his ear buds in around Kurt, it was perfectly fine with the brunet.

Blaine seemed to sense Kurt's stare, and met his gaze when they reached a red stoplight, his eyebrow rising slightly as another smile ghosting across his face, "Why are you looking at me like that?" he asked in a playfully annoyed tone.

A small snort filled the car and Kurt looked away from his friend, waving his hand in the air briefly, "Oh, nothing, nothing," he replied flippantly, before the light turned green, causing Blaine to laugh and start driving again, not able to answer while he was driving dangerously close to the school.

It wouldn't exactly be helpful or great if Blaine got too distracted with their play fight and ended up running over somebody. Not that it had ever happened... or got close to happening outside of the middle school the other day...

Of course not.

Another quite amused smile appeared on Kurt's face at the memory that flashed through his head—that *totally* didn't happen because Blaine had been absolutely mortified and Kurt swore that he'd never tell anybody about that little incident that almost (didn't) take place.

Kurt laughed shortly, and airily, before trying to find something else to think about. His eyes ended up catching Tina, Mike, Brittany, Artie, and Mercedes walking into school together as basically quintuplets as he and Blaine pulled into the parking lot. A sudden idea appeared in his head, and he looked over at his friend, who appeared to be looking for the best parking spot left in the entire lot.

Blaine didn't use to actually look for a good parking spot, until Kurt made that random, useless note one day about how he hated parking far away from things, even if it made getting out easier—only if you *ran* to your car, though. The moment Kurt decided to say that, Blaine started looking from all ends of the earth (parking lot, earth, same thing in high school) in the morning to find the closest parking spot possible.

It was a cute little quirk Blaine had. He liked making people as happy as possible, and Kurt knew that, which was exactly why he never bothered giving his best friend hell for trying *so hard* to please him. It was really sweet, actually, since basically no one else would do that for Kurt.

No, seriously.

He had tried to get Finn to actually look for a good parking spot, but Finn just parked next to all of the football players. Yes, that was decently close to the school... but it was also close to the trashcan and leering idiots. Finn was lucky that Kurt was still being avoided so no one would get in major trouble, otherwise the brunet would not have been happy with his stepbrother. At all.

The car was suddenly turned off, and Kurt blinked, realizing that Blaine had found a spot—it was a pretty good spot, actually. Not too far away from the front doors, and a decent amount of space away from the trashcan and the football players. Nodding to himself, Kurt looked over at Blaine, who was pulling out his iPod from his glove box, unraveling the headphones from around it with a concentrated gaze.

"Do you think that you'll ever just leave your iPod at home, Blaine?"

Kurt asked softly. His eyes didn't miss the way that Blaine's shoulders tensed slightly at the question, even though Blaine tried to hide it.

The dark haired teen inhaled deeply, and exhaled slowly, before looking over at Kurt, licking his lips slowly, "Maybe... someday, I will. It just depends," Blaine responded softly, the hand holding the iPod tightening around it.

Kurt stared over at his best friend, his head turned to the side while his body stayed in its straight posture, turned almost perfectly forwards as if someone had positioned him like that and made it so that he couldn't move. Blaine stared back, in a posture that was nearly eerily similar to Kurt's.

Finally, Kurt sighed, breaking their somewhat tense silence, reaching over slowly and placing a hand on Blaine's shoulder, just wanting his friend to relax again, "I have an idea," he announced gently. A curious look crossed Blaine's eyes, and it was clear to Kurt that he wasn't going to answer verbally, so the brunet continued, "Why don't you come with me to glee club after school?"

Blaine looked clearly confused for a few moments, "Kurt... I'm not part of the glee club—"

"You never were last year, and you still dropped by a lot," Kurt pointed out, his hand subconsciously sliding from Blaine's shoulder to his bicep, holding on gently.

Hazel eyes flickered to Kurt's hand for a second, and Blaine's other hand reached up and grasped Kurt's wrist gently, holding it for a few moments with such care that the touch was nearly noticeable there... It took Kurt a few moments to remember that was the wrist that got broken.

"... I guess I could come in and... observe," Blaine finally said, his hand sliding slowly from Kurt's wrist to his hand.

Kurt ended up smiling more than he intended to when Blaine's thumb stroked the skin on his hand, and nodding a little bit, "I'm glad that you're going to," he responded, not wanting to pull his hand away, nor to look away for a split second.

They sat like that for a while, staring at each other unwaveringly, holding each other's hands—something that they had gotten into the habit of when they sat in silence in private. Neither really knew why, they just did. Never in public, though... not after what happened to Kurt.

Eventually, they had to let go and they had to get out of the car, otherwise they'd be hilariously (not so hilariously, actually. Probably horrendously) late for first period... they already had to walk a little faster than usual since they loitered in Blaine's car for a while.

Suddenly, Kurt was all-too careful to cross his arms over his chest, when before he could let one arm dangle between himself and Blaine effortlessly, barely thinking a thing about it. He just felt... oddly self-conscious for some reason even though they were only friends.

Only friends.

Plus, Blaine had his hands in his pockets randomly, too, so it wasn't just Kurt. Maybe it was just the need to draw the line between friendship and romance relationship... not that there was any romance. It had never quite occurred to Kurt before that the line was so thin, though.

In English, Kurt and Blaine were given another free day, while most other people in their class were still working their asses off. Somehow,

Mrs. Coleman gave everyone a little more time to finish their projects... Kurt had a feeling that she was just rewarding himself and Blaine with more free time for being done first and actually *working* all those months, while punishing everyone else by extending their period of torture.

All in all, it was immensely amusing.

The two teenagers were idly doing their own things: Kurt was sketching a random design in his notebook for the first time in a while, and Blaine was reading some huge book that Kurt couldn't quite remember the name of off the top of his head. For all he knew, it could actually be a fairy tale book for no reason.

Kurt had just finished designing the pants on the sketched model he drew, when Blaine nudged his arm gently with his elbow. Kurt looked over at his best friend, and automatically leaned closely to him, letting Blaine maneuver so that his mouth was next to Kurt's ear.

That was another random thing that Kurt pointed out. Notes were cute, but they got extensive (especially when they started having 'x' wars). Plus, he preferred when Blaine would actually talk to him (he didn't bother adding that it just felt nice, having warm air spread over his face and neck. Normally he found that vaguely disturbing but not with—bad train of thought), so Blaine slowly got into the habit of talking quietly to Kurt. A few times, Kurt caught him talking quietly to Santana, as well, and always felt a little accomplished, especially since Santana sent him an approving glance once, paired with a nod.

In between all of the angry, jealous glances, that is. It was nice to get one nice glance, though...

"Are you sure that you want me to come to glee club after school?"

Blaine asked, pulling back slightly so that he could look at Kurt's face properly.

Kurt rose an eyebrow at him in response, not bothering to lean forwards to whisper into Blaine's ear in return, "Only if you want to," he muttered with a small shrug. Of course he wanted Blaine to go to glee club practice, because *maybe* that would convince him to open up a little more and openly be more of himself. "I don't want you to go just because I want you to go."

Blaine stared at him for a few more moments, before nodding slowly, another faint smile spreading across his face, "I won't lie," he whispered, shocking Kurt a little bit since he wasn't leaning forwards any more than he already was. Progress. "I do miss the New Directions' rehearsals. You guys were always immeasurably amusing." Kurt laughed lightly under his breath, unable to stop himself from grinning just a little bit, "I'm glad that you can find our insanity to be amusing."

Again, Blaine smiled briefly in response, before returning to reading his book, letting Kurt go back to sketching a somewhat messy design, the silence settling between them once again... until they realized they were still leaning oddly close to each other. At that, they both coughed, almost in complete unison, before straightening up again.

At lunch, when Kurt was innocently eating his salad, sitting with some of the glee club members since Blaine was off helping some teacher grade papers, Mercedes dumped an almost awkwardly random question on him.

"Kurt," he looked up from his mixed up bowl of vegetables, eyebrows risen, "don't you think that... maybe you're getting too attached to Blaine?" she asked slowly, deliberately, as if she had actually been rehearsing how exactly to ask the question. "I mean, too attached for you two to *just* be friends."

Kurt's mouth fell into an impeccable frown, and he heard everyone else he was sitting with shift uncomfortably—except for Santana and Rachel. "No, I don't think that, Mercedes," he responded politely, sticking a piece of lettuce into his mouth, "We're just friends," he added after he swallowed completely, "Nothing more."

"It looks like there's something more going on between you two," Rachel interjected, giving Kurt a look that said she was completely serious. He shot back his own look that simply asked her for proof, and she sighed, rolling her eyes a little bit. "You guys stop by each other's lockers constantly—"

"I truly do hope that you know that friends can do that and not be dating—"

"When you guys walk together, you're always extremely close—"

"Friends can do that, too, Rachel—"

"Your shoulders brush—"

"Crowded hallways—"

"Hands touch—"

"Crowded—"

"Okay, shut up, both of you," Santana snapped, throwing her fork onto her tray, stopping the kind of fight—which was honestly just Kurt and Rachel trying to one-up each other to win the fight about Kurt's personal life. "You're giving me a headache, even if it's amusing me to watch Hobbit over there fight with Hummel," Rachel made an indignant sound and muttered something about how she was totally right. "Point is, is that there has to be something going on between you and Blaine," she was looking directly at Kurt at that point, "Especially if you're working so hard to defend the point that you guys are just friends."

"Okay, that's just not true—"

"Sorry to say, dude," Finn suddenly added his two cents, which was just lovely, "but it's true. The harder you work to prove something the less people are going to believe you half the time... I think..."

Rachel patted his arm and told him that he was right with that random statistic.

Kurt sighed and rolled his eyes, "Whatever. I'm not talking about my personal life with Blaine anymore. End of the story is that we're just friends. That's it."

He went back to eating, and everyone stared at him for a little while longer, all with different looks on their faces, before slowly going back to previous conversations and actions. The last person to look away, as far as Kurt knew, was Santana who was giving him a critical gaze because she *knew* that he was lying.

Well, even then, he wasn't lying. Kurt and Blaine were just friends, even if Kurt felt more than platonic friendship for Blaine. It didn't change their status as friends; it just made for a one-sided romance. It didn't change anything.

After school, Kurt led Blaine towards the choir room, consciously putting more space between them than he usually did. Blaine obviously noticed the deliberate space between their respective bodies, but he didn't say anything, or make a move to step closer to Kurt as he normally would if they got separated in a crowded hallway or anything.

Together, they walked into the usual meeting room, to see everyone standing or sitting, talking to each other and laughing. Every last member of the New Directions, *including* Brad and Mr. Schue, looked over at the doorway, and all of them looked a little confused as to why Blaine was there... without ear buds in.

Actually, Santana looked less confused than everyone else. She looked more... pissed off.

"Blaine's just here to observe today," Kurt explained to the abruptly silent room, walking inside of it easily, ignoring the weird looks. He heard Blaine following, and when he spared his best friend a glance over his shoulder, Blaine didn't really look worried or stiff... he actually looked a little more relaxed than before.

"Well... alright," Mr. Schue said, shrugging a little bit, "Everyone take a seat so we can get started with today's rehearsal," he walked over to the piano, letting everyone situate themselves in the rows of seats. Kurt sat down to the far left (when you entered the room left), and Blaine sat in the seat directly next to him effortlessly. He knew that they were both aware of the stares that they were getting from the

members of the glee club, but they both ignored them just like they ignored every other kind of stare they got during the actual school day.

Mr. Schue turned back towards the class, smiling brightly at all of them, "Well, alright. Brittany actually told me that Santana wanted to perform something for the class today..." finally, everybody turned their gazes to the Hispanic, who was sitting next to her blonde best friend, looking a little panicked.

"She said... what?" Santana said, disbelievingly, looking over at Brittany slowly.

Brittany smiled her easy, warm smile, reaching over and touching Santana's bare arm gently, "You said that you wanted to make me feel better with a song, San," she whispered, even though everyone could hear her clearly. ... That was right, she and Artie had broken up recently... "I think it'd be really, really cool if you sang it to me in front of the rest of the glee club."

Santana looked like she was about to flat-out refuse since everyone was staring at her, but when Brittany whispered something else inaudible to the rest of the teens in the room, and Santana's resolve broke visually, and she nodded slowly, agreeing begrudgingly, "Well... okay, fine. I guess I can sing the song in front of the whole glee club," she said, standing up slowly.

Everyone clapped sparingly as she made her way to the front of the room, standing in the center where Mr. Schue had previously been. The expression on her face was a weird cross between angry, annoyed, and fright for some reason, and made Kurt's eyebrow raise a little bit. What was she about to do?

"I didn't exactly expect to sing this in front of all of you guys," Santana noted a little harshly, crossing her arms, "but this is something I've been struggling with for a while. I guess that I may as well come clean to everyone in this room, since we're all freaks of nature."

No one really offended. No one *could* be offended. For one thing, this was Santana, for another thing, they were all used to being called freaks. They already embraced their freakish-ness, so whatever.

Santana looked over at Brad, and nodded to him, and he nodded a little in return, before looking down at the piano keys and starting to play a soft, beautiful tune.

"For you, they'll be no more crying," Santana sang, looking directly at Brittany and no one else, *"For you, the sun will be shining... and I feel that when I'm with you, it's alright... I know it's right..."*

Kurt's eyes widened when he realized what Santana was singing. She was singing... a love song about loving somebody... to Brittany.

Santana was singing a love song to Brittany and only Brittany. He took

a short glance around the room, and it seemed like everyone else realized it as well, and all of them were thoroughly shocked.

"To you, I'll give the world..." Santana closed her eyes briefly before opening them again, and Kurt was pretty surprised to see tears shining in them... yet not surprised at all. *"To you I'll never be cold..."* Honestly, Kurt wasn't sure when he arm started dangling between his and Blaine's chairs, but it did at some point. He felt Blaine's hand brush against his own, and he inhaled sharply, loudly enough for Blaine to hear over Santana singing and Brad playing, before looking over at his best friend... who was staring at him blankly.

"And I love you, I love you, I love you... like never before," Santana belted out, probably looking directly at Brittany still, as Blaine's mouth fell open slightly, and moved his hand just barely, causing his slightly calloused fingertips to brush against Kurt's hand so lightly that it was ticklish.

Their fingers twined together almost subconsciously, and Kurt's gaze slid to his lap, his heart racing in his ear, *"And I wish you all the love in the world... but most of all, I wish it from myself!"*

The song started to fade when Kurt finally lifted his gaze again, this time simply looking at Santana, not daring to look at Blaine because his heart might have just exploded if he did that.

Platonic, platonic, platonic, platonic. He just had to remind himself of that.

Santana was basically backed against the piano, singing to Brittany as if the blonde were the only one in the room. When the piano finally faded out completely, Brittany was out of her chair and in Santana's arms faster than anyone could really comprehend. Kurt wondered if that was even possible...

His hand slipped from Blaine's. It returned to where it originally was, folded with his other hand in his lap. He still refused to look at his best friend, instead watching Brittany and Santana whisper to each other, before breaking apart, and slowly people moved to Santana to tell her encouraging words and to give her hugs and such things...

Kurt didn't move. Blaine didn't move. Instead, they sat there in silence, Kurt not daring to look at Blaine, and due to this he had no idea *where* Blaine himself was looking.

His hand still felt warm, though... and tingly, in a way, as if that moment said something.

It obviously said nothing, though, because in real life there were no signs of romance or romantic feelings. They just happened and kicked you in the ass.

Hard.

Blaine pulled up to Kurt's house after glee practice, since Finn had told Kurt that he was going out with a few of the guys and none of the girls could give Kurt a ride... conveniently.

Kurt kind of hated his friends sometimes.

They both sat in the idling car for a few moments, until Kurt leaned forwards to grab his bag, also moving to grab the door handle. "I guess I'll see you later, then—"

Blaine's hand was suddenly gently on his shoulder, and Kurt's heart gave an odd jolt. He still hadn't looked Blaine in the eyes... though, at that point, he really had no choice, so he turned slowly, and found himself staring into hazel eyes once again.

"Let's hang out this weekend," Blaine proposed seemingly out of nowhere, one of his faint smiles passing across his face, lingering more than it usually did.

Kurt blinked a few times... before he nodded slowly, "Okay," he responded as smoothly as possible.

He could handle hanging out with his best friend.

That he was in love with.

Yeah, he could totally handle it.

Totally.

Chapter Fifteen: Please Don't Take My Sunshine Away

By Friday, the awkwardness between Kurt and Blaine had lessened noticeably, and they began to walk closely in the halls again, ignoring their classmates. On Thursday, Kurt hung up a picture of himself and Blaine in his locker, framed and at the very top. Mercedes has given him a look, but said nothing about it to his face. Things slowly and carefully returned to how it was before the "Songbird" thing. Well, not completely back to the way it was. Now Santana and Brittany were attached at the hip again—more like the pinky—and they walked around school proudly together. Most people just thought that they were back to being inseparable best friends. The glee club knew better, of course, but no one said anything about it. That would be like setting the two of them up to social suicide.

It still made Kurt undeniably jealous, though.

It was the mere fact that Santana and Brittany could walk around the way they did without getting any taunts that made Kurt jealous. They could walk like close best friends did, they could even hold each other's hands, and no one would try to stop them. No one would ridicule them. When Blaine and Kurt even walked close enough to brush shoulders, glares and taunts came from everywhere.

It really just wasn't fair, the double standard at their school.

On Friday, he and Blaine stayed inside of Blaine's car longer than usual, since they were pretty early for once. Early enough to get a *really* good parking spot and sit around and have a normal conversation, anyways. Due to the extra time, Kurt decided that they might as well talk about the one thing about their school that bothered him over everything else, which was the stupid double standard.

"Do you ever think that it's not fair, how people treat Santana and Brittany different than us?" Kurt asked as he checked his hair in the car mirror once again, glancing at Blaine out of the corner of his eyes. Blaine stopped messing with the sleeve of his jacket, and looked over at Kurt with curious eyes, his eyebrows tilted down slightly in thought. His chest rose with a deep inhale, before he shrugged, "Sure, it's not really fair... but you have to remember that this is McKinley... plus, gender-inequality as well as the fact that neither of them are exactly out of the closet," he pointed out level-headedly.

Kurt sighed, turning his body and leaning back against the seat, crossing his legs when it situated himself to face Blaine more. Blaine mirrored the movement as Kurt began to speak again, "Yeah but out of the two of us, I'm the only one out of the closet, and no one knows

about you," Blaine nodded in agreement at the stated facts, "and gender-inequality is just... a weak argument."

With a small hum, Blaine looked out of the windshield for a few moments, "Yes, gender-inequality is a weak argument, but you have to remember that close guy friends don't exactly walk close to each other when they don't need to. Finn and Puck keep a suitable, friendly distance between each other. We, on the other hand, don't. We walk like how girls do with their best friends, or how someone walks with their significant other minus the handholding. People will always jump to conclusions in society, no matter how many times we reiterate that we're just friends."

Kurt let out a frustrated groan to cover up the small (huge) amount of disappointment he felt at Blaine bringing up their strict friendship, as well as at the fact that Blaine didn't even seem visibly affected by bringing up said friendship, "There is always a line between a close friendship and an intimate relationship, and Brittany and Santana have crossed that line, even if just barely. I guess it's just... the double standard that bothers me."

"The double standard is stupid," Blaine agreed smoothly, "but you also have to remember, in respect to Santana and Brittany, people don't always see that difference. Sometimes it takes blatant making out for people to realize when two close friends become something more, which they obviously aren't about to do. Yes, there is that clear difference, but some people don't see it. Even with us," Kurt looked up from his lap, not entirely sure when he started looking away from Blaine, his eyebrow raising slightly, "people can blur the line and see us as something more. That line is never even truly definitely set, Kurt, the line is just there and where the it is drawn depends on the specific person and their ideals."

"Like... with me, I was such a touchy person last year that it depended on where I touched people, and that was where the line was drawn. When I would touch an acquaintance, it'd be a quick, hard clap on the shoulder, or a fast high five. A friend would maybe be a pat on the back... Santana was constant touching of her waist, sometimes her hips," Blaine explained.

Kurt blinked, "You never really did any of those to me, though," he pointed out critically, remembering last year, "sure, you touched my shoulder, but it wasn't a hard pat. It was always more like a light, fleeting touch over anything."

Blaine's eyebrow rose at this, and a slight smile played across his face, "You actually remembered how I touched you last year?" Kurt didn't really dignify that with an answer, he just looked away, feeling his face heat up just a little. It looked like Blaine wanted to chuckle, but he bit

his lip and just shrugged instead, "You were different. That's all I can really say to explain that."

"I was different," Kurt echoed, laughing a little bit under his breath before shaking his head, "Anyways... back on topic... from what I'm gathering, it's not the line between a close friendship and an intimate relationship that people are confusing. It's purely gender inequality since Brittany and Santana are walking in a more couple-like manner than we do."

Blaine seemed to think about that for a few moments, looking out of the windshield several different times, "Well, yes," he finally responded, turning his head itself more to look directly at Kurt, "it is based purely on gender-inequality, if everything I've said in this conversation is true. It's also based on how people were raised and their mindsets, though I'm sure that you already know that."

Kurt nodded, frowning a little again and looking away from his best friend. He knew that *very* well.

"You also have to remember," Blaine began, and Kurt heard him move in his car seat, and looked up to see Blaine leaning close to him, against the glove box, "that homophobia or the inability to see the difference between us and Santana and Brittany, is just ignorance."

Kurt took a deep breath, before nodding again, trying to relax into the chair despite the very small amount of pain that caused his ribs, "I know," he whispered, setting his elbow on the side of the inside of the car, staring out the window at the slowly filling parking lot, "it's just a whole lot of ignorance."

He got the slight feeling that Blaine was about to touch him in some way again (plus, out of the corner of his eye, he noticed that Blaine's hand was hovering above his shoulder), but the sound of Blaine leaning back into his seat told him otherwise. Kurt tried to not let disappointment eat away at him again at that, and instead straightened up and leaned down to grab his bag, "We should probably get going, we have about fifteen minutes before first period starts."

Blaine hummed in agreement, grabbing his bag and the keys from the ignition, before opening his door at the same time that Kurt did. They stepped out of the car, and shut the doors securely. Kurt waited a few steps away from the car for Blaine to make sure that he locked the car properly, and so that his best friend could catch up with him, before starting to walk towards the slowly populating school. They walked as they normally did, closely and in a completely friendly manner.

Before reaching Kurt's locker, they passed Santana and Brittany, who were linked at the pinky as per usual. Kurt glanced at them and smiled as best as he could, and Brittany said a cheery good morning in passing. Santana, however, gave Kurt a look that clearly said that he

would be getting bothered later for some obscure reason... Kurt was so excited for *that*.

Totally.

Blaine dropped him off at his locker as he normally did, and gave Kurt a small half-smile that wasn't at all like his slight smiles. Kurt had actually only seen Blaine's half-smile a few times before... and it made his heart constrict and his lower stomach heat up slightly as it had the spare times before when he had seen it as Blaine turned and walked away. Kurt sighed to himself, shaking his head and turning towards his locker as Mercedes made her way down the hall, as well.

That stupid conversation hadn't really helped much... it really just cemented the fact that he and Blaine were just friends in his head. Having that confirmed for him *by* Blaine was just about as great as a rose dying was. It wasn't really even like he had been expecting anything... or had been pursuing anything more with Blaine, *or* that he even made it blatantly obvious that he liked his best friend like he normally did when it came to people he liked.

Overall, it was kind of just his fault that they were just friends. Then again, he could always blame it on society... but that would just be stupid and pointless.

Whatever. He had a conversation with Santana to look forward to for the rest of the day (or at least until she talked to him. Whichever came first).

Santana ambushed Kurt after English, but before lunch, grabbing him by the back of his jacket at his locker, once again giving him just barely enough time to close his locker, before dragging him into a random empty classroom. This time, however, she did not throw him, so she obviously wasn't *pissed*... or she didn't seem to be, anyways. When she let Kurt go and turned around to face him, he already had his arms crossed and an exasperated look on his face, "Do you think you can ever just tell me to follow you, rather than force me to come along? It's not like I'm going to run."

Santana smiled far too sweetly, "That just ruins all of the fun or getting you to talk to me, though," she pointed out as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. Kurt rolled his eyes, and her smile dropped. Instead, she adopted a more serious expression, "I'm not angry or anything, we just need to talk. I know I've been keeping an eye on you and Blaine lately—"

"More like glaring at us," Kurt interjected with a raised eyebrow.

She gave him a warning expression, before continuing, "I won't lie and say I'm not jealous, because I am. Or, more like I was."

Just like Kurt had thought. He sighed and just stared at Santana for a few moments, "Why, though? You have no reason to be jealous of me, or of Blaine, or of anything. You got Brittany, you came out to the glee club, no one bothers you in the hall... what can you possibly be jealous of? If anything, I should be, and am, jealous of you," the last part kind of just slipped out without actually meaning to. It wasn't really like he could take it back, though.

Santana gave him a weird look, before shaking her head, "Blaine has been my best friend for as long as we could remember. I was the person that he trusted the most in the whole world... until you came along," she looked directly at Kurt, a small frown pulling at her mouth. "I wanted to be the one to get him to open up. I wanted to be the one that helped him and the one who made him smile in school, and the one who made him talk in school. I tried to be that person, but it obviously didn't work. You come along, and you don't even try... and suddenly Blaine is looking more like his old self than he has in months."

Well, that made a lot of sense. "I get where you're coming from by saying this," Kurt stated, "and I don't know why I'm the person Blaine opens up to, because logically it should have been you... but it's me. It's me and neither of us can change anything about that... I don't know if he'll ever tell me what happened, and if he does I'll honestly be surprised, but I'll be more than happy to let him tell me and I won't tell anyone, because I know that's what he wants. I think I'm actually more surprised by how honest you're being, though."

With a small snort and a slight smirk, Santana shrugged, "I don't know why I'm being so honest. It probably has something to do with the fact that you're actually helping him. Or, maybe it's because I feel like I owe you after the hell I put you through... whatever. The point is, yes I am jealous, but I'm going to back off. Britt has been asking me why I always glare at the "dolphins" anyways."

Kurt laughed shortly at the dolphin thing, before nodding a little bit, "Well... it's good to know that I won't be watched like I'm being hunted in the halls by you anymore."

Santana seemed to stare at him pensively for a few moments, before she decided to poke at Kurt's own brain, "You said that you were jealous of me," she stated bluntly, and Kurt's slight smile dropped immediately. Of course she was going to go back to that. "Why would you be jealous of me?"

It took Kurt a few moments to figure out what to say because... he had no idea how to word this without sounding unnecessarily sexist, "You got almost everything that you wanted," he finally stated. "You got your best friend, and you came out to the New Directions, even if

that's so much of a smaller scale than where I am at. You and Brittany can be close to each other in the hall and not be taunted by everyone else. I..." Kurt was about to say that he didn't have and couldn't get his best friend, but stopped himself. Santana seemed to get what he was about to say, anyways. "Blaine and I can't even touch shoulders in the hall without getting a rude glance—or, at least, I can't do that without getting a rude glance."

"One of the perks of being a girl," Santana said, passing by Kurt and patting him on the shoulder, apparently back to her more bitchy self, "guys find lesbian action hot. Later, Hummel," she left the room, leaving the door open for Kurt... until she reappeared back in the doorway just as Kurt turned around to leave, "Are you planning on doing anything to Blaine?"

Kurt scoffed, crossing his arms again, "No. All he needs is a friend right now, Santana."

"Good. Keep that mindset," she said bluntly, waving her fingers in a goodbye as she left the room once again.

With a small sigh, Kurt stepped out into the hall, ready to actually head to lunch, which he was late for. Well, you couldn't really be late for lunch, in all technicality, since it wasn't even an actual class... the hallways were all completely vacant, though, so Santana must have been pretty fast. Head headed down the hall, mentally preparing himself for yet another crazy lunch with the New Directions and Blaine, since Blaine had started sitting with them... and actually talking *just* a little bit. Quietly, and only enough to really partially participate in the conversations nearest to him, but it was a pretty big surprise to everyone.

He had just turned into the hall where the lunchroom was located, when his phone buzzed in his pocket. He stopped and pulled out his phone, before staring to walk again at a slower pace to read the text properly.

From: Head Bitch

To: Kurt

The picture in his locker.

... What a cryptic message. Kurt just pocketed his phone once again and pulled open the lunchroom doors. He had already seen the inside of Blaine's locker... multiple times. There were only three pictures visible and the fourth one was constantly hidden, which—
Maybe that was the one that Santana was talking about...

No. That couldn't be it, because that picture was irrelevant to everything... unless she was talking about his somewhat-secret feelings for Blaine.

Way to be specific, Head Bitch.

Way to go.

On Saturday, Blaine came over early in the afternoon when no one was home, yet again, seeing as Burt was down at the garage, Finn was having a "Call of Duty" marathon or something with some other glee guys, and Carole was once again out with friends. They lounged around in the living room together, watching TV and talking when they really felt like it, though they both sat in mainly silence, just content to be together.

Eventually, they both became at least a little hungry, and they wandered towards the kitchen, Kurt glancing through the refrigerator and freezer to see if there was anything to eat, while Blaine scouted out the pantry.

"Hey, do you guys have eggs and milk?" Blaine suddenly called, and Kurt straightened up from where he had been leaning down to look through the refrigerator properly.

"Yes, we do," Kurt responded, a questioning tone in his voice.

Blaine stretched upwards, one hand braced on the counter while the other was above his head, before he grabbed a box from a higher shelf, turning to smile at Kurt, "Let's make cupcakes," he proposed, showing Kurt the box of mix that he was holding.

Kurt rolled his eyes and reached into the refrigerator for the milk and the eggs, grabbing both, "I'm not going to ask why you want cupcakes right now," he noted, setting the two ingredients next to the box of mix while Blaine grabbed a mixing bowl and a wooden spoon, "nor am I going to point out that it always tastes better when you make it from scratch."

"Making it from scratch also takes forever, though," Blaine pointed out, setting the two things next to the ingredients, already grabbing the box and opening it, "maybe over the summer we can bake cupcakes from scratch."

Kurt smiled uncontrollably from the mention of them spending time together over the summer, before heading towards the oven to preset it. Once the proper temperature was punched in, he walked over to a drawer and picked out the proper measuring cup and walked back over to pour the right amount of milk out. He dumped the liquid into the batter and grabbed one of the two eggs that were needed, since Blaine was already in the process of cracking one of them...

That was when Kurt noticed that Blaine was humming a tune that was almost annoyingly familiar. It was really only "annoyingly familiar" because Kurt couldn't manage to actually remember the song that Blaine was humming. It was like having a tune to a song stuck in your head while not being able to remember the actual lyrics.

"What are you humming?" Kurt asked, cracking the egg into the bowl before walking around Blaine to the trashcan, dropping the eggshell in there and holding out his hand for Blaine to hand him the eggshell he had been working with.

Blaine looked over at Kurt, his eyes a little wider than usual, as if he hadn't been aware that he was humming whatever he was humming, "I was... oh," there was a sad, small, ridiculously heartbreaking smile on his face suddenly, and the dark haired teen picked up the wooden spoon and started mixing the batter, "it's... uhm, it's a song that I used to sing to my little sister when we would... bake together. Or when I would tuck her into bed if my mom was busy..."

Kurt watched Blaine mix the batter with the utmost care... and wondered if the only reason he wanted to bake was because it subconsciously reminded him of his sister, whatever happened to her. That made a lot of sense, even if it was a somewhat sad thought... Kurt stared at Blaine for a few more moments, before he moved slowly to grab the cupcake pan and cups, and set them next to Blaine, working smoothly next to his best friend, their shoulders touching again. He dropped the cups in the crevices diligently, since he wasn't sure if there was anything to be said.

If there was actually anything to be said.

"Kurt," Blaine stated softly just as Kurt put the last cup where it needed to be. Kurt looked to Blaine, ready to ask what he needed—until a cold, batter-covered wooden spoon touched his nose, leaving a rather large blot of brown (since they were making chocolate cupcakes, go figure) on the tip of his nose. "Hey," Blaine whispered while Kurt's eyes crossed in an attempt to stare at his nose, light, unheard laughter evident in his voice.

Kurt blinked a few times... before glaring over at the apparently amused Blaine, "Very mature, Blaine," he retorted, sticking his tongue out briefly in a display of his own minor childishness, making the corner of Blaine's eyes wrinkle due to unheard laughter once again. He reached partially-blindly for a rag, though Blaine leaned across him before he could grope for it, and grabbed it instead. Blaine brought the rag up to Kurt's face, leaning precariously close, holding the rag in front of Kurt's face for a few moments... they just stared at each other, before Blaine touched the rag to the bridge of Kurt's nose, causing Kurt's eyes to close instinctively. The rag was trailed downwards, to

where the batter was starting to drip a little bit, and Blaine wiped the mixture away with the gentlest touch that Kurt had basically ever felt, even from Blaine.

"Sorry, I couldn't resist the random urge," Blaine whispered, stepping back and setting the rag down, before picking the bowl up, beginning to pour the batter into the small paper cups.

Kurt watched his best friend work silently for about a minute or so, "... Sing the song that you were humming to me," he commanded softly, "please?" he added, just to seem less of a bitch than he probably sounded. "You can even... pretend that I'm your sister, or something." The sister whose name Kurt still wasn't aware of. It wasn't like he was about to ask Santana what Blaine's sister's name was. That'd just be... odd.

Blaine's movements stopped, and he looked over at Kurt for a few moments, his eyes looking Kurt up and down, from his face to where his hip was leaned against the counter to his feet, and then back up... before nodding. He continued working, however, as he took a deep breath and started singing, "*You are my sunshine*," Kurt heard softly, "*you make me happy, when skies are gray*," the mostly empty bowl was set down, and Blaine grabbed the pan of filled cups, walking over to the heated oven, opening the door and setting the pan inside. He typed in the time, before turning around and staring at Kurt again... and walking towards him, "*You'll never know dear, how much I love you. Please, don't take my sunshine away...*" Blaine stopped close to Kurt, and Kurt turned himself to face Blaine dead-on once again, pushing away from the counter, "*The other night, dear, when I laid sleeping, I dreamt I held you in my arms. When I awoke, dear, I was mistaken, so I hung my head... and cried...*" Kurt could have sworn that he saw tears start to form in those hazel eyes, but he couldn't be too sure since Blaine closed them and tilted his head downwards.

Kurt stared down into at the top of Blaine's head, wondering what he was thinking... what he was feeling at that moment, "I forgot how good you were at singing," he whispered honestly, "You still sound... amazing. I can't believe I didn't think about that song before... no wonder it was so familiar..."

The next thing that was said was unexpected. Santana charging in and stealing Blaine away could have been more expected—hell, the end of the world could have been more expected than what happened next. Blaine lifted his head slowly, tears still shining in his eyes, but held back skillfully... what a depressing skill, "I'm ready. To tell you what happened that week. To tell you... about my family."

Chapter Sixteen: Oh Simple Thing, Where Have You Gone?

They let the cupcakes finish baking before having the anticipated conversation in total silence so that the poor things wouldn't burn. No use in sacrificing perfectly good chocolate cakes. Plus, Kurt's father and/or stepbrother may end up annoyed by the burnt confections that they could have potentially enjoyed. Blaine was leaning against the counter and Kurt was cleaning the dishes slowly... the cupcakes were taking for-fucking-ever. It was honestly getting on Kurt's nerves. Then again, it was probably the anticipation that was building up inside of his chest like a swelling balloon that made him feel horribly on edge. Still, the complete and utter silence between them just left Kurt with his thoughts... and the mere fact that they were in a kitchen just made Kurt think back to the dream he had in the hospital... the dream when they were older and living together. Instinctively, his face heated up and he almost dropped the bowl in the process of washing it because... that dream had never actually been finished, though he had been extremely aware of where it was going. He kept his grip though, and lowered his head more to continue washing the things that they used... which wasn't much. Honestly, he had washed everything in the sink at least twice.

Stupid cupcakes. Taking forever to bake... it was like they wanted Kurt to die of utter anticipation or fear or something.

Finally, after what felt like forever and even more, maybe a millennia or something, the alarm on the oven sounded, telling both of them that the cupcakes were done. Kurt nearly dropped the plate that was used earlier that day, probably around breakfast time, that he sloppily saved in his haste to finish drying it and to get to the oven. Rather than setting it into the cupboard for dishes like he was supposed to, he just set it on the counter and threw the towel on top of it before rushing to grab the oven mitts. Somewhere behind him, he heard Blaine walk over and grab the abandoned plate to set it in the cupboard, and put the towel where it was supposed to be.

Ever polite Blaine.

Kurt pulled open the oven door, his eyes closing at the heat that rushed out and spread across his face... he couldn't stop his mind from thinking that Blaine's breath felt so much better, and blushed due to it. Mentally, he blamed the heat, before grabbing the pan and stepping back to set the pan on top of the stove to let it cool, before closing the oven door. He took off the oven mitts, before turning around and seeing Blaine on the clear other side of the kitchen, standing at the door with his hands in his pockets, staring off to the side.

With a small nod, just to himself, Kurt set the oven mitts on the counter before walking over to Blaine, placing his hand gently on his best friend's upper arm, "Let's go upstairs," he whispered softly. Blaine nodded, and reached up to take Kurt's hand, squeezing his gently, in an almost desperate manner that made Kurt wonder if the dark haired teen just needed some form of comfort before he really started talking... he didn't voice the thought, though. Instead, he held Blaine's hand gently and led him up the stairs and to his room, closing the door slightly behind him. Only when they were securely in Kurt's room did Blaine slowly let go of his hand, sliding the tips of his pointer, middle, ring, and pinky fingers lightly against the palm of Kurt's hand, leaving a lingering touch before Blaine sat down on his bed, pulling his legs up on it.

After getting over the slight chill that ran up Kurt's spine from the barely-there touch of Blaine's fingers, he walked over to his laptop and opened it, moving his finger on the mouse pad to wake it up, before opening his iTunes and automatically selecting his "Soft Music" playlist. He set it on random, before turning back to Blaine, who was watching him from his spot on the bed, and walking over, sitting next to Blaine and pulling his legs onto the bed as well.

Nothing was said for a few moments. The only sound that filled the room was the soft music playing from the speakers of Kurt's laptop. Even their breathing was quieter than a pin dropping in a silent room. Kurt watched Blaine, letting his friend gather his thoughts, as he appeared to be, and ready himself. He didn't want to rush the mysterious teen at all... because Blaine was actually trusting Kurt enough to tell him what happened the year prior. Blaine was putting full trust into Kurt.

It was even bigger than someone telling Kurt that they trusted him with their life. It was bigger than just about anything else in the world at that time.

Finally, Blaine looked directly at Kurt, his emotional barrier absolutely crumbling, Kurt could tell. So many things were shining in his hazel eyes: sadness, anger, regret, terror, self-hatred... it made Kurt want to reach out and pull Blaine into his arms and never let him go, ever. "I... my past is odd. Not really complicated, just odd," Blaine began, sounding surprisingly calm compared to his eyes. "I grew up in the same neighborhood, the same house, with the same best friend. My brother is William Anderson, my mother is Lin Anderson, my father is Edmund Anderson... and my sister is Serena Anderson.

"We were happy, in the past," the use of "in the past" made Kurt a little nervous. "Everything was okay, put together, we were an entire family unit. My father had his big company, and my mother was more

of a stay at home type. My brother was intelligent and basically the perfect son, and my sister was... well, she is a lot younger than me, but when she came along it felt as if everything... was complete, somehow, in our family. She was like a balance between William and myself, since we were always rivals for our father's affection and attention. I... I really did want his affection, or maybe I just wanted his attention more... though William always complained that our mother loved me more. Either way, Serena was like a happy medium after she was born... until she learned how to pick favorites, anyways.

"When she started to lean more towards me as far as her favorite siblings, my brother steadily got angrier at me. Of course, nothing ever came out of it apart from a few yelling matches... he just began to stick by my father as he got older while Serena and I spent more time with our mother when she wasn't busy. Otherwise, we were almost constantly together when I was home. Serena... she was like my everything from the moment she was born, in a lot of ways.

"Serena was a prodigy, if there was even a singular word to ever describe her properly. She was highly intelligent and ended up skipping kindergarten and first grade right off the bat. She loved to draw and was obsessed with cats and was the bubbliest person you'd ever meet. She was nice to absolutely *everybody* unless you gave her a reason to be mean to you, and protected people when they needed to be protected. It was like... she was a ray of sunshine. When I told her what I saw her as..." a bitter, sad smile spread across Blaine face as he looked directly at Kurt, "she started asking me to sing "My Little Sunshine" to her whenever she could. Who was I to ever refuse? I loved playing the song on guitar and I loved singing it... plus, it was Serena. It was like she had me wrapped around her little finger all the time... she was my entire world for a long time, she was just that important to me.

"Then, I started high school," Blaine looked away from Kurt and closed his eyes, laughing bitterly, in a way that just... wasn't him. It was almost scary. "I was suddenly the center of attention—I don't know how or why—which was just odd to me, since my entire life I had been second to my brother as far as my father was concerned, and I was asked to join just about a million different things. I ended up choosing the obvious... because of my father. Because of what he thought would be best for me and for my own future... or, that's what he told me. I'm pretty sure that it was to ensure I wouldn't be a failure but whatever..."

Kurt was about to interject and say that Blaine wasn't a failure no matter what, but couldn't manage to form words in his mouth.

He looked back at Kurt, suddenly stonily serious, "You and the New Directions and just about everyone else in school always wondered why I didn't join glee club. If I had, people might have liked the glee club a lot more... or maybe they would have shunned me personally. The reason why I never joined... is because my father thought it'd be a waste of my time, that I shouldn't get involved with that kind of thing." Kurt's mouth dropped open slightly at this, and Blaine looked away again, "I was always wanting to please him... so I didn't join, even though I wanted to... I wanted to, so badly, Kurt. So badly..." Blaine's voice broke slightly and he took a few deep breaths to compose himself.

"A few weeks into freshman year, I was already beyond busy. Homework piled up to mountainous heights, and tests and quizzes were coming left and right. Add soccer, debate, orchestra, and science extracurricular activities onto that and you get an overscheduled Blaine Anderson. Maybe overscheduled isn't the right term, maybe it's even an understatement... I somehow handled it all, though, and managed to spend a little bit of time with Serena every day. I'm not sure how I managed, but I did.

"Then, out of nowhere, Quinn asked me out and I was too nice to say no, plus I did like her, at least a little bit unless I'm thinking about some other blonde. And then you add a girlfriend onto the list... a girlfriend who is a cheerleader rising fast in the ranks for a young freshman. That meant parties on the weekends, which meant that I had to spend more time on the weekdays on homework... and that boiled down to less time with Serena.

"Of course, I broke up with Quinn eventually... not because I didn't like her from the beginning like a lot of people said, because I did like her enough to date her, obviously as I said before, but just because I didn't have enough time to really handle a publicly-known girlfriend, hence why my next relationship with Santana was kept a secret. I expected the invited to parties to stop there... but they didn't. If anything, I was invited to even more, and I ended up going to every single one for some insane reason that I cannot figure out to this day. Slowly, I started saying no, not to my peers like I probably should have... but to my own little sister.

"You see... everyday, after school, Serena had a habit of skipping into my room and asking me if I wanted to play. She'd always ask the same thing: "Blaine, d'you want to play with me?" It was always in her cute, small voice that I could never say no to... until that point in my high school life. I started saying no to her... because I had to, because I was always too busy with the far-too large pile of homework I always had or studying for a quiz or test or getting ready for something that

was deemed "important" when it really just... wasn't. At all. She always took it in stride, though, smiling and saying that it was okay and that I shouldn't feel bad or anything, as if she knew how utterly guilty I felt. She'd always skip out, humming "You Are My Sunshine" to herself...

"Freshman year turned into sophomore year, the summer in between the two I tried to spend as much time as possible with Serena... even though it really wasn't enough, not that I knew that at the time.

Slowly, as the school year restarted, she only dropped by my room every other day... and then every two days... which then turned into only on Wednesdays and Sundays... and it faded into once a week, and then, suddenly, never. She didn't even pass by my room, actually...

She slowly became quieter and more reserved... and she began to spend more and more time in her room with her cat, and less and less time running around or going to her friend's, Johan's, house. Serena started pulling into herself... and I didn't even notice. I didn't recognize any of the blatantly *there* signs that were pushed into my face."

Blaine had started to *tremble* and Kurt just wanted to pull Blaine into his arms yet again, though he refrained when Blaine turned his gaze to Kurt once again, his eyes starting to water slowly again.

Kurt *really* didn't like where this story was heading... then again, he hadn't really liked where it was heading to begin with. He knew that this was going to have a sad ending... there was no other way it could end.

"She... fell silent, around Thanksgiving or so, and I still didn't really notice, because I was always so busy with everything else in my life, because I had so much school work and because I had Santana. I didn't notice... I didn't ask her if she was okay, I didn't help her at all, even though earlier in sophomore year she had tried reaching out to me in the way that she always had... she needed me to be there for her... and I kept saying no. I kept saying no when Serena really needed me...

"Apparently, she had been getting harshly bullied by a group of her classmates. Normally, she would have stood up to them effortlessly... but they had threatened to hurt Johan if she stood up to them as she normally would have... and that was the only reason she stepped down and let them do what they did to her. She couldn't bear to let Johan get hurt because of her natural instincts to fight back... No one ever... got exact details on how they bullied her... but it was bad enough to cause her to stop talking all together, and to cause her to become introverted, the exact opposite of how she had been before everything started happening. It escalated... to the point where, on January 25th, that group of kids that tormented her... pushed her down the stairs."

Kurt's mouth fell open again. What the *fuck*? A group of kids... pushed a girl at least two years younger than them... down the stairs... what was wrong with society? Seriously, what the hell?

Blaine rubbed a face over his hand, and let out a small sob that he obviously tried to muffle... but failed, heartbreakingly so, "They swore that they meant it as a joke... they swore that they didn't actually think she'd fall... they looked sorry, and they probably were sorry... not that she was hurt, though, I'm sure. They were probably only sorry that they got in so much trouble for it..." a pause, "Serena, uhm... she got really, really hurt and was in the hospital for about a week. That was why I was gone... for that entire time span... I needed to stay with her at all times. I couldn't allow myself not to... it physically hurt me when I wasn't with her."

"That... that still doesn't explain why you stopped talking, though..." Kurt didn't want to be insensitive... but he couldn't will himself to move to comfort Blaine physically for some reason. It was like he was frozen.

With a small sniff, Blaine still wouldn't look at Kurt... as if he were ashamed of himself. It wasn't much of a long shot to think that maybe Blaine was ashamed of himself, though. "I told you once that my father is very persuasive... well, I wasn't kidding. He is. He wasn't particularly happy when he found out his little girl was bullied and pushed down the stairs... and that she had reached out to someone but no one helped, no one even noticed the signs... he blamed me, indirectly." Kurt's eyes widened, and he opened his mouth to say a possibly rude remark about Blaine's dad, but was cut off, "His way of punishment... is basically mentally manipulating a person, because he's mentally superior to virtually everyone in the world. He made it well known that he thought it was my fault without straight up saying the words... and did nothing after that. It messed with my head that he didn't give me a formal punishment, as it always had messed with me... and my mind conjured up my own punishment, out of my own self-hatred for doing this to my sister... the punishment to be isolated, just like she was. The music was just added on because... honestly, I hated society after that. I hated it for taking away the sunshine in my life. I wanted to ignore everybody around me, I wanted them all to fade into the background."

"Blaine," Kurt called out, *finally* moving closer to his best friend, "it wasn't your fault that all of that happened to Serena! And... well, I understand the hatred towards society, but still... you didn't deserve to do that to yourself, at all."

"I don't think you understand, Kurt," Blaine whispered, shaking his head a little bit, "I neglected Serena when she needed me the most."

That can be considered child abuse in its most emotional form... she was practically going mentally insane because there was absolutely no one there to help her." Blaine started crying—not that Kurt could actually see, it was the way that his voice wavered that made it obvious. "I couldn't take an hour of my time to spend time with her... to ask her if everything was okay... I neglected my little sister when she *needed* me, more than anyone else in the entire world."

Kurt reached out and touched Blaine's shoulder gently, wanting Blaine to look at him... his head didn't move at all, though. It didn't even seem like he noticed Kurt's touch, "It still wasn't your fault, Blaine... if it was your fault then it's just as much as your parents' faults, too. You don't deserve to have all the blame dropped onto your shoulders... because it wasn't your fault in any way. Just... believe me when I say that Blaine, please, believe me. Listen to me. Just listen to *me*... don't... don't listen to the demons in your mind," Kurt voice dropped to the softest whisper as he moved a little bit more towards Blaine.

"Just... just me. That sounds vain, but—"

"I want to believe you," Blaine suddenly interjected, his breathing almost alarmingly shaky, "I want to listen to you, so much... I want to ignore everything in my head that's telling me that this is all wrong, that it's my entire fault... but I can't. My father's... tactics of punishment... have led me to a mental state that I can't escape."

There was a long, long pause, and Kurt didn't know what to say.

"People say that it's bad when something is wrong with a person and they don't realize it... I personally think that it's worse when the person does realize it... but knows they can't do anything about it."

"Blaine—"

Blaine seemed to ignore what Kurt started to say, though he finally looked back at Kurt, a dead, cold, empty smile on his face that made Kurt's stomach twist in the worst way possible, as a few tears continued to fall from his bloodshot eyes, "I was doing great, with the self-inflicted punishment that my own twisted mind made up for me... until I was partnered with a stubborn brunet who always said the right things to get me to talk for a huge English project that was several months long. I couldn't exactly help myself, after that."

Kurt's eyebrow rose, and his heart pounding in his ears abruptly became all too evident to him. The next thing he knew, he and Blaine were falling onto the bed, and he was laying on top of Blaine... yeah, that caused his ribs to flare up in pain, but that wasn't too big of a deal, because... well, he was lying on top of his best friend. Who he was in love with. Why would minor pain matter when *that* was happening? Still, he pressed his face against the shocked Blaine's chest, and muttered, "I'm not that bad... and it still wasn't your fault..."

Slowly, Blaine's arms wrapped around him and held him loosely, before shifting him upwards on Blaine's body, until the top of his head met Blaine's face, "You know how I am, Kurt. I just explained... or tried to explain why I'm this way," he breathed, "I just... I can't... help it. I blame myself because there's no one else to blame... I hate myself because I know that I did this to my own little sister..." Blaine's voice quieted even more, regardless of the fact that that was nearly impossible, "I hate myself for letting you get hurt by bullies..." the arms around Kurt tightened, but not enough to cause pain. Only enough to seem possessive.

Possessive.

"Please," Kurt said softly, his hands finding purchase on Blaine's shoulders, "please, tell me that you didn't inflict self-punishment on yourself because of what happened to me." Honestly, Kurt didn't think he would be able to handle it, if Blaine did anything to himself because Kurt got beat up by his tormentors.

The breathing from the chest that he was laying on stuttered, Kurt could feel it, and a hand was suddenly grasping one of the hands on Blaine's shoulders, holding it gently. "I didn't," Blaine whispered, and Kurt's heart felt a little less heavy than before. It still felt like it was being crushed by a hundred bricks, but still, "Knowing how hurt you were... was enough," Kurt's hand was brought up to Blaine's face, and the brunet lifted his head from Blaine's chest just in time to see and feel lips press softly against the knuckles of his hand... and then his wrist. It was his previously broken wrist, once again. "I guess if you wanted to look at the situation in a certain way... pulling back into myself could be considered self-punishment... but I don't see it that way."

Blaine's eyes slid down to Kurt's face, and there was still so much pain and sadness in his hazel eyes... but there was also a sense of warmth that made Kurt smile just a little bit, despite the situation. "Of course you don't," Kurt whispered, shifting upwards a little bit more.

There was a tense moment of silence, suddenly, as Kurt laid on top of Blaine and stared at him... and Blaine stared back. The soft music was still playing in the background, when Blaine took a deep breath, his chest rising, "You're going to hurt yourself if you keep lying on your stomach on top of me," he muttered, squeezing Kurt's hand slightly, since he was still holding it.

Kurt nodded slowly, and rolled off of Blaine carefully, back onto his bed before sitting up and setting his feet on the ground, "We... we can go ice the cupcakes, if you want," he suggested, looking over his shoulder back at Blaine, who was still sprawled across his bed, "If you're ready to leave my room, that is..."

Blaine stared at him again, not even blinking, before he closed his eyes and nodded, "Yeah. We can go ice cupcakes," he muttered, sitting up and sliding towards the edge of the bed carefully, standing up and brushing his pants off for no particular reason.

The brunet stared up at Blaine's back for a few more seconds, before he stood up and walked over to his laptop, pressing the pause button on the music and closing the computer. He turned and walked towards the door, pulling it open again and letting Blaine walk out of there first. They headed back down stairs together, Kurt following Blaine, and back into the kitchen, where their completely cooled brownies still sat in the tray. Automatically, Kurt went to get the miniature cakes out of the pan, and Blaine went to the cupboard to get icing they had up there for some reason... Kurt could have sworn that he always made sure that kind of stuff wasn't on their shopping list, but whatever. Together, in mainly silence, they used butter knives to spread the vanilla icing onto their chocolate cupcakes... until Kurt absentmindedly mentioned something about sprinkles probably hiding near the back of the cabinet that they could use, causing Blaine to walk over to the cupboard he got the icing from again, pulling it open and pushing boxes and containers aside. After a few moments of shuffling items around, Kurt saw Blaine grab something out of the corner of his eyes, and went back to concentrating on the cupcakes, content with letting Blaine walk all five or less steps that he needed to take to return to his previous post without supervision.

Kurt's shoulders stiffened automatically when he felt Blaine's presence directly behind him, and forced himself to relax because... it was Blaine. He knew that it was Blaine behind him, and there was no reason to panic. So, he took a few deep breaths as Blaine reached around him and set the container of blue sprinkles onto the counter. Kurt expected Blaine to step off to the side when the light item was put down... but, instead, his arms wrapped around Kurt's middle, and his face pressed against his neck, causing Kurt's face to heat up slightly.

"What...?" Kurt forced out of his air-deprived throat, seeing as he stopped breathing when Blaine started randomly wrapping himself around him again... only this time they were standing up.

"I lied," Blaine whispered, his breath spreading over Kurt's neck, causing the slightly taller male to shiver because his neck was still stupidly sensitive. "I wasn't ready to leave your room... I kind of just want to hold you, right now. Or to be held. I don't care."

Kurt set down the butter knife slowly, and turned around in Blaine's arms, causing the dark haired teen to lift his face from Kurt's neck... and they stared at each other for a while, until Kurt's pale arms lifted

to wrap slowly around Blaine's neck, and Blaine's face found itself pressed against the pale neck once again, "You can," Kurt faltered when he repeated the words that he was about to say in his head, flushing a little more because of the way they sounded, "You can... hold me, for as long as you want. I will never object, if you need me... ever."

Blaine's arms tightened around Kurt's middle slightly, "Thank you."
"You're welcome."

—

Eventually, they had to finish icing the cupcakes and they had to clean everything up... when they managed to do that, though, they each grabbed a cupcake and sat together on the couch, sitting separately for a few minutes to eat... before the paper cups were dropped onto the end tables and Kurt found himself leaning against Blaine again as the TV played some random show that neither of them even paid attention to.

Carole came home shortly after they started cuddling on the couch and watching the TV, and dropped in on them briefly, before whispering a sorry and fleeing the room as quickly as possible, whispering something about giving them alone time.

Neither could even feel embarrassed.

Soon after Carole arrived home, though, Blaine had to leave, and he and Kurt hugged for a ridiculously long time in front of the door, neither exactly wanting to let go... though they did, eventually, because they had to. When Blaine left, Kurt wandered up to his room, telling Carole to call him down when dinner would be served, falling into his bed—careful to fall on his bed and not on his stomach. It took him a while of lying there... before he felt tears come to his eyes again, because everything that happened... hit him again.

Blaine... he was so severely hurt. It wasn't even like he had a mental illness—really, he just needed to be pulled out of his mental state by the right person—his past was just so... messed up. Or, well, not even his past, because it was really, honestly and truly, his father's twisted mind that made him this way. Sure, it could have potentially made Blaine a stronger man than he already was (especially because he dealt with all of this on his own. No matter what Blaine said, Kurt would always think that he was strong and brave), but it... didn't. It really just broke him.

Kurt's phone buzzed next to him, and he grabbed it, glancing at the name, before quickly looking at the message.

—

From: Blaine

To: Kurt

Thank you. For everything.

-Blaine xx

Kurt locked his phone, and dropped it back onto his bed... before groaning a little bit. It wasn't as simple as that, Kurt knew. Blaine was just... he was so *complicated* that simply figuring out what happened and having him explain everything to the best of his abilities just wasn't... enough. Blaine Anderson was still so much of a mystery, somehow.

Maybe Kurt would never truly figure him out.

He wouldn't be surprised if that was the case.

Chapter Seventeen: I Could Really Use a Wish Right Now

It was Tuesday when Kurt looked over at Blaine while they were driving to school, a contemplative look on his face and a sudden thought in his head that should have been there on the previous Saturday when they were hanging out... and when Blaine finally told Kurt about what happened. Yes, anyone could say that Kurt was relieved, and could be telling the truth, because he was... but at the same time, Kurt could almost *feel* the regret that Blaine was feeling by telling him. He couldn't even lie that he felt some form of responsibility... not for what happened to his best friend, no, but to help him heal, to help him get better.

Of course, Kurt always wanted to do that to an extent. Getting close to Blaine and learning more about him just intensified those feelings, really.

So, Kurt was just staring at Blaine as he drove down the road to the high school, concentrated completely on the road... even though Kurt knew that Blaine could sense his stare, if not actually see it out of the corner of his eye. It wasn't even like Kurt was trying to hide how much he was staring, since he was just... well, blatantly doing so.

When they parked in the parking lot, Blaine turned off the car and pulled the keys out of the ignition, pocketing them smoothly as he normally did. After he did that... well, they just sat there together, Blaine staring ahead of them at the tree they parked in front of (behind?), Kurt staring at Blaine's profile. Nothing was said between them for several minutes.

"Something is on your mind," Blaine stated, not bothering to ask Kurt anything since it was so obvious, finally looking over at the pale brunet. "Don't bother to pretend that nothing is. You've been staring at me since we pulled away from your house."

Kurt sighed, leaning back in his seat and shrugging a little bit, "I wasn't going to pretend that nothing is. There's no point... and I knew that you were aware of my staring. I'm not enough of an idiot to think that you didn't..." he trailed off and glanced away for a moment. Blaine wanted Kurt to ask him the question that was on his mind, he knew it... but he just wasn't entirely sure how to ask it. "... Serena... your sister..." Kurt saw Blaine stiffen all too visibly, and mentally cringed. Maybe it was better if he didn't bring it up... but it was too late at that point. "How... how is she doing now? The accident a year ago happened... but now I don't know what's going on with her. You... you don't have to tell me if you don't want to, though."

Blaine shrugged, in a somewhat sad attempt to lessen the obvious stiffness of his shoulders, "She... she's being homeschooled, now, by a tutor that my parents hired for her. She still doesn't talk... at all. I haven't heard her speak in over a year..." Blaine stared out of his window, and Kurt was a little afraid that Blaine would start to cry. The dark haired teen cleared his throat and shook his head, before looking back at Blaine, "She has a habit of writing notes when she wants to converse with someone. That's how we know that everything is okay after..."

"Everything is okay after...?" Kurt echoed, an eyebrow rising slightly, "Is there... still something not okay, with Serena?" Kurt had an extremely strong feeling that he was overstepping his boundaries as a best friend and confidant by asking this... but he was honestly curious, and there wasn't much else that could really be said.

Blaine swallowed thickly, and nodded slowly, "She had nightmares... or, more like he has nightmares, about those kids that tormented her. Or sometimes she just has really bad nightmares about something or other... she never tells anyone what exactly they're about, but she has them a lot more than she really should. When she first came home... from the hospital last year, they were constant and terrifying, according to her reactions, but they've... gotten better, now. She doesn't have them as often. And they don't seem severe."

There was about a minute of silence, as they watched a few kids walk past the car they were seated in, talking and heading towards yet another day of school, and Kurt thought about the virtually anonymous little girl who was Serena Anderson. The nightmares were clearly signs of posttraumatic depression brought on by the probably terrorizing experiences Serena went through.

Good grief. Kurt wasn't a damn doctor... though, recalling what he learned in health *about* posttraumatic depression, the nightmares seemed to fit some characteristics. Serena seemed so...*young*, though. "You have another question."

Yet another blunt statement from Blaine, always so attentive... it was actually a little scary every so often. It did help move conversations along, though, since Blaine started to basically talk whenever they had something to talk about. In private, though, never in public. That was still a whole other step.

Kurt shifted in his seat boarder line uncomfortably, "I don't... want to put you in a spot you don't want to be in, Blaine. I can tell that asking all the questions on my mind right now will upset you, at least a little bit, and I don't want you to be sad or anything, at all." Because he honestly didn't. Seeing Blaine so hurt and upset... well, it hurt Kurt,

too. A lot. An almost unbearable sadness overtook him when Blaine looked like he was about to get overemotional. Blaine dragged his fingers through his gelled, curly hair, sighing softly, "Kurt... you're my... best friend," Kurt's eyebrow rose very slightly at the pause before best friend, but didn't say anything about it. "Yeah, these questions will probably upset me, but it's all clearly something you want to know about. I won't... answer anything I'm not comfortable with answering, so you don't have to worry about putting me in a spot I don't want to be in... not really, anyways. I'm letting you ask these questions, after all," Blaine looked over at Kurt, his expression so completely vulnerable suddenly, "because I trust you." Kurt quite literally felt his mental net snap, and his heart jump a little too much at those three words. *I trust you*. Well, despite the fact that Kurt had already been extremely aware of Blaine's trust in him, hearing it verbally was just... so much different, for some reason. It made his face heat up a little bit, and his heart race in his chest, and his breathing stutter slightly... it was a bizarre reaction. He took a deep shaky breath in an attempt to calm himself... before licking his lips and nodding a little, "I just... I just wondered what your mother did about all of this. About your self-inflicted punishment... did she try to stop it at all?"

It looked like Blaine actually had to think about the answer, seeing as his eyes glanced away from Kurt and a small frown pulled at his mouth, and his eyebrows furrowed just slightly. Seeing as Kurt stared at Blaine as often as he did (in a not-creepy way), he knew extremely well that the facial expression he was making was his "thinking face". Slowly, Blaine's eyes slid back towards Kurt, and he bit the inside of his mouth briefly, "My mom is a sweet, kind mother, who is also busy. She realizes my... tendencies, and did try to get me to stop my self-inflicted punishment of isolation and silence for a while... though, my honest guess is that my father told her to stop because I deserved every last thing that I was doing to myself, so she stopped after about a month of trying to get me to talk. I never did talk to her, obviously, but... she tried. She did."

"How did I get you to talk, in that case?" Kurt asked abruptly. He hadn't even been thinking about that earlier... well, until that moment, anyways. He wasn't about to take back the question, though, since... technically, Kurt had at least the partial right to know, since he was involved.

Blaine stared over at Kurt, some emotion flickering in his eyes from the question that Kurt really couldn't pick out, which bothered him to some extent. The emotion disappeared quickly, though, and Blaine looked away, at the steering wheel, a very slight smile on his face,

"I've told you this before, Kurt," he stated softly, slumping back in his seat a little bit, "you're just... special." At that, Blaine lifted his head again and looked over at Kurt with one of the gentlest smiles he had even seen, and it was so... what was the word? Was there even really another word to describe that smile?

Taking a deep breath, Kurt mulled over his thoughts for a few moments, trying to sort out his thoughts properly to ask the right questions, "... What ever happened to your brother? William was his name, wasn't it?"

The noticeable stiffness returned to Blaine's shoulders, and Kurt resisted the almost overwhelming urge to reach out and place his hand on Blaine's right shoulder, which was closest to him. "William..." Blaine stated, his voice falling into a partially monotonous state, "he's... he's in college right now, his first year of college. Yale. He's dating some girl... I think her name was Emily. He's... studying to be a lawyer..." Kurt opened his mouth to ask about William's reaction to everything, though Blaine continued speaking, as if he knew that Kurt was about to ask. "He reacted somewhat similarly to the way that my father reacted. He was angry with me and made it known that he was... he had our father's talent of not falling for the mind game, unlike me. I think... that at one point during the week, he tried to make me leave because I was a "hazard to Serena's health" or something... I honestly can't remember. That entire week... it such a blur in my mind for some reason."

"... You don't think that you are a serious hazard to Serena's health, do you?" Kurt asked, studying Blaine critically because... the way Blaine said those words make him a little bit more nervous than he probably should have been.

Blaine didn't say anything for a few moments, before he just looked away from Kurt again, and out the window, his entire body tensing automatically, "I... my actual... feelings towards everything that has happened... are complicated and odd. I'm so glad that she's physically okay but... but I just... Kurt, I literally cannot forgive myself after what happened," Blaine choked out after trying to start an explanation, "I... she writes to me, sometimes. She asks me if I'm okay and if there's anything wrong and... it hurts. I can never hold a conversation with her very long because... every time I would look at her, back in September and the time before then, I just hear *her* voice telling me that she'll never forgive me." His voice broke multiple times at his shaky explanation, and Kurt reached out, finally, placing a hand softly on Blaine's shoulder.

"In September? Then... you haven't heard that since then?" Kurt asked. He really, really hoped that Blaine hadn't been blatantly

avoiding his sister since then, because that... that really wasn't the way to deal with the situation.

Blaine's hand reached up and gripped Kurt's gently, but firmly, as Blaine slowly turned back around to face Kurt fully. There was a very slight smile on his face, despite the pain in his eyes, "It was around that time we got assigned the English project," he explained, taking Kurt's hand from his shoulder. He held it gently, his thumb basically *caressing* Kurt's ring finger, "That was when I was partnered with that stubborn brunet... who just kind of made everything... better." Kurt's eyebrows rose again, and Blaine leaned forwards a little bit, "That certain brunet also reminded me a little bit of my sister. There were some obvious differences, however."

Kurt really couldn't help but smile a little bit, before glancing down at their intertwined hands... and realizing something, "This... this is going off topic, but you're a little obsessed with my hands, Blaine."

A moment of silence passed between them... before Blaine started to *shake* with unheard laughter, and he turned his face away from Kurt for a full minute to calm down. Kurt himself really couldn't help but laugh a little bit, as well, because... seriously, that was so awkwardly off-topic it was hilarious. Finally, Blaine looked back at him, a little bit of mirth shining in his eyes now, "I suppose that I am," Blaine answered, smiling a little bit. It... it felt really nice, knowing that Kurt could make Blaine smile after talking about something so traumatic... was it odd that it felt nice?

It probably was.

"May I possibly ask why you are so obsessed with my hands—particularly my left one, which had a broken wrist not too long ago?"

Kurt asked, sounding way too proper just for pure amusement, his eyebrow rising once again. Plus, he really did want to know... Blaine was legitimately touchy... when it came to Kurt's hands. Never anything else. Just his hands.

Blaine laughed a little bit, just barely and under his breath, his eyes only closing briefly before finding Kurt's eyes again, "Maybe I'll explain to you someday," he whispered, squeezing Kurt's hand gently.

That small, miniscule, probably subconscious gesture suddenly made everything start to jump around in Kurt's head, and all of his thoughts jumbled and mixed together into a confusing cluster of thoughts, some of which Kurt hadn't even acknowledged at all before that moment, like...

"Let's skip school," Kurt suddenly rushed out and—wow, he really had to stop speaking before he finished a thought properly, especially when nothing was really set in stone in his head, because that was a *ridiculous* thing to propose. Skipping school? What had even brought

him to that thought? Was anything really even making sense anymore?

No, not really.

Surprise widened Blaine's hazel eyes as his eyebrows rose upwards slowly. It would be hilarious to watch... if it weren't for the fact that Kurt was seriously wondering about his sanity. "You, Kurt Hummel," Blaine began, pulling his hand away from Kurt's slowly, the amusement all too clear in his voice suddenly, "want to... skip school? As in play hooky?" He chuckled shortly, his hand covering his mouth, the laugh hanging in the air along with Kurt's extreme horror. "Who are you, exactly, and what have you done to my best friend?" Kurt rolled his eyes at Blaine's mock-surprise (or maybe it was serious) and amusement of the situation, fighting down his own confusion at his random mind as he turned to stare out the window, "I just... I just think that you need a day away, okay? It's not like missing a day of school is going to destroy our grades, and I doubt either of us have any quizzes or tests today, and I could always... get a note myself or something," Kurt explained, mostly trying to figure out his mental process that led to him thinking about skipping school. "I mean we don't have to... it was just a random idea, since first period is starting soon."

There were a few moments of silence... until Kurt heard the unmistakable sound of a key sliding into the ignition, and turned at this, his mouth dropping open slightly as Blaine turned the keys, starting the car back up. Blaine looked over at Kurt... and grinned shortly, making Kurt's stomach tighten slightly. When was the last time he had saw Blaine really grin? ... A while ago.

Actually, it felt like a full lifetime ago.

"Like I'm going to pass up the chance to skip school with you," Blaine explained, looking behind him before backing out of the parking space when the area behind him was clear of teenagers running full speed towards the school in a vain effort to not be late for first period, "It's not that big of a deal, like you said. It might even be fun."

Kurt groaned, just a little bit, "I shouldn't have said anything," he muttered, pressing a hand to his forehead.

There was another light laugh, "We can back out now, if you want."

"No, let's go," Kurt said easily, looking out the window as the car came to a stop in front of the main road, obviously so that Blaine could choose a direction to turn into. There was a moment of hesitation, and Kurt was absolutely sure that Blaine was surprised that his quick response. Even Kurt was a little bit surprised... but not as much as before. Honestly, he knew from the moment he saw Blaine grin like that and laugh just a little bit, that he wouldn't say no.

Blaine Anderson just had that crazy effect on him, no matter what.

They drove around Lima for a while, just talking idly and enjoying each other's company together. It was only around lunchtime, when they had driven through every part of Lima (except for near Kurt's dad's garage. They could never be too careful about this), that they parked outside of the park (coincidentally), and thought about something to do... apart from go to Kurt's house.

"Why don't we go to your house?" Kurt finally asked, looking at Blaine, who was looking at him questioningly. "Well, I haven't been there since we worked on the project," he voice faltered slightly at the memory, though he pushed on easily, "and you never did exactly showed me around your house. I basically got lost last time getting a drink of water."

Blaine seemed to contemplate the idea for a while, his hands flexing on the steering wheel... before he finally nodded slowly, "My house... yeah, I suppose that we can go to my house and hang out. My... my father will be at work... and my mother will probably be out with the ladies... yeah, okay," it seemed more like Blaine was talking to himself, before he turned the keys in the ignition once again and backed out of the parking space.

Kurt blinked, surprised that Blaine actually accepted the idea... though he didn't say anything about his surprise. Blaine was actually taking him to his house again... like he would ruin *this* chance.

Kurt Hummel wasn't stupid.

They drove through Lima silently, and Kurt stared out the window, looking at passing things that seemed to familiar to him since they had been there basically his whole life. Since he wasn't driving this time, when they hit the area of Lima that Kurt didn't go to often due to the fact that there was no actual reason to go there, he stared at the newer looking things... until they turned into the huge neighborhood with the oversized houses and huge front lawns. It was so different than the small, cozy Lima that Kurt grew up in...

Blaine turned the car into the Anderson driveway, and reached up to the pull-down mirror where the garage door opener was, and pressed the button on the very right, causing the door to start to pull up. He slowed down as he neared the garage, and pointed to the house on the right, across Kurt's face, "That's where Santana lives, in case you were wondering," he noted, as if he *knew* that the first time Kurt was there he wondered which out was Santana's. Well, now he knew.

Walking into the house from the garage was vastly different than walking in through the front door because... well, it automatically led into the huge-ass kitchen, rather than the still huge front hall.

Everything was still and silent, just as it had been before... well, there was a maid walking around doing miscellaneous things, but that was just about it. Everything else looked so... perfect. Untouched.

They both handed their jackets to the maid, before Blaine took Kurt's hand and led him out of the kitchen into some other room that Kurt hadn't found the last time that he was there, "This is the living room," Blaine stated, nodding at the huge couch and TV, "though I'm sure that you can figure that out by the main components. I don't really use this room too much, though this is where my parents relax mainly when they're not busy with other things." Kurt nodded, eyeing the bookcases on the far side of the wall that were in between perfectly spaced huge windows.

Blaine led him through every room on the first floor, apart from the bathrooms, even though there wasn't much... well, there was a lavish office that he said was his father's, and there was a library... to which Kurt just had to ask how many books the Andersons owned. It looked like Blaine was about to answer... before he frowned a little bit... and then shrugged.

Seemed like even Blaine didn't know.

By the time they reached the second floor, Kurt was pretty damn tired of walking around. Blaine seemed to notice immediately, and told Kurt that he'd only show him two more rooms, and led him down a hallway to a huge pair of ridiculously pretty doors that had window panes carefully lined and spaced that was at the very end of the hall. On the inside of the door, there were obvious curtains hanging, keeping Kurt from actually looking inside at the moment, until Blaine grabbed the handles and pushed the doors open carefully.

Kurt's eyebrows rose at the inside of the room, and he automatically stepped inside of it, looking around in partial awe. It was a gorgeous room, with a huge grand piano and a few instruments lining the hall, with chairs placed in the corners. Well, at least Kurt thought so... until Blaine flipped the light switch, revealing carefully painted deep, beautiful red walls and a perfectly white dome ceiling that had a crystal chandelier hanging from it. The entire room was almost surreal, it was just that beautiful.

"What... what is this room?" Kurt asked, looking around again as his voice echoed very slightly, since the room only had chairs and a few instruments inside.

Blaine walked over next to Kurt, standing close enough that their shoulders touched, looking around as well, "This is the main music room," he explained softly, sighing a little, "it's... our mother used to take us kids in here every night and play for us on the piano.

Obviously, this room hasn't been used for a while, despite the

cleanliness of the place... I used to take Serena in here every so often, too. That was a long, long time ago, though..."

Kurt glanced over at Blaine... and took his hand silently, holding it gently. He let Blaine squeeze his hand tightly, "What's the other room that you wanted to show me?" he asked as quietly as possible, not wanting to disrupt the odd, calming beauty that the room somehow embodied almost flawlessly.

Taking a deep breath, Blaine nodded and let go of Kurt's hand, motioning for him to leave the room, which he did. Blaine turned off the lights, and pulled the doors closed, before walking back over to Kurt and taking his hand again, leading him down the same hall and to the *clear* other side of the house, to yet another huge door that was identical to the music room door. This time, Blaine didn't let go of Kurt's hand, and instead opened one door with his left hand, leading Kurt inside slowly, "This... this is the playroom."

Well, it most certainly *looked* like a playroom. There was an unmistakable cheerfulness that the room held, with its light yellow walls and white curtains pulled away from the windows that let some of the sunshine stream into the room. A few half-bookcases lined one wall, holding colorful books, and there was a toy box pushed into the far corner of the room. In the center, there was a round table, and when Kurt looked to the wall on his right, he saw a dollhouse backed up against the wall as well... it was like looking at a playroom before a kid came in and messed around inside of it.

"We haven't used this room in a while, either, obviously," Blaine noted, a small hint of bitterness in his tone, "this room holds a lot of memories, though..."

Kurt looked over at Blaine again, and opened his mouth to say something—Blaine's phone interrupted him, though, and Blaine pulled said phone out of his pocket, and stared at the screen for a while... before sighing and shaking his head. "Who is it?" Kurt asked, not wanting to actually look at the phone, because that was just a blatant intrusion of privacy.

Blaine pulled his hand from Kurt's, and turned, walking towards the door, "I have to take this call," he explained, a little distracted, "I'll be right back, okay?"

Kurt couldn't even respond with an "Okay" before Blaine was out the door and down the hall, already talking into his phone.

With a small sigh, Kurt turned around and looked at the room once again, even though there really wasn't much to look at. It was just as clean and tidy as every other room in the house... which really was just odd and a little creepy in its own way.

A small noise came from behind Kurt out of nowhere, and before he had time to look around, there was something fluffy brushing against his leg. He froze, stiffening and squeaking a little bit, before looking down slowly... at a pure white cat who was circling his right leg, purring softly, before looking up at him with green cat eyes. Kurt stared back for a few moments, before bending down and picking the cat up, cradling it gently in his arms, "Hey there," he whispered, and the cat seemed to purr again.

There was yet another sound from behind him, though this time it was more of the sound of the door being opened more, and Kurt turned around, expecting to see maybe Blaine or the maid... but neither of those two people were there. Instead, a little girl with black hair pulled into low pigtails wearing a green t-shirt and a white jean jumper stood there, staring at Kurt with no particular emotion in her eyes... until she turned around and ran off.

Kurt let out a small sound of surprise and rushed after the little girl, "Wait!" he called as quietly as he could possibly manage in the huge house, following the sound of footsteps against the softly carpeted floor, and he found himself heading towards the room that he had found the first time he visited. Without thinking, he turned, about to walk into the room—until he noticed the little girl walking out of the room, holding a pad of paper and a pencil. He stopped immediately, not wanting to run the poor thing over, and they bumped into each other briefly. The small child looked up at him through her long, dark bangs, and she wordlessly reached up and grabbed the end of his shirt with her free hand, and pulled him inside of her room.

The cat jumped out of his arms and headed straight to the queen-sized bed, jumping on top of it gracefully and curling up just like any other cat would. The small girl gave a tug on his shirt, causing him to look down again, and she was pointing at the round white table that was still in the same place that it was last time Kurt saw the girl's room... *Serena's* room. He nodded, easily realizing that she wanted him to sit down in the small, white wooden chair that was made for little kids. He silently made his way towards table, and pulled out a small chair and sat in it, positioning his legs in the least awkward way possible to be at least partially comfortable... it probably looked really funny, but whatever.

Serena sat across from Kurt, and stared at him for a few moments... before pushing the pad of paper over to him. He blinked at her a few times, and thought back to what Blaine said... Serena tended to write to people when she wanted to talk to them. Why would Blaine's little sister want to talk to Kurt, though? Regardless, he picked up the pad of paper and read the note.

Snowball seems to really like you, which is odd because she normally doesn't like strangers very much. Who are you?

Kurt stared at the paper that had almost scarily neat writing on it in perfect grammar and pretty advanced vocabulary... huh, seems like Serena really was a prodigy. Not that Kurt had doubted Blaine when he said that. Still, Kurt grabbed the pen that was left in the center of the table and wrote a note back, figuring that continuing the conversation would be a good idea.

I'm Kurt, Kurt Hummel. You're Serena, aren't you?

He passed the paper back, wondering what her reaction would be to the fact that he knew her name... though he didn't watch her write a reply. Instead, he looked around the room... and found it to be exactly the same as before. The green walls were the exact same shade as they had been, and the blue flowers were still there... though Kurt could see a bright yellow sun painted in the corner of the room that he hadn't been able to see from where he had been looking into the room. Looking at the sun... almost made his heart ache.

Actually, it did make his heart ache.

The sound of the pad being slid back across the table met Kurt's ears, and he picked up the papers as Serena stood and moved the tea set to the floor carefully.

Oh, you're Kurt. I thought you looked familiar. Yes, I am Serena. My full name is Serenity Jewel Anderson, though. Are you one of Blaine's friends?

Kurt raised his eyebrow at this... he looked familiar? How in the world...? He shook his head, blaming it on a yearbook or something, and wrote a reply. Hopefully he could keep this conversation flowing properly and maybe even create the illusion that it was a real conversation.

Yeah, I am one of Blaine's friends. And Serenity is a really pretty name—why don't you go by that instead of Serena?

I don't really know why I do. I can't exactly remember why or when I started going by Serena. I actually think that Blaine had something to do with it... actually, that was it. Blaine started calling me Serena one day, because it sounds closer to serene and because he liked the name. It just kind of caught on.

Oh? Well... which name do you like more? Serena or Serenity?

Serena.

Why?

Because Blaine likes that name better. I like seeing Blaine happy and smiling, and calling me Serena used to make him very happy... I think so, anyways. I don't really care what he calls me, though. I think my favorite nickname from him is Sunshine.

Oh, dear lord if there was one... Kurt's heart was hurting from the pureness of this child's mind and heart... and also due to her seemingly unconditional love for her older brother. It was just... it was almost too much and Kurt could have sworn that he was literally about to cry... he sucked it up, though, and got to writing a reply.

That's very sweet, that you want to see Blaine happy and everything. You're a very sweet little girl, Serena.

Thank you. You're really nice, too, Kurt. I can tell, because you seem to care about Blaine a lot, too. Plus, Blaine is never friends with really, really mean people, so you have to be really, really nice.

Haha, well, thank you very much Serena. That's very kind of you to say to me, even though you don't know me that well.

Hey, Kurt?

Yes?

Do you know how Blaine blames himself for a lot of things?

Well... yes, yes I do. I know very well about how Blaine blames himself for almost everything bad that happens to... people.

I wish that he didn't do that. I know that he blames himself for what happened to me... I wish I could tell him that it wasn't his fault at all and that I forgive him for saying no to me and that I still love him very, very much. I don't think that I'm ready to talk, though. I'm scared, Kurt.

Okay, Kurt was seriously about to cry... Serena just had so much innocent, purely platonic love for Blaine and it was so obvious from the words written on the page. He sniffed a little bit and continued writing.

Aren't you afraid of telling me all of this?

No.

Why?

I saw you and Blaine walking around together. For one thing, Blaine hasn't had friends over since my accident... plus, he was holding your hand. Blaine doesn't hold peoples' hands very often, just people that

he really, really likes/trusts. Blaine trusts you, so I trust you, too. I'm not afraid of telling you anything.

I see... that means a lot to me, that you trust me so much simply because your brother trusts me a lot.

The way that he looks at you, too. I know I can trust you because of that, too.

The... way that he looks at me?

Blaine... Blaine looked at him just like he looked at anyone else, right? Right. Kurt couldn't just... go crazy and get his hopes up because of Blaine's sister. Kurt was Blaine's friend at that point, he wasn't anything more and he probably wouldn't be anything more. No need to freak out... platonic, platonic, platonic.

Yeah. Hey, Kurt?

Yes?

Can I ask you something?

Anything, Serena.

Can you fix Blaine? I... I can tell that he's happier, when he's around you. I really, really want him happy most of the time again... well, okay, wait. Do you think that you can maybe help my brother?

Kurt stared at the note... and tried to think of a way to respond to it efficiently.

I'm not going to lie to you, Serena... I really want to help your brother, because he really means a lot to me... and I do think that he's getting better. He talks to me a lot, actually... maybe, soon, he'll talk to you, too.

I'd... I'd really like that, Kurt. I miss the sound of my brother's voice... maybe if he starts talking again, I'll get the courage and find my own voice again.

Kurt was about to respond to that, until he heard a gentle knock against the doorframe, and turned around in the tiny chair that he was sitting in, seeing Blaine leaned against it with a gentle look in his eyes, "Blaine," he breathed, trying to calm down his fast heart rate that really only happened due to surprise.

"Hey," Blaine whispered, and Kurt glanced over his shoulder at Serena, whose eyes just seemed to light up because Blaine seriously just talked in front of her.

Kurt watched as the small girl jumped up from her seat and ran over to Blaine, jumping at him and wrapping her arms around him tightly.

Blaine staggered backwards a little bit, wrapping his arms around Serena automatically, and he looked surprised... before his facial expression relaxed a little bit and he hugged her warmly in return. Kurt heard him whisper her name fleetingly, and he smiled uncontrollably at the beyond sweet scene, before turning away and looking down at the notepad, feeling a little intrusive by watching the sibling moment.

It was only when small arms wrapped around him, as well that Kurt was pulled back into the room, and he looked at Serena, who was hugging him surprisingly tightly for such a small girl. He hugged her back gently, until she let go and he stood up, smiling down at her before walking over to Blaine, who seemed to be waiting in the door. Almost immediately, Blaine grabbed Kurt's hand, and glanced over his shoulder, staring down at Serena, and Kurt had a feeling that he was promising her that they'd spend more time together, just without words.

Blaine led Kurt up to his room, and closed the door behind them... before turning towards Kurt and staring up at him questioningly, "What... what did you say—write to her?" he asked softly, as if she could clearly hear them conversing a full floor below them.

Kurt shrugged a little bit, "I just... talked to her, that's all. It was all you actually saying something to her that got her to react that way, though," he replied, smiling warmly at Blaine, who smiled a little bit back... and pulled him into a warm embrace, his large, gentle hands pressing at Kurt's back, keeping them close together.

In immediate response, Kurt hugged Blaine back, letting Blaine press his face against his neck... and they held each other again, tightly but gently.

Kurt wanted to say his feelings... he wanted to tell Blaine how he felt at that moment, *so badly*, because he just felt so right in so many ways... but he didn't. He just couldn't manage to say the words and it annoyed him, just a little bit... but there really wasn't much that he could do. His mouth wouldn't form the words no matter how many times his mind repeated them as a mantra, they just died a premature death in his throat... So, instead, he tried to convey his feelings in that embrace. He hoped vainly that maybe, just *maybe*, Blaine could read hugs like he could read people, because it said everything Kurt couldn't...

I love you.

Chapter Eighteen: This Innocence, Is Brilliant

A week later, on Friday, Blaine picked Kurt up at his house as he normally did. It was the first time in an entire week that Blaine had been able to pick Kurt up because... well, Kurt had been grounded from hanging out with Blaine since Burt figured out that Kurt skipped school. That had been an interesting conversation, to say the least... with plenty of demands for an explanation and rushed words that didn't really make sense. In the end, Kurt's father told him that he would have to go to school with Finn until the next Friday *and* that he wasn't allowed to hang out with Blaine as he normally did for that weekend.

It wasn't the worst punishment possible, Kurt supposed. He still had his phone, after all, and school time to spend with Blaine since Burt couldn't exactly ban him from going to school. Well, he could, but Kurt knew that his dad wouldn't go quite that far.

They said their hellos, and drove to school in their regular silence, with Kurt staring out the window at the passing landmarks that he had gotten used to throughout his entire life. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed that Blaine was extremely fidgety, his hands tightening and loosening around the leather of the steering wheel regularly. Kurt couldn't help but just... stare, because he had never seen Blaine like that. So... frazzled, not there, spacey.

When they parked in front of the school, Blaine pocketed his keys and Kurt turned to stare at him curiously, "... Blaine, what's wrong?" he asked slowly.

Blaine swallowed, and looked over at Kurt... before smiling a little bit, just faintly, "Nothing's wrong," he insisted, turning around to grab his bag from the backseat, "I'm just a little nervous, that's all."

"What do you have to be nervous about?" Kurt asked, grabbing his bag from the floor and opening his car door slightly, looking over at Blaine... and he blinked in surprise when he saw Blaine just open his car door. He didn't do what he normally did. He didn't reach into his glove box and carefully unravel his iPod and headphones for the school day. Did that mean...? Well, wait, that was a little... Blaine had been talking more in school, and more audibly, but never without his iPod. Not for a whole day. Sure, Kurt sometimes convinced him to stop listening to his music in English but...

Blaine stepped out of the car and into the sunlight of the day, covering his eyes for a moment, before fixing his bag's strap over his shoulder. Kurt stepped out quickly, too, and stared over at Blaine with wide eyes until the dark haired teen finally turned towards the brunet... still

smiling just like before, "I'm not going to listen to my iPod today in school."

Kurt gasped a little bit, his entire face lighting up and his hands clasping together for a moment before he ran around the car and threw his arms around Blaine in a rush of adrenaline, grinning quite a bit without really meaning to. Blaine's arms wrapped around his waist snugly, and Kurt pulled back slightly to look down at Blaine, "You are? Really? I don't want you to feel uncomfortable..."

With a light laugh, Blaine nodded, "Yeah. I'm... I'm ready, to do this, Kurt," he replied softly, "I'm done hiding from the rest of society. I can't... be isolated for the rest of my life, we both know that. This is the first step that I have to take. Pushing everyone away is just... a really bad idea."

A small sigh escaped from Kurt's lips, and he smiled contently, about to say something, until he heard a few football players shouting rather rude things... mainly to Kurt, of course. They wouldn't dare yell vulgar slurs against gays at Blaine... who they didn't know was (mostly—Kurt still needed to clear that one up) gay. Even then, Kurt would feel Blaine stiffen in his arms as an automatic response to the bullies. All Kurt wanted to do at that point was keep holding Blaine... but, of course, he couldn't.

Kurt sighed, shaking his head a little bit before pulling away from Blaine, turning to glare at the guys who were apparently on the top of the social hierarchy at their school, which really never made complete sense to Kurt. At all. "You have no power over me!" he shouted, directly quoting "Labyrinth" for no exact reason. It just seemed to fit. The small group of guys stared at him, clearly extremely confused, and Kurt rolled his eyes, shaking his head once again, "Cultureless Neanderthals," he muttered under his breath, before turning towards Blaine—who seemed to be laughing just a little bit. "I'm glad that my retorts can be amusing to you," Kurt drawled, one of his eyebrows rising elegantly.

Blaine smiled up at him, not really saying anything, before grabbing Kurt's left hand with his right, staring to walk towards the school, "Come on, we might be late for first period," Blaine said, sounding a little absentminded.

Kurt's mind didn't even really process that Blaine had just said because... they were holding hands. In public. Them, two guys, at their homophobic school... with a glance around the kids in the parking lot, everyone else seemed thoroughly shocked, as well. Kurt sped up a little bit, so that he was walking besides Blaine, and leaned slightly towards him, "Blaine, what are you doing?" he whispered, still glancing around at everyone who was turning to stare at them. It wasn't like

the stares were odd, but there weren't any immediate glares... just hilariously shocked stares.

His best friend looked up at him, and stepped towards him, bumping their shoulders together playfully, "Walking into school with my best friend, what else?" Blaine asked teasingly, chuckling a little bit under his breath.

Kurt smiled down at him, and regained his usual partial strut, shifting his hand a little bit and lacing their fingers together closely, "Are we still hanging out this weekend?" he asked as they turned a corner, passing by Rachel, who he waved at. He saw her glance at their hands, and she squealed a little bit, her eyes lighting up automatically. Rachel's reactions... they always at least a little amusing.

"Of course we are," Blaine commented, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world... or maybe it was the most obvious thing in the world. To them. "We might have to move our hang out to tonight, though," he noted. Less people were staring, though there were still a few curious gazes... Kurt was a little surprised, but said nothing about it.

"Oh?" Kurt questioned, so many scenarios started flying through his head at once... and he smiled slyly to cover up any amount of worry that might have been showing, "Why's that? Have a date with someone?" His tone said that he was teasing... his mind was yelling at him for asking that kind of question while his heart was just aching at the thought of Blaine going out on a date with some guy that Kurt didn't know at all.

It wasn't *jealousy* it was... worry. Yeah. Worry.

Blaine looked over at him, a confused look on his face, before he shook his head, "Of course not, why would I have a date?" It took basically all of Kurt's willpower to not answer that question as honestly as possible, even though his mind stopped screaming and his heart stopped aching quite as badly. "I'm thinking about taking Serena to the aquarium if she wants to leave the house for the weekend so we can spend some time together, since my mom has another one of her functions and my dad is out of town for a business trip..." Blaine trailed off, before shrugging a little, "You can come to the aquarium with us, if you want. The more the merrier, you know."

Automatically, Kurt's first thought was that he'd love to go to the aquarium with Blaine and his little sister... but he stopped himself before he actually said anything, and shook his head instead, "No, no, you deserve to have a day with her. I wouldn't want to intrude," he insisted as they stopped in front of his locker. He pulled his hand slowly away from Blaine's, and smiled down at him a little bit, "Hanging out tonight sounds fine."

"Well... if you say so," Blaine replied with a shrug, stepping away from Kurt a little bit to get a little further down the hall, "I'll see you in English," he added with a wave, before turning and heading down the hall completely, leaving Kurt there to stare after him.

Sighing a little bit to himself, Kurt turned towards his locker and spun the combination to open it. The metal door swung open, and he took a glance at the interior of his door, staring at all of the pictures that he put in there. A group photo of the New Directions in the top right corner, a picture of his dad underneath the punched-in area where his lock was, a picture of Mercedes and Rachel next to that, and a picture of Blaine in the middle of everything. The most important people in his life... Kurt smiled, just a little bit, at that thought, and started to pull things out of his bag as his female best friend stopped besides him, opening her own locker.

"Word among the students is that you and Blaine were walking into school together," she shared, smiling over at him, "holding hands." Again, Kurt rolled his eyes, hanging his bag up on the hook before looking over at Mercedes, an eyebrow arched at her, "What if I was?" he asked almost teasingly.

She laughed somewhat breathlessly, and shook her head, stacking her own books in her locker, "I'd like to think that I'd be the first to know if you had anything going on with that boy," she said, giving him a meaningful glance, which he just sighed at as he closed his locker door.

He leaned his shoulder against his closed locker door, and looked down at Mercedes, a soft smile on his face, "Nothing is going on between Blaine and I, Mercedes, I promise. Anyways, even if anything was going on, you'd definitely be the first to know. You don't need to worry about anything, Miss. Diva."

Mercedes laughed a little bit, closing her locker as well before looking over at Kurt, a caring smile on her face, "Oh, Boo... he makes you so happy, I can tell," she whispered to him, and he stepped towards her as another wave of teenagers came by.

"He does make me happy, Mercedes," Kurt confirmed, "I mean... before this year, I never thought I'd actually get close to him," he pushed away from the lockers, and Mercedes followed him. They walked down the hall together as Kurt continued to talk, "I didn't think that I'd ever be this happy in high school, either. No offense. You and everyone else in the New Directions do make me happy, so maybe that was the wrong wording..."

Mercedes laughed a little bit, and bumped their hips together in a compassionate gesture, "I'm glad that we do," she replied, looking up at him with a contemplative expression. She reached out and grabbed

his jacket sleeve, leading him over to the side of the hall where not too many kids were walking through. "Do you love him, Kurt?" Kurt stared down at her... before shrugging, "I don't know," he lied smoothly, "Maybe." It wasn't like he didn't want to tell Mercedes... it was just that he wasn't sure if it was really the time to tell anyone. Actually, he wasn't sure if he *could* tell anyone. It was almost like he was completely unable to say those three words with Blaine's name tacked onto the end or something. It wasn't that hard, was it? Yes, *Mercedes, I love Blaine.*

... Okay, maybe it was really hard.

Mercedes stared up at him for a little while longer; as if she *knew* what he was just thinking, before nodding, "Well, if you say so. If he ever hurts you, though, I'll have to cut a bitch, I hope you know that."

He laughed just a little bit, nodding through the small bout of laughter, "Yes, I do know that, 'Cedes," he confirmed, smiling down at her, "you're just a fierce diva with a very sharp maternal instinct."

"Damn right that's me!" Mercedes said, snapping her fingers before laughing. After a few seconds of laughter, Mercedes wrapped her arms around Kurt gently despite the books, giving him a warm hug at her returned, careful not to hit his best friend in the head at all. That would just ruin the hug and be counterproductive in every single way. With a small sniff, Mercedes pulled away, "We both have to get to class," she stated, already walking backwards, "I'll see you later, Boo," she said, before turning and walking down the hall.

Kurt stared after her for a little while... before smiling to himself and turning around, walking the opposite direction himself. He got nearly violently shouldered quite a few times walking down the crowded hall, but it wasn't like that was surprising at all, so he took it in stride, letting it all roll off his back easily. It honestly felt like, for once, that everything was going to be okay for the rest of the school year. Well, he hoped so, anyways.

After school, Blaine drove them straight to Kurt's house, since they came to a mutual agreement to spend as much time as possible together directly after school. No use in wasting time going home separately—plus, Blaine still had to drive Kurt to and from school. Going home for no reason would be a waste of gas, too.

When they both stepped into the house, they greeted Carole and she smiled at both of them, handing Kurt a plate of fruit and giving Blaine a warm welcome, which he returned as best as he could.

Kurt was kind of proud of his step mom. About a month before, he had asked her why she had the reaction she did when he told her Blaine was his partner and would have to come over almost constantly, and

she seemed a little bit flustered when she explained that some of her lady friends told her about a few of the rumors about Blaine. Kurt had been pretty surprised that Carole actually seemed to believe those bizarre rumors, but she apologized and said that she knew it wasn't right for her to believe them. Kurt himself said it was fine, because it was perfectly fine as long as Carole was okay with Blaine at that point in time, which she was. She did end up giving Blaine a big up and apologizing to him the next time he came over, though, confusing the poor teenager.

They both headed up stairs together, and dropped their bags at the foot of Kurt's bed. Blaine fished through his bag for something, and Kurt went over to his laptop, turning it on to pull up iTunes so they could listen to music while hanging out.

"Hey, wait," Blaine called when Kurt had the mouse poised over the iTunes icon, and he turned to see Blaine holding his iPod and ear buds, "We can always listen to my iPod together, if you would prefer that?"

Kurt blinked and walked over to Blaine, his head tilting to the side slightly, just a little suspicious, "You had your iPod all day? Are you sure that you didn't just listen to it when I wasn't around?"

Blaine flushed a little bit and *pouted* (seriously, he pouted, no matter what), "You don't trust me?" he questioned, plugging his ear buds into the MP3 player, "I'm so glad that the one person who I'll probably ever share my ear buds with trusts me oh so much," he teased somewhat sarcastically, before falling back onto the bed.

Falling onto the bed next to Blaine, Kurt looked over at him, a little confused, "Do you not like sharing ear buds or something?" he asked, grabbing the right ear bud and pressing it into his ear.

Blaine slipped the left one into his own ear, and shrugged a little bit, pressing the shuffle button before looking over at Kurt, "It just feels a little personal to me, sharing ear buds, for some reason. I don't know...

I just have this weird thing about it," he waved his hand above their heads for a few moments, and Kurt laughed, shifting to the side a little bit to prop his head on Blaine's shoulder even though there were pillow underneath them. It wasn't like Blaine really seemed to care, anyways. "Well, in that case, I feel honored," Kurt said with complete honesty. It really just meant the world to him that Blaine would put that much trust in him. Obviously, ear buds weren't that big of a deal to normal people, but this was Blaine. Every single small gesture from Blaine normally meant something more than what it normally meant. Kurt knew that.

"You should," Blaine shot back, obviously joking, chuckling to himself, moving his head a little bit so that it was on top of Kurt's head, the pressure only slight but it was still there. "We haven't hung out outside

of school for an entire week," he breathed, "You'd think that we would have so much to talk about... but my week was horribly boring, I'm afraid." Kurt hummed in agreement, his eyes falling closed, and they laid there in mostly silence, music playing between them—literally. "I have this slight feeling that you have more questions for me, though." Kurt opened his eyes again, and lifted his head to look up at Blaine... they were so close together, due to how they were lying. It made his cheeks heat up a little and he lowered his head again, coughing a little, "Well... I do, but they're not really that major..." Blaine's shoulder lifted, and Kurt's head lifted in response and he sighed, a little frustrated because Blaine just didn't take no for an answer, "It's just that... you said that your mom is a stay at home type of mom, yet she's busy all the time... what do you mean by that?"

There was a small pause, before Blaine sighed, "I've told you that she is a stay at home *type* and that she has functions constantly and is out with "the ladies"... well, she is out a lot. She's just one of those wives that organize parties for their rich husbands, and she can't always be quite as attentive as she wants to be with our family, so things fly over her head a lot more than she cares to admit they do. Most people would think that she would have realized what was happening to Serena, and I think somewhere in the corner of her mind, she did realize, but... Serena apparently hid it when my mom asked her what was wrong, until she just couldn't hide it.

"My mom... noticed, but at the same time, because she was basically booked for the first half of the year, and people depend on her and she hates letting people down... she couldn't do it. Serena never ran to her specifically, anyways, and... my mother is very adamant on trying not to push her way into peoples' business unless they actively seek her out for help. That's just... kind of how she works, I guess. It doesn't really help that she can't say no to people, either... I get that from her. Either way, after Serena's accident my mother stopped saying yes to everyone trying to get her help and... paid more attention to what was happening to our family. She tries... I know she tries extremely hard, but this entire thing has been hard on the entire family."

Kurt laid there in silence for a few minutes, letting the new information sink in... before shifting his body again, towards Blaine, bringing over his left arm to lay a hand gently on Blaine's chest, simply resting it there lightly. "Do you know why your father blamed you, rather than anyone else in the house?"

Automatically, Blaine's hand was on top of Kurt's on his chest (Kurt probably should have expected that) and he didn't grip Kurt's hand or anything... his just laid his on top of it and breathed deeply, "I'm, in his eyes, the failure child of the family, really. I told you that I was clumsy

as a child, despite my aptitude for reading... I managed to constantly get straight A's but he'd ask why I didn't get A+'s. I was very into music like my mother and he just... didn't really want that for his children. Or, his sons, at least. He's just... he has very high expectations, which I understand because a lot of parents do... one of his expectations is also for his children to think similarly to him, though. Obviously, I do not and cannot, because... I never learned at a young age how to play his game, unlike my brother."

Slowly, Kurt turned his hand under Blaine's, so that their palms were facing each other, and he slid his hand back slightly so that his fingertips pressed gently against the warm skin of Blaine's palm, "You also said that he's basically the smartest guy in the world, which I highly doubt."

Blaine laughed shortly, and Kurt glanced up from where he was at to see Blaine's eyes closed, and his eyebrows almost turned upside down from the way that he was furrowing them, "I know he isn't smarter than any other person in the world," Blaine whispered just loud enough for Kurt to hear over the music, opening his eyes slowly and looking down at him, "It just really feels like that sometimes."

Kurt just stared at Blaine for a while... before licking his lips a little bit and dropping his gaze to Blaine's neck because the look in Blaine's eyes... it was so intense and it just felt weird, staring into Blaine's eyes like that at that moment. "Do you think that you'll ever forgive yourself?" he asked, his eyes dropping to their hands.

Kurt could feel Blaine tense underneath him, and he lifted his hand from Blaine's chest, bringing the larger, slightly rougher hand with him. Letting Blaine think about how to answer that, Kurt slid their palms together completely, their fingers pressing against each other fully... though Blaine's fingers were *slightly* longer. Applying a little bit of pressure, Kurt pressed his hand against Blaine's, and sighed softly when Blaine returned the gesture, pressing his hand back. At that point, the quieter teenager shifted all of his hands to the side, and locked their fingers together, squeezing Kurt's hand slightly. Kurt squeezed back, before finally looking up at Blaine, who seemed to be staring at their intertwined hands with extreme concentration.

"Maybe," was all Blaine said in response, not looking away from their hands for a moment, even as Kurt stared up at him with a small sense of disappointment mixed with an immense amount of sadness.

Kurt slowly lowered their hands onto Blaine's chest again, their palms separating but not their fingers, "Well..." he began, trying to think of exactly what to say. "Serena was never mad at you, I hope you know that." A small grunt was all Kurt got in reply, and he tried again, speaking what came to his mind first, "I forgive you."

He heard and felt Blaine stop breathing, just like that. It took a few moments for Blaine to take a deep, shaky breath inwards, exhaling slowly, his gaze finally dropping to Kurt's face. Surprise was evident in his hazel eyes, and Kurt stared at him, waiting for him to say something. "What... what do you have to forgive me for?" Blaine asked, his voice wavering more than a little bit.

"For not forgiving yourself," Kurt explained himself simply, even though he honestly didn't know why when he actually said the words. "For hating yourself—the nicest, sweetest, bravest guy I've ever met. For... hiding yourself and all of your special wonderfulness from the rest of the world unfairly... for thinking that you're anything less than amazing. I... I forgive you because of those things... and because you can't forgive yourself, Blaine. That's all."

There was a short silence before Blaine turned his head to the side suddenly, and Kurt was about to sit up and ask him if he was okay, though there were sniffles that told Kurt that... no, Blaine wasn't really okay. Somewhere in the back of his mind, Kurt was yelling at himself to sit up and try to help Blaine stop crying, but he didn't. He couldn't. He felt paralyzed, his head on Blaine's trembling shoulder and his fingers intertwined with Blaine's fingers—which were spasmodically tightening and loosening.

"Blaine...?" he called, finally, after about a minute of lying there, staring at his trembling best friend... best friend. That sounded a little funny in his head because... well, normally, best friends didn't lay like they were lying, but whatever. It wasn't like he and Blaine were normal in any way, shape, or form.

That automatically meant that they weren't normal best friends, either, of course. Right.

After one last sniffle and a deep, shuddering breath, Blaine turned back to Kurt, his eyes shining and just a little bit red so Kurt got his confirmation that Blaine had, indeed, been crying. "Sorry," Blaine muttered softly, seeming a little embarrassed by his emotional outburst, "I just... I think that in some far away part of my twisted mind... I really, really wanted to hear that. I just... I think that I wanted to hear, verbally, that I was forgiven for everything that I know I have done wrong, and for things that the person thought I had done wrong even if I didn't think I was doing anything wrong and—I'm rambling now, but... I just..." he brought Kurt's hand up to his lips once again, and kissed the back of it, as well as his ring finger, "Thank you, thank you, thank you," Blaine whispered, his voice breaking just a little bit in between the 'thank you's.

Kurt smiled a little bit, and let his entire body relax as Blaine dropped their hands back onto his chest. They smiled at each other, both just a

little teary-eyed (because Blaine rambling and being all emotional brought tears to Kurt's eyes for some reason), until Kurt let his eyes fall closed slowly after several minutes of silence smiles. He felt a small wave of exhaustion wash over him out of absolutely nowhere... and slowly drifted off, just a little bit. Honestly, he wasn't sure if it could even be classified as sleep, but whatever.

Kurt was dreaming again, he could tell. Apparently, he had fallen more asleep than he thought he did... how bothersome. Still, he was absolutely sure he was dreaming due to the minor fact that he was sitting on the swing at the park again in broad daylight... it honestly looked like it was noon. When he fell asleep, it had been early evening and he was in his bed lying with Blaine, so... yeah, definite dream. He heard the joyful shouts of children somewhere in front of him, and blinked his eyes a few times, squinting a little bit before bringing a hand up to shield his eyes from the sunlight to see who was playing on the swing set. His blue eyes blinked a few times when he saw a few years older version of Serena running up the stairs to the top of the tower with a somewhat older brunet boy following her, laughing and calling her name with a slight slur (and accent) to his voice, "S'rena, S'rena!"

... Oh, gracious, that just sounded really, really cute for some reason. After watching them run around and play for a few minutes, Kurt stood up slowly, his eyes still trained onto Dream Serena, who was saying something to her friend in a happy, peppy voice that just made a smile automatically appear on his face because... she was just so adorable, it was odd. A few more moments of staring later, he looked at his surroundings, scanning the area—until he saw two people sitting on a blanket far off in the grassy field next to the playground. He stared at them for a few moments, before walking over towards the pair, his eyes squinting slightly due to the bright sun, and because the couple had an umbrella stuck in the ground, keeping them from the sunlight. It was basically what Kurt did himself on sunny days like the one he was dreaming about—

He stopped walking when he noticed just who was sitting on that blanket underneath the umbrella. How could he be so clueless? That umbrella was his, after all, it was hanging up inside of his closet... he took another deep breath and started walking towards the duo, circling them a little bit to get a better look. Yeah, that was definitely who he thought it was. Now knowing whom the pair was, he walked over unyieldingly and sat down on the blanket in front of them, knowing well that they couldn't hear or see him.

Dream Kurt, maybe about two or so years older than Kurt was presently, was in Dream Blaine's arms, leaning back against his chest, a book in one hand, and his left one intertwined with Blaine's left hand (of course) in his lap.

It looked like they were reading the same book at the same time... well, at least it looked like Dream Kurt was reading. Dream Blaine kept looking at Kurt out of the corner of his eye randomly and smiling a little bit... until he finally moved their clasped hands and kissed the back of Dream Kurt's hand.

Dream Kurt stopped reading, and looked over his shoulder at the figment of the actual Kurt's imagination, an eyebrow raised and a smile on his face, "You have such an obsession with my hands, I swear you're just in this relationship for them and not me," he swatted Blaine in the shoulder playfully with the book.

Dream Blaine laughed without holding back, and leaned down to kiss the small junction that was between the shoulder and the neck, lingering there for a few moments before pulling away and kissing the tip of Dream Kurt's ear, "Oh come on, now. You know that I adore every last part of you... Would it be too cheesy to say that I'm not only obsessed with your hands, but all of you?"

"Oh you better adore all of me," the brunet playfully snapped, laughing a little bit under his breath before calming down. "And, yes, it would be really, really cheesy," Dream Kurt replied simply, opening the book in front of his face again, even though his smile was still obvious, as was the small blush spreading from his cheek, across the bridge of his nose, to his other cheek, forming a small line of red. "Also a little creepy, but you know I love you anyways."

Kurt's heart jumped a little bit, despite the fact that it was a dream. Dream Kurt could say the words... yet real Kurt couldn't. Well, that was just a little depressing, but not exactly unexpected.

Again Dream Blaine laughed, and propped his chin up on Dream Kurt's shoulder, his eyes still going from the book to Dream Kurt's face, "Of course you love me," he whispered, "otherwise we wouldn't be engaged, silly. Unless you're in this relationship because of my eyes—which, by the way, you're pretty obsessed with, just saying."

Kurt's eyes immediately fell to Dream Kurt's hand, and his mouth fell open just a little bit at the glittering, circular diamond set onto a simple, silver band... it was exactly the ring that Kurt wanted when he was going to (hopefully) eventually get engaged... what a dream, indeed.

Dream Kurt opened his mouth to speak again, and his lips moved and Dream Blaine laughed at something he said... but it was like watching a TV set on mute. Kurt couldn't hear a single thing that they said...

instead, softly playing music started to play around him, even as Dream Serena ran over and jumped onto both of them, pulling her friend on top of the pile and they all laughed. It was a cover of a song... Kurt could tell that much...

He watched the joyous scene fade before him.

"So come here... a little closer... wanna whisper in your ear... make it clear... little question..."

Kurt felt himself wake up mentally, but he didn't open his eyes. All that he was aware of was that he was lying in bed, with his head against a pillow... wasn't his head against Blaine's shoulder when he fell asleep? Did Blaine leave? Kurt should probably open his eyes to check... but he really didn't want to for some reason. Instead, Kurt tried to concentrate on his surroundings... and there was still a dip in his bed next to him, so Blaine still had to be there. Good.

There was a slight weight on Kurt's other side, suddenly, and it felt like a face was all-too close to his own... what was going on? This was just... bizarre. Was he still dreaming or something? That was probably likely considering the circumstances... He honestly would have pinched himself if it weren't for the fact that doing that would alert whoever was basically on top of him...

Warm breath spread over his face that smelled a little like cinnamon gum... that had to be Blaine, there was no one else if *could* be.

Especially because of the way his breath smelled (that sounded really weird, but Kurt didn't care), and now all Kurt needed to do was figure out what in the world his best friend was even doing—

A pair of lips was brushed against his own, fleetingly, and was taken away just as quickly as they were lowered, and Kurt stopped breathing completely at this, his heart going into overdrive, which probably wasn't exactly good for him in the least. Again, soft lips were pressed against his own, firmer this time, and Kurt's breath stuttered as he started to breathe properly again... before he applied just a *little* bit of pressure back, leaning up slightly to kiss Blaine back fully.

All weight on and around his body (especially his lips) was suddenly gone in the next moment, maybe even less than a second after Kurt actually kissed back. There was shuffling and muttered words that he couldn't hear clearly, though Blaine sounded clearly distressed.

Kurt's eyes flew open and he sat up to find Blaine grabbing his bag and making a beeline for the door and... Kurt was confused. Horrible confused. And hurt. And even a little angry because what the hell was going on? "Blaine...? What... what are you doing?" he asked, his voice a little raspy due to being asleep only minutes earlier.

Blaine stopped, his hand in front of the doorknob and his head turned away from Kurt so he couldn't see his face, "... I... I'm sorry, Kurt," he whispered, grabbing the doorknob and turning it, "I shouldn't have done that so mindlessly and impulsively... b... b..." the door was pulled open and Blaine was running out of it.

It took Kurt approximately .01 seconds to fly up out of his bed and out his door, running after Blaine as fast as he possible could,

"Blaine! *Blaine!*" he shouted, trying to catch up to the still ridiculously fast (from multiple years of soccer) dark haired teen. Sadly, his house was still fairly small, and easily navigable, and by the time he reached the front door and opened it, Blaine was getting into his car, closing the door and pushing the keys into the ignition.

Their eyes met once, just as Blaine started his car up, and Kurt just saw so much regret *again* in Blaine's eyes, before he looked away and started to pull out of Kurt's driveway, leaving Kurt standing alone in the doorway, staring after him, feelings of sadness and bitterness and *anger* building up inside of him...

Over everything, though, he felt and even heard his heart break, because Blaine tried to say *goodbye*. Why did he try to say goodbye?

What was... this was just...

Crack. Crack. Shatter.

Chapter Nineteen: Am I Squeezing You Too Tight?

"You have one unheard message. First unheard message:"

"Kurt... it's, uhm... it's Blaine, if you haven't already figured that out—which I'm sure that you have. Please, pick up the phone... please. I really, really want to talk to you. You know that we have to talk about what happened and I... I just... I was stupid, Kurt. I was stupid and I panicked and I ran, like the coward that I really am. But I really, really want to talk to you... but you aren't picking up your phone... I probably should have expected this, honestly, because I did run out on you like that and I totally deserve to have you ignore me for the rest of my life and I just—I know I deserve it, but I don't... I don't think that I can actually handle it. You're my... my best friend, Kurt, basically almost my entire world. Please, please call me back. Please."

"End of message. To delete message, press—"
Click.

On Monday, it was cloudy and depressingly dreary when Kurt pulled up to the school, by himself for the first time in a while. He hadn't actually gotten out of the house early enough, so he was stuck with a spot that he really, really didn't want... but he could deal with that. Just like he could deal with school. School with Blaine. Right. Kurt Hummel could definitely handle that, especially since he constantly had to deal with bullies and idiots. Seeing one guy wouldn't kill him on the inside, because it really just... wouldn't. It might not even affect him at all. ... Okay, that was a total lie, but whatever. Kurt would lie to himself until he believed himself about not being affected by the mere thought of the dark haired teen. Sadness was still rearing its ugly head, but he had watered it down with copious amounts of absolute anger. Yes, anger. The brunet was honestly angry at Blaine for doing what he did. Was it actual anger? Probably. Was it brought on by constant belief that Kurt was angrier than he was sad? That was a high possibility, as well.

Still, Kurt grabbed his bag from the passenger seat and opened the door, stepping out into the sunless day, due to the thick, dark, and gray clouds cluttering the sky, blocking any and all sunlight from reaching the ground below. His blue eyes glanced upwards at the sky, and he sighed, because it seriously looked like it was going to rain... and he didn't bring an umbrella. What a great way to start the day. Regardless of the high possibility of getting rained on, Kurt pulled his bag onto his shoulder and walked into the school building. He had already figured out over the weekend how he was going to avoid

Blaine—out of anger not sadness (yes, Kurt would keep making himself believe that because it was totally true).

Since he was running later than usual, Blaine wouldn't be stupid enough to be waiting at his locker before first period, thank goodness. Kurt hadn't exactly planned that, but whatever. Regardless, he knew every hall in the school, and could take several different halls to get from his classes to his locker to other classes, without passing through the hall that Blaine's locker was in like he normally did. Sure, he'd have to rush and maybe he would be late for class, but that was a small price to pay in order to not see the guy that was slowly coming out of his shell.

It was a virtually flawless plan, since Kurt had also gone over it multiple times in his head at home when he was lying in his room like he did for most of the weekend. He hadn't even texted anybody, except for a few spare replies that said that he was busy with studying or something to people who had been spamming him. Yeah, he had listened to the message that Blaine left for him... with a heavy heart. In all actuality, Blaine had called him twice, both times Kurt pushed his phone under his pillow and let the vibrations alert him as to how many times the guy actually called... it was only twice. Obviously, he left a message after the second call... that was pretty late on Saturday, basically twenty-four hours after everything that had happened, happened. Clearly, Kurt never called him back... not because he didn't want to (well, that was part of the reason, Kurt wouldn't really lie about that), but because... he just couldn't find the actual courage to. His thumbs had hovered over Blaine's name for much of late, late Saturday into early, early Sunday... but he didn't do it. He couldn't. So that was exactly why Kurt found himself walking into school, feeling a lot more alone than he had in a really, really long time... even within the busy, buzzing halls of his high school. He followed the path that he knew by heart, taking the exact turns when he needed to, and avoiding the people that he usually did. A few jeers and taunts were thrown his way, but he ignored them as per usual and kept his head held high with a false sense of security and pride.

He turned into the hall that his locker was in, ready to see Mercedes and give her a big hug, just because he felt like he really, really needed one for once—until he saw a certain someone who was leaning against his locker, looking from side to side as if looking for him in particular—well, actually, he probably was looking for Kurt.

His shoes made an annoyingly loud sound against the hard floors of the school, and Blaine's head snapped over to where he was standing... and Kurt turned around, heading in the direct opposite direction that he was originally heading in. He backtracked, tuning everything

around him out as he turned into another hallway... and leaned against a wall, staring at the ground with wide blue eyes as people started to filter out of the halls and to their first periods.

No, Kurt Hummel was not proud of himself for basically running away. He didn't really even have a choice, though, because... he didn't want to know what Blaine would have said. He was angry at Blaine Anderson for kissing him and then trying to say goodbye and then leaving, just like that.

Kurt had every right to be angry. He did, and no one could change his mind on that.

"Skipping class?" he heard a familiar voice, and his head turned slowly to the right to see who was the only other person standing in the hall, despite the fact that he could already tell that it was the infamous Noah Puckerman. He was right, since Puck was standing there with his arms cross and with an eyebrow raised.

In response, Kurt rolled his eyes and pushed away from the wall, adjusting the bag on his shoulder, "No, I'm not skipping class, Puckerman. I'm just... trying to figure things out, that's all."

Kurt turned to start walking away, though a hand on his upper arm both stopped him and made him tense considerably, "Is there anything actually going on between you and Anderson?"

A small groan of utter annoyance fell from his mouth as Kurt pulled away and turned towards Puck, automatically bringing up his defenses—as well as his bitch face—in response to the question, "No, Noah, there is absolutely nothing going on between B-Blaine," he mentally prayed to whatever deity existed that the stutter that came with Blaine's name wasn't horribly noticeably, "and I."

Obviously, Puck did end up catching the stutter and gave Kurt a weird look, "Okay, listen," he began, sighing a little bit and glancing over his shoulder, probably checking to see if there was anyone around.

"Something happened between you two, I can tell just from your reaction to the question—plus, Anderson was standing at your locker waiting for you like a love-sick puppy or something this morning and you ran the moment that you saw him," Kurt gave Puck an incredulous expression, and Puck gave him a look, "Don't give me a look, Hummel. Quinn's locker is in that hallway. Anyways, just do what I would do."

Kurt's incredulous expression didn't leave his face as he stared up at Puck, shaking his head slowly from side to side, crossing his arms over his chest, "Puck, most things you would do in this situation I definitely wouldn't do—plus, at least half of them are illegal in most states and/or continents."

"Break into his locker," Puck proposed, as if he hadn't even heard Kurt basically deny the idea of doing anything that he in particular would do. "It's a great way to figure things out, since people normally keep important things in their locker, sometimes some of which they don't want other people seeing."

The incredulous expression dropped to one that was similar to absolute disbelief to the plan that Puck decided to pitch at him for no actual reason. "You... want me to break into Blaine's locker?"

Puck's hands found purchase in his pockets, and he shrugged, "Hey, just an idea, Hummel, no big deal."

"You're absolutely insane," Kurt drawled, before turning and walking down the hall. The first period bell had just rung and he was already going to be really late... getting his stuff into his locker was necessary, so he would have to go do that. He stopped at the corner, though, and turned around to see Puck still standing there, staring at the floor a little bit. "How many times have you broken into Quinn's locker?" he asked automatically.

The kid with the Mohawk looked up, an eyebrow raised again, before he shrugged, "Once or twice..." Kurt gave him a look. "Okay, fine, maybe five or so times—but each time I found pretty important things."

"Like what?"

"A picture of her and I," Puck began, pulling a hand out of his pocket to scratch at the side of his face. "Quinn is very particular about how she sets up her locker. She removes useless things when they become virtually non-existent in her life. Before, she had a picture of her and Finn up... it was gone. Same with the one of her on the Cheerios at the top of the pyramid, and the other one with her and her dad. Now the only pictures that are hanging in her locker is the New Directions one that we all got, one of her and her mom, and one of her and I over the summer before our... break up."

Kurt stared at Puck for a few moments, who seemed to have dropped his bad ass attitude at the thoughts and memories of Quinn... and nodded, "Okay," was all he said, before turning around again and heading towards the hall that he should have been in several minutes ago to begin with. When he turned into the hall, his chest tightened when he saw that no one was there. Honestly, Kurt wasn't sure if he was relieved that Blaine hadn't kept waiting for him... or if he was disappointed.

Whatever, it wasn't even that important. Kurt walked over to his locker and opened it quickly, half-shoving things in there haphazardly when he glanced at the clock. He'd have to stop by the attendance office because he was running late, of course. Somewhere in the

forefront of his mind, he blamed Blaine... in the back of his mind he just blamed himself and his cowardly actions. It wouldn't have been that hard to march over to his locker and just ignore Blaine if he would have attempted to talk to him, right? ... Right?

Kurt wasn't entirely sure how to answer that question.

When everything for the class that he had to head to was properly balanced in his arms, he closed his locker and started to walk towards the attendance office, making as much noise as he wanted in the halls. No one would touch him physically, and words barely affected him anymore. It was just a daily occurrence, the jeers and taunts and glares and looks. Obviously, it had been worse other mornings when he was walking into school with Blaine compared to today when he was alone but...

Blaine. Merely thinking about him just caused Kurt's mind to go absolutely crazy. Suddenly he couldn't really think about anybody else except for the confusing, seriously messed up teenager, which just made everything better. He couldn't help but wonder if he may as well just talk to Blaine about everything...

No, no. Kurt just decided that he'd avoid Blaine for the little bit that was left of the school year, and then just not have to deal with him over the summer. Eventually, the heartbreak—anger—would fade away and Kurt would be able to function in school properly as compared to how he was already. It wouldn't be that hard... he'd just have to rearrange everything in the entirety of his daily schedule but still somehow center it accordingly to the same classes that he had, and would have until senior year started.

He could do this. He could get to the attendance office without thinking of Blaine anymore and he could definitely do it without thinking of Puck's ridiculous plan that wouldn't make sense for Kurt to do at all—Never mind. He was thinking about it. He was probably thinking about it too much and it was just such a bad idea and—

The slim brunet stopped next to the large windows, and turned a little bit to look out of them up at the gray sky. He saw a raindrop splash against the window, a few following it and they slid down the glass together, though the last one that fell sliding down faster than the other two. A few more drops fell haphazardly and Kurt watched as the rain started to fall steadily, beating against the roof above him and the windows and pavement in front of him. Somewhat content, he turned and continued down the hall, shoving the weird, useless thoughts out of his head as forcefully as he could possibly manage in the state that he was in.

Rain always helped him clear his head. He was thankful that it started to rain, even if it brought that memory back—he shoved it with all of

his mental might back into one of the far, dark, hidden corners of his mind, deciding that it would be in his best interest to just forget about that. One thing that he couldn't stop, though, was the sudden mental flashes of Friday that just... worsened his mood even further. Kurt just had to remind himself that he could get through the day.

After second period and before English, Kurt snapped mentally and went absolutely insane. Well, he kept telling himself that, anyways, since it was true that if someone told himself or herself something enough, then they would eventually actually think that. That was what Kurt was going by, and, plus, going absolutely insane was the only way he could properly explain why he was holding Quinn's nail file (he borrowed it, saying that he left his at home—which he had) at his open locker, letting people walk past and around him to get to their class.

"Are you sure you're okay, Kurt?" Mercedes asked for probably the millionth time, closing her locker and looking at her friend with complete concern evident in her facial features.

Kurt pretended that he was filing his nails and didn't look at the African American girl. If he did, he wouldn't have been able to lie, "I'm fine, Mercedes," he said absentmindedly, his mind slowly forming a plan as well as holding up an emotional wall. "Third period is going to start soon, though," he commented, looking away from his nails for a moment at the clock, "You should probably get going. This will only take me a moment longer."

Mercedes stared at him for a little while longer, before finally nodding, patting Kurt's shoulder warmly as she walked by him, and then down the hall to get to... Algebra, if Kurt's mind remembered properly within all of the clutter.

Continuing to file his nails, Kurt heard, rather than saw, the hall start to empty, and when the final bell for third period rang, he closed his locker, deciding that if he was going to end up going to English, he'd just come back for his stuff. Twirling the nail file in his hand, he walked down the hall towards the hall that he usually took to English, and he turned a sharp left, finding himself standing in front of Blaine's locker all too soon. He stood there for a few moments, trying to talk himself out of the insanity that he was about to subject himself to... He was already working at the lock, though, and in basically no time at all (really about one or two minutes), he got the locker open with ease. One hand pulled it open only partially, before leaving the door slightly open and pocketing the nail file, before pushing the metal door open all the way. Kurt's eyes scanned the metal box, since he had never actually looked inside of Blaine's locker. Sure, he had dropped by a fair share of times, but he hadn't actually looked in a while...

An umbrella was hooked on the left hook of the locker, while Blaine's leather bag was on the right hook. He had a locker shelf, and the top one had some binders and notebooks and actual books, while below it on the actual metal there were some textbooks lined up perfectly, probably by the period Blaine had the subject from what Kurt would see by his scan. On the far back wall of Blaine's locker, there was picture in a frame... and Kurt leaned forwards, over a notebook that looked a little familiar, squinting his eyes to see what the picture was. It was a picture of the two of them.

Kurt wasn't entirely sure when the actual picture was taken, though it kind of looked like it was taken at the mall... and Kurt was obviously wearing a black coat from the looks of it. He estimated that it was probably taken in January, before the attack happened... yeah, that was probably when it was taken. By the time that he analyzed the picture, though, he was made acutely aware to the fact that his heart was pounding against his ribcage, loudly and strongly. He wasn't sure if it was due to nervousness or finding an actual picture of himself and Blaine... in Blaine's locker.

He blamed it on the nervousness.

After straightening up, Kurt looked at the door of Blaine's locker, grabbing it and pulling it away from the wall of lockers and more towards his face, his eyes scanning it. The same stickers and patches were still in place, but there was suddenly a fish magnet hanging up as well, even though it wasn't exactly holding anything. Kurt hypothesized that it was most likely from Blaine going to the aquarium with Serena, since... well, why else would he have a fish magnet? Blaine didn't have an odd obsession with fish, last time Kurt checked. Shaking his head, he looked away from the stickers—he automatically looked away from the one of the sun in the top left corner of the locker—and at the pictures. There was still the same one of Serena in its frame, with her looking as cheery as ever. Now that Kurt had actually met Serena, he could easily tell that the picture was about two years old, though. The pictures of Santana and Wes were still taped up there, too, and a medal was hanging from another magnet that was a soccer ball that Kurt had probably missed the first time that he looked at Blaine's locker.

Finally, his eyes fell to the bottom right corner of Blaine's locker, onto the ribbon that still happened to be hiding the picture that Kurt never quite forgot about. Kurt stared at it, noting that the ribbon was hiding it differently than last time, as if Blaine had moved the ribbon to look at the picture... then again, he could have, it was his locker. Or the opening and closing of the locker door would have caused that. Still, Kurt stared at it and contemplated whether or not it would be a good

idea to actually move the thin, flimsy piece of fabric away to get a good look at whatever picture that Blaine was actually hiding in his locker, since there was no way that the ribbon was accidentally there. No way at all.

A few minutes passed, and Kurt still found himself standing there, staring at the bottom of the door of Blaine's locker, and holding onto it with his hand. He had half the mind to just close the locker and go on his merry way, which he very well could have (and should have), but his natural curiosity was bothering him and telling him that it wasn't exactly a bad idea to just look at the picture. It was, however, a bad idea from the beginning to actually break into Blaine's locker and Kurt knew that... he had found out that Blaine hung up a picture of them, after all. On the back of his locker. Where he had to look all the time to actually get stuff for his classes.

Did that mean something, the placement of the picture?

... Oh, yeah, Kurt had definitely gone insane if he was analyzing the actual placement of pictures, of all things there was to analyze about Blaine Anderson's locker. It was just a picture, after all, and it was their first day back at school since Friday and maybe Blaine hadn't had the time to remove the picture or to replace it or something...

Kurt had to fight back the far-too strong urge to take the picture down suddenly, because that was a worse idea than actually breaking into the locker. Breaking in was one thing; leaving blatant evidence was another thing all together. Kurt really, really didn't need Blaine to find out what he was doing at that moment, for several reasons. One of them was that... well, Kurt was breaking into Blaine's locker being the obvious one. The other was that it seemed like a horribly stalker-like thing to do. The other? Well, it was technically very illegal.

Finally, Kurt decided that it'd just be a really, really good idea to close the locker door before anyone happened to cross his path, because, in that case, it's just be really awkward since... well, in such a small high school, most people had an idea of where each other's lockers were, and Kurt clearly wasn't at his own. So, he started to close it—until the ribbon ruffled and he got another spare glimpse at the photo hiding behind it. His arm stopped its movements, and he stared at the corner of the locker again... before reaching out slowly to move the ribbon tails to the side.

It took him quite a few moments of staring to realize what exactly he was looking at. Clearly, it was a picture... it was a picture taken on a rainy day... of him. Of him and it was of him standing under his umbrella, apparently staring at the ground even though he knew that he was actually looking at his shoulder and... his face looked a lot more relaxed than he thought it had been at the time. His eyes fell to the

shoes that he was wearing... they were his white ones with the black tips and—how could he have missed that? It took him a few more moments to realize that those were the boots whose soles ripped, so he had to throw them away...

The picture was of him. The picture was of him and not Rachel. It wasn't of anyone else, it was just... him. He reached out shakily and grabbed the bottom of the picture, flipping it over slowly. He remembered someone in photography saying that the teacher always wrote a note about the picture on the back and the students always had to put what the project was on the back. There wasn't any actual writing on the picture, though, except for the date that it was taken in the bottom corner.

Footsteps were heading towards him down the hall suddenly, and Kurt moved to close the locker as quickly as he could before the person could actually register who he was and what he was (most likely) doing—"Kurt?" came a soft, confused, way too familiar for Kurt's comfort, voice.

Slowly, with the locker mostly closed but still, sadly, open, Kurt turned his head towards the person that he knew was standing in the hall, just staring at him with wide, confused, and shocked hazel eyes. A few long, long moments of silence passed between them, only broken by the constant ticking of the clock somewhere around them, ticking with every second that passed. Kurt didn't know what to say or do, and it was clear that Blaine didn't know, either. So many emotions were running through Kurt's head, all at once, and it was dizzying and confusing for him and part of him just wanted to run to Blaine and hold onto him and just refuse with all of his might to leave, but another part of him was broken, and angry, and sad, and—

The next thing either of them, especially Kurt, knew, Kurt was taking off running, down the hall and towards the front of the school, leaving the locker slightly open, and leaving Blaine behind. He sprinted through the halls as quickly as he possibly could, his shoes loud against the hard linoleum of the school floor.

"Kurt! Kurt!" he heard Blaine shout, maybe even scream at the very top of his lungs, off reminiscent to what happened on Friday, just with reversed places and a bigger setting. Kurt didn't stop or slow down or turn back, though, even though Blaine was shouting after him and clearly running after him, if the steps mirroring his own were anything to go by. "Kurt, Kurt wait! Please, just—!"

Kurt shoved open the doors of the school, feeling the pain shoot up his arms from the force that he collided with the door. He didn't care, though, since he knew that his phone was in one of his pockets and his keys were in the other. He just needed to go home, he needed to get

away because so much was flooding his head at once. Not once did he even care that rain was pelting down on him, effectively ruining both his hair and the outfit that he was wearing. He didn't pay attention to the rain, nor the puddles that he was stepped right into, and he was really just zeroed in on his car because he wanted to get there—he needed to get there.

A hand was grabbing his wrist when he was halfway to his car, and he was pulled to a forceful stop. Kurt struggled to get away from the person he knew was holding onto his wrist tightly and tears were starting to well up in his eyes—tears of anger and sadness and utter frustration. Anger and sadness because of what Blaine did to him, frustration because he still felt his body heat up, even in the spring rain, from Blaine's touch, because his heart and stomach still gave a weird jolt just from Blaine's hand on his bare wrist. After a few moments of useless struggling, Kurt finally turned towards Blaine, his salty tears mixing with the natural rain that was dripping down his face as well. He glared at Blaine as best as he possibly could through all of the tears and the rain and to emotions, forcing himself to the best of his ability to not feel anything else from just seeing Blaine standing there, looking to desperate and sad.

"What do you want?" Kurt whispered, his voice breaking a few times as his arm went limp and he just let Blaine hold his wrist. His left wrist, of course, since Blaine would never grab his right wrist.

Blaine was panting a little bit, and it was only then that Kurt realized how out of breath he was from running as fast as he could through the school and rain. Kurt swallowed thickly, still looking at Blaine expectantly. "I just..." Blaine began, looking away from Kurt for a moment, "I just wanted to say that I'm sorry—"

Kurt yanked his wrist of Blaine's grip finally, and took a step away from him, anger overtaking him out of nowhere, "You don't have a right to say anything to me!" he shouted, another round of tears falling from the corners of his eyes, "If you're going to say anything, then you better be explaining yourself to me, not just saying that you're sorry!"

They stared at each other again for a while, before Blaine nodded slowly, licking his lips, accidentally catching a drop of rain that had been sliding down his face and was clinging to the skin right above Blaine's lips. The dark haired teen took a slight step towards Kurt, and Kurt resisted the urge to take another step back, instead standing his ground defiantly, "I do owe you an explanation," Blaine whispered. "I just... Kurt... the last thing I ever wanted to do was to loose you, but on Friday I just... I had to run. I had to run and... figure things out."

"Figure what out?" Kurt demanded, his voice wavering noticeably and he was very well aware how noticeable the waver was, "You can't give me a half-assed explanation and expect me to be okay with everything, Blaine. It just... it just doesn't work like that. It doesn't work like that at all." Kurt could literally feel his anger start to evaporate. He could feel the rain start to pull away all of the anger that had been welling up inside of him during the weekend, leaving behind only partial frustration and too much sadness for him to handle properly.

Blaine closed his eyes for a few moments, and Kurt might have seen a tear fall from his clenched eyes and down his cheek slowly, before he opened them again, taking another slight step towards Kurt. "I was afraid," Blaine whispered, and Kurt could barely hear him over the pattering rain, "I was afraid because you are my best, closest friend. I was afraid because I care so, so much about you, and I don't... I don't want to mess this up. I don't want to mess us up because... I wouldn't be able to handle losing you for the rest of my life, Kurt. I was afraid because I had never... I had never felt the way that I felt when I kissed you and it was... it was too much, all at once for me. I was afraid that you'd... reject me, straight up, the moment that your eyes opened because maybe... maybe you were still dreaming and thought I was something else or something like that because my mind comes up with crazy scenarios—I'm rambling again."

Kurt was still staring at him, completely unsure of what to say because... anger had left his body. He no longer had the will to scream at Blaine or to be angry with him. All the frustration was basically muted. The only thing that was left was sadness and Kurt didn't want to keep crying, even though tears were still coming and he had too much pride to actually wipe his eyes because maybe, maybe, Blaine didn't notice that he was actually crying. Maybe Blaine just thought it was rain.

"... You found me, Kurt," Blaine started again, his eyes not leaving Kurt face as he basically closed the distance between them, standing precariously close to the taller brunet, who lowered his head a little bit to keep staring at Blaine's eyes even though that would just make it more obvious that he was crying. "You found me, and you saved me, and you forgave me... when no one else really tried, when no one else really truly noticed me. Santana... tried, but she always wanted to be with Brittany and I knew it. You did everything, everything, that I wanted and needed, and you said everything that I wanted and needed to hear and... you healed me. You helped me and you got me to talk and to smile and to laugh again and... everything has just been

brighter since you stepped into my life. You changed everything for me, Kurt, and you changed everything positively.

"I didn't—I don't want to lose you. I don't want to mess things up between us because... I want you to be a constant in my life and I don't want my... my feelings for you messing things up. I just... I know that you saw the picture in my locker. The picture of you... from last year. I won't... I won't deny that I had... feelings for you, at the point in time. Santana... she told you that I liked someone while I was dating her and it—it was you. It was you and I didn't think that anything would come of it, because we never talked and I just saw you from afar—I watched you in the halls and I saw you. D... Deny it all you want but there was always something in your eyes... that said that you were unsure about something. That you were scared and—You still kept your head held high, though, and I admired that so much about you... I admired that you could still be yourself after being knocked down so much while I was hiding behind the me that I created to make my father proud of me—not that I wasn't actually myself last year and in freshman year, because I was... it was just a little more forced than it should have been.

"I never... ever, ever thought that we'd talk, especially after my isolation. And then... and then you ended up in the same English class that I was in and then we got paired for that project and I was surprised and maybe even frightened because I just—I know that you... you had ways of getting to me, even if you weren't my actual friend at first. Every time you tried to talk to me I had to force myself to not respond in some way because I wanted to so badly and that crush came back and... I didn't think that the crush would become anything more. I just thought that we'd get the project done and that'd be that... and then you were yourself. Then you were yourself and said all the right things to make me talk and everything happened and I just... I wanted to be close to you. I wanted to be your friend and... and things just progressed. Somewhere along the way I just... I just fell for you... further than I already had."

Finally, Blaine closed his eyes and rubbed a hand over his face, wiping some of the water off of it, though that was pointless because of the rain still falling. Blaine looked back up at Kurt, with a small, sad smile, "You don't want to hear this, I'm sure. I'm sorry, I'm just... wasting even more of your time but... I can't... lose you and be okay. If you... walk away right now, then I won't... I'll move on, but I just... I really want you to stop crying because no matter how beautiful you are when you cry, it's heartbreaking to see and—"

"How could I walk away?" Kurt asked when he finally found his voice again, his head tilting to the side slightly as he blinked heavily in an

attempt to clear his vision, "How could I... Blaine... you can read people so well... yet you couldn't tell one extremely important thing about me. You couldn't... figure out the one thing that could have made all of this so much easier on both of us." Blaine stared up at him, looking extremely confused behind all of the pain that was shining in his eyes. "When I fell asleep, Blaine, I was dreaming about you. You and me and Serena and some random kid that I swear I've seen in a picture at your house with Serena and I was just... it was us. I was awake when you k... kissed me mentally, and I knew it was you and I was well aware that I was kissing you. You and only you. Unless I have created this entire conversation as a figment of my imagination... please, just... I can't say that I've liked you since last year, but I was interested in you last year and I know that I feel something for you right here and now and I really wish that you'd just me up because I'm babbling and I probably spend too much time around you—"

"I love you," Blaine stated clearly through the rain, shutting Kurt up quickly since he just had to stare down at Blaine with wide eyes and just try to process what exactly he just heard come out of the dark-haired teen's mouth. "I love you, Kurt Hummel," he repeated, a hand reaching for Kurt's left hand, grasping it gently as his other hand came up and pressed itself against Kurt's cheek, "I love you."

Kurt stared down at Blaine for a while longer, their faces close enough together that their noses were brushing against each other every few seconds, "... I love you, too," he whispered back, his voice breaking a little bit because of another wave of emotions that hit him because... he had finally said it. He finally, finally said his feelings for Blaine, out loud, to Blaine face and... he could really only hope that he wasn't suffering from hardcore illusions or that he wasn't dreaming or anything.

A pair of lips brushed against his lightly for a few moments, before a small amount of pressure was applied and Kurt matched that amount perfectly, his eyes falling closed as her squeezed Blaine's hand gently as rain continued to fall all around them and on them. They separated just slightly, and Kurt opened his eyes partially, looking at Blaine again, his lips barely parted, "You kind of saved me, too."

"Oh? How did I manage to do that?"

"You saved me from falling apart," Kurt answered, "from snapping in two due to all of the abuse that gets directed at me. From collapsing and just giving up." He had never actually told anyone any of those things... but, really, Blaine did save him, from just being there and being a focus for Kurt to depend on subconsciously.

Blaine stared up at him through his long eyelashes that drops of rain just clung to in such a gorgeous manner... and squeezed Kurt's hand in

his gently, leaning back up to kiss him again, not saying a single word, and Kurt was perfectly okay with that. That was all that he needed, the physical contact that gave him real proof that Blaine wasn't going to run away from him, that Blaine loved him and adored him and they could just hold each other for a little while longer.

Their fingers laced and their palms slid together, and Kurt just knew that everything was going to be okay, a little better than before.

Chapter Twenty: You'll Never Know How Much I Love You

The sun was bright and unyielding high up in the sky—a sure sign that it was the middle of summer. Blaine and Kurt walked through the grassy field in the park, hand in hand, while Serena and her friend, Johan, ran towards the swing set. Kurt had a picnic basket hanging in the crook of his right arm, and Blaine had a blanket draped over his left arm and an umbrella in hand. They talked lowly and smiled at each other and laughed, walking closely because there was no one else around—no one else was crazy enough to go outside and eat in the weather that they were having.

When they reached a nice, grassy spot they could spread out in, Kurt set the basket down and grabbed one end of the blanket, helping his boyfriend—Kurt still grinned whenever he thought of that—spread the soft, but thin, fabric out. While Blaine was crawling around on the blanket, pushing outwards on any odd creases, Kurt grabbed the blanket... and just stood there for a while, thinking about the past few months since they had become a "thing".

Of course New Directions took it well when Blaine decided it'd be a great idea to spontaneously kiss Kurt on the huge steps in the back of their school only a week after their kiss in the rain. It wasn't like that type of reveal was planned or anything, but it did work to an extent. Mercedes hadn't really been surprised—well, no one in the glee club was really surprised, actually. They said something about expecting it since Kurt came back from the hospital or something—since Kurt had told her almost immediately after their kiss the next time he saw her. The rest of the school? Well... there was definitely an interesting reaction. The main first reaction was definitely shock. No one was angry for the first day after Blaine decided he'd be a spontaneous idiot (when Kurt asked him why he bothered to kiss him in probably the worst place for two guys to kiss in McKinley, Blaine just said, "You looked really cute," like the smooth, compliment-giving guy he was), even though some of the anger set in a day after.

Mostly, it came from the football players, of course, both due to the fact that Blaine came out of the closet and because he was with Kurt of all people. Not that Blaine really even cared that slushies were reinstated and mainly targeted at both him and Kurt, nor did he care that people started treating him completely differently. Being a popular straight guy like how he had been the year before was completely different from being a popular gay guy, which he couldn't be since... well, he was gay.

Yes, the thought pissed Kurt off because he knew that they wouldn't let Blaine back on the soccer team due to stupid prejudiced behavior that always pissed him off, so much. Once again, Blaine assured Kurt that he didn't care, and just held his hand happily and proudly, despite the fact that Kurt could tell that Blaine did care that everything was changing again.

At one point, the weekend after their relationship was revealed, actually, when they were lying on Kurt's couch watching TV, with Kurt's head in Blaine's lap again, a commercial came on and neither made a move to change the channel, so Kurt just turned his head away from the television and stared up at Blaine, who was watching it with a blank expression. Kurt stared up at him for a while, until Blaine became aware of his staring and looked down in response, a small smile appearing on his face automatically when he looked down at Kurt. His hand moved and weaved it self softly and slowly through Kurt's hair, causing the brunet to close his eyes in a small (large) amount of bliss.

"Are you doing okay?" Kurt asked softly, opening his eyes again only partially.

Blaine gave him a confused look, his head tilting to the side slightly like he always did when he was questioning something, "Of course I'm doing okay," he responded easily, "why wouldn't I be doing okay?" Kurt sighed and shook his head just enough to give the clear message that he was, indeed, shaking his head, "Blaine, everything started changing this week for you. People didn't use to touch you or ridicule you. Now that you've come out, and you've come out not only as a gay but also my boyfriend... the abuse has only just begun, Blaine." The words were said quietly, but bluntly so Blaine would get the message that Kurt was trying as hard as possible to send to him. As a first response, Blaine brushed his thumb lightly across Kurt's forehead—what he could reach, anyways, "I know that, Kurt," he responded, leaning over slightly so that their faces were closer, "You know that I know that. I don't exactly understand what you're trying to tell me by reiterating this."

"You can break up with me, if you want," Kurt said, appearing outwardly indifferent even though mentally and emotionally, the thought really, really hurt. They hadn't even been together a full two weeks... but Kurt wouldn't lie and say that he was afraid that everything that was happening to them would eventually cause Blaine to drift away. "I-I mean," he hurried on, looking away from Blaine before the dark haired teen could really respond properly, "eventually... eventually you'll probably start to fade away from me and I don't think I could actually deal with that if you stay with me."

There was a soft and short laugh before Blaine brushed his lips faintly across Kurt's forehead, "Kurt... I don't want to break up with you. I swear to you, that I'll never let the bullying affect how I feel about you. What we have between us... it's bigger and better and more important than any amount of abuse thrown my way—our way. Don't... say stuff like that, because we both know it's not going to happen. I bet you anything that you convinced yourself to think that." Kurt said nothing in return to that and just returned his gaze back to Blaine, who was still leaned over him, staring down at him.

"I won't lie," Blaine continued after a small moment of silence, "yes, the bullying does... bother me, quite a bit, but... you are truly worth it all. If anything, it actually all strengthens my feelings for you, in an odd way. We haven't even been together two weeks and this is probably sudden, but I never want to break up with you. If anything, you'll have to break up with me and..." there was a pause, before he changed his train of thought, "You have absolutely nothing to worry about, Kurt. I'm honestly not about to break up with you because of some kids at our school—I thought that you had more hope in me than that."

Kurt stared up at Blaine with wide eyes, before letting his own small laugh rush out of his mouth, "How do you always know what to say?" he asked.

"I don't," was Blaine response, and Kurt opened his eyes again, and Blaine's eyes were right above his own in all of their beautiful hazel glory.

Kurt's hand reached up and around Blaine's neck, pulling him down for a soft, light and brief kiss, arching upwards into it since there wasn't really much Kurt could do from how they were lying, before he let go of Blaine and let him sit up again, since that position couldn't have been comfortable.

"Kurt," Blaine's voice intruded his thoughts, and Kurt blinked, finally realizing that he had been staring off into space for a while, and he looked down at Blaine, who was staring up at him with a mixture of confusion and amusement, "I've been trying to get your attention. Set up the umbrella and get down here, silly."

Rolling his eyes, Kurt walked around the blanket and dug the large umbrella into the soft grassy ground, before carefully stepping onto the blanket, not wanting to crawl over due to grass stains, "So demanding," he huffed playfully. At Blaine's laugh, he fell onto the dark haired teen's chest, letting Blaine wrap his arms entirely around him. "I can't believe that you convinced me to do this, though."

Blaine laughed again, and Kurt could feel it more than he could hear it, "No one else is out here, though," he said in response, pulling them

both up to more of a sitting position, spreading his legs and letting Kurt sit in between them snuggly, "so we can cuddle as much as we want." As if to prove a point, Blaine's arms tightened around Kurt's torso for a moment.

"Ah, yes, the cuddling," Kurt shot back, tilting his head back completely to find Blaine smiling at him, "We could have cuddled at my house or your house, though. I honestly don't think that you have a legitimate reason for dragging me out here on one of the hottest days of the year."

Another small rush of laughter came from Blaine, spreading out across Kurt's face, causing him to heat up even more than he already had. Even wearing shorts and a soft t-shirt with a vest was causing Kurt to become heated enough by the weather to be a little more easily irritable than usual. "Let's just say it's for the kids—I mean, they're having tons of fun." One arm loosened from Kurt's body and gestured towards the playground, where Serena was climbing a ladder to get to the top, Johan taking the stairs instead.

Kurt watched them for a few moments, before smiling a little bit and nodding, leaning his head back less dramatically so that it fell against Blaine's chest, "Fine, it's for the kids—I am very proud of Serena, by the way, she seems to be getting so much better. The only thing I wish for now from her is for her to talk, but you said that she has said a few words, so I'm absolutely sure that she'll get better before the school year starts," Kurt rambled, breaking off from the original subject. Blaine didn't seem to mind, though. Actually, when Kurt glanced back at him shortly, Blaine was just smiling in an almost admiring manner that was just a little odd. "I repeat once more for emphasis, for the kids, not for you," Kurt added quickly.

A small kiss was pressed to the top of Kurt's head, and Blaine shook with muted laughter once more, "I'm glad that I have such a loving boyfriend," he retorted playfully, and Kurt couldn't even think of a proper response to that because his brain just melted and his heart basically just did a back flip from that one word.

Boyfriend.

"You did that on purpose," Kurt muttered in response, moving his elbow quickly to jab Blaine in the side. The dark haired teen let out a small noise that was probably a mixture of surprise and pain, before asking Kurt what exactly he meant. "You used the word boyfriend on me, on purpose," Kurt repeated, twisting his head again to give Blaine a look.

Blaine looked a little confused, before smiling again, "Well, I can assure you that I didn't do whatever I did on purpose. If it helps at all..." Blaine leaned down, his face ridiculously close to Kurt's suddenly

when it had already been pretty close. "The word probably gives me about the same reaction that it give you."

Kurt rose an eyebrow, attempting to act nonchalant at Blaine blatant attempt at flirting, "Says the guy who ran and tried to say bye after our first kiss." Kurt knew very well that was a pretty bad blow, but Blaine knew that he was kidding—especially because he adopted a playfully wounded expression, his mouth falling open slightly in a way that Kurt just had to laugh at.

"Haven't I explained this to you?" Blaine mock-whined, causing Kurt to laugh a little more. The small smile on Blaine's face broke the already poor illusion of Blaine being upset, and he chuckled a little and fell back, obviously bringing Kurt with him onto the blanket completely. Kurt rolled off of Blaine, and instead laid next to him, facing him completely on his right side while Blaine faced him, lying on his right side, "I am still a little angry at you for that, by the way," Kurt whispered truthfully. It wasn't like he was about to go in a rage angry, just more like a little bit hurt angry. Sure it wasn't really a good idea to dig up things that happened months ago, but he couldn't really help it—he did bring on the subject, after all.

A more serious, sorrowful expression found its way to Blaine's face, and he reached slowly for Kurt's left hand, holding it gently, "I know that you are," he whispered, inching just a little closer to Kurt. "You do have every right to still be angry at me for that. I was upset and frazzled, so I wasn't really thinking, and something in my mind told me to say goodbye and... well, I did stop myself because... I never, ever want to say goodbye to you." A thumb brushed across the slightly sensitive skin on Kurt's hand, adding to whatever his heart was feeling that made it hurt in probably the best way possible. "Saying bye to you would have been the biggest mistake of my life, in my honest opinion."

"We need a change of subject," Kurt muttered, squeezing Blaine's hand back gently, "today is supposed to be light and happy. We shouldn't be talking about serious things..." he trailed off, and glanced down at their hands, intertwined between them as they normally were, "You never did tell me why you have such an obsession with my hands, and I really want to know."

A small smile broke across Blaine's face again, even though that expression was still in his eyes that almost ruined the sweetness of the smile. Slowly, though, it started to fade from his hazel eyes completely as he brought Kurt's hand up to he mouth and pressed a gentle, fleeting kiss against the knuckle of his ring finger, "Mm, my odd obsession with your hands," he whispered against Kurt's pale skin, causing a slight shiver to run up his spine. "Do you know about that

Egyptian—I think it was Egyptian anyways—myth that stated that there was a vein that went straight from your ring finger to your heart, without taking any detours?"

Kurt gasped just a little bit as Blaine pulled their hands apart and turned the palm of Kurt's hand towards his face, and began lightly tracing his index finger from the tip of Kurt's left ring finger across the palm of his hand to his wrist. It was a ticklish feeling, that made him squirm a little, but not unpleasantly ticklish, "Yeah, I know about that," Kurt whispered, watching Blaine's finger slowly trail across the underside of his soft forearm, "That's why engagement and wedding rings are always on the left ring finger."

"Exactly," Blaine whispered, his index finger stopping briefly in the crook of Kurt's elbow, before continuing up Kurt's upper arm, "I mean, part of the reason I love your hands is because they're so soft, but it's also because of that. It's really just a myth... but I like going by it for some reason." His finger reached Kurt's shoulder, and then his chest, before Blaine pressed the palm of his hand gently against where Kurt's heart was beating under his skin and ribcage, "It's almost like a direct link to your heart. That's why I'm always touching your ring finger more than anything else."

Kurt lifted his gaze from Blaine's hand, and looked at Blaine himself pensively... before smiling just a little bit. "That's so... romantic in an odd way," he murmured in response, his left hand rising up again to press itself over Blaine's hand gently. "I do have to wonder, though..." he began, and Blaine made a noise that confirmed that he could continue with whatever question it was about to ask. "Does the fact that engagement and wedding rings are always placed on the left ring finger, as I said before, have anything to do with it?" Maybe Kurt was overstepping the boundaries of their new relationship, but he couldn't help but think back to that dream where they were engaged.

A light blush spread across Blaine's face, and his eyes darted to the side briefly, before he looked back at Kurt and laughed somewhat nervously, "I... I can't tell you yet," he finally said, leaning his head forwards so that their foreheads touched gently, "We've only been together a few months. I don't feel the need to drive you away from me just yet with my weird awkwardness."

"It's a yes or no question, Blaine," Kurt said teasingly lowly, moving so that their noses brushed together, "I just want to know if it has anything at all to do with that small fact. How long we've been together has nothing to do with it—yet. And you won't scare me away no matter what your answer is." Actually, Kurt could figure out the answer from Blaine's reaction, but he really just wanted to hear the

dark haired teen say it aloud for him to hear, as well as for confirmation.

"Yes, it does have something minor to do with that."

"I thought so."

They stared at each other for a while longer, before breaking out into huge smiles and light laughter. Blaine leaned forwards and pressed their lips together in a sweet, chaste kiss that was broken by another stream of laughter from both of them. "I thought it was a thing for people to freak out if their new significant other gives any indications at all that they want something more permanent in the future," Blaine said around the random fit of laughter that really just came out of nowhere.

Kurt's laughter died down just a little bit and his eyes opened again to look over at his boyfriend with a soft expression, "If that was even true in our case, you would have broken up with me immediately when you forced me to tell you about my dreams that I've had of us."

"True enough," Blaine responded, before leaning in for yet another soft kiss that only lasted a few moments, before they broke apart and smiled at each other again, just a little goofily.

Honestly, Kurt always felt a little lighter when they vaguely brought up the topic of marriage... that was a bad thing, wasn't it? He always had to remind himself that getting ahead of himself was a horrible idea and he just needed to take a step back, and breathe for a few moments, because he and Blaine had only been together for a few months and early desires of marriage were a bad thing. He totally blamed the dreams that he had, though. Their entire fault... well, okay, that would mean it was his subconscious' fault, which meant that it was his fault. He really couldn't win this mental battle.

Suddenly, a weight was on top of them and pushing them to the side slightly, and Kurt looked up confusedly to see a smiling Serena sprawled across them, laughter shining in her eyes. Kurt looked over to the side slightly and saw Johan standing there, smiling and looking a little guilty. At this, Kurt just laughed lightly, and Serena tugged on Blaine's shirt, "Hungry," she said softly, before lowering her head and hiding behind her bangs a little. It was clear that she still felt a little funny talking, and Kurt couldn't help but pull her into his arms.

"We can eat now, if you want," Kurt said, before Blaine said anything, hugging Serena closely to him. She giggled a little bit, and twisted around in Kurt's arms, pressing her face against his chest, hiding herself in such a cute, childish manner.

Blaine laughed a little and stood up, walking over to the basket and opening it, as Johan sat next to Kurt. Serena twisted around again so that she was sitting in Kurt's lap properly, and smiled over at Johan,

reaching out for him with one hand, which he took. Kurt smiled at them, before looking over at Blaine who was bringing over some sandwiches as well as a bowl of fruit.

Blaine seated himself next to Kurt, and handed to kids their food. When Serena got her food, she hopped out of Kurt's lap and seated herself next to Johan, resting her head on his shoulder as she ate, her mouth moving slightly every so often. She was probably whispering to him, since the only people she would actually speak choppy sentences to, according to Blaine, was both Blaine and Johan, obviously. Kurt was getting there... slowly.

"Thank you," Kurt said when Blaine handed him his food, and he unwrapped it carefully.

"No," Blaine whispered, pressing a sweet kiss against Kurt's cheek, "Thank you. I've told you this already, but really. You really, really did save me, Kurt."

Kurt looked over at his boyfriend, and smiled a little bit, leaning his head in Blaine's shoulder gently, "I know I did, and you saved me and everything is okay. We've been through this," he said in a teasing tone, taking a small bite from his sandwich and Blaine laughed gently. "I love you," he whispered, really more liked breathed, but all the same. His heart sped up slightly at the words, and he could feel his face start to heat up again slowly.

"I love you, too."

With a small, soft hum, Kurt let his eyes fall closed and a small smile spread across his face as he took another small bite of his sandwich. He listened to everything that was around them... the buzzing of a few bugs, the soft wind that fluttered across his face and moved leaves in the trees that were near them. He heard Serena talking softly and Johan responding just as quietly, and he heard Blaine's soft, quiet breathing between his own bites of food. Everything was fine... everything was okay. At that moment, Kurt could just listen and faintly, just faintly, he could hear the soft sound of music, as if it were so far away that someone had to strain their ears to hear.

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine, you make me happy, when skies are gray...

Serena suddenly shrieked with laughter and Kurt heard her fall over, and Blaine had to stand up to go see if everything was okay, and Kurt sat up completely and opened his eyes, looking over at Blaine who was leaned over Serena, who was basically rolling around on the blanket and the grass. Blaine was staring at her with a confused expression, before he started to laugh himself, which just caused Johan to start laughing.

Kurt watched Blaine lovingly, until he turned back to Kurt and grinned over at him. Kurt smiled back, softly, and the music started playing somewhere again, and he mouthed the next lyrics to Blaine.

You'll never know, just how much I love you.

In response to the mouthed words, Blaine's eyebrows rose from surprise... and then lowered as a sweet, caring smile appeared on his face. They were like that for a while, Kurt sitting and staring up at Blaine, and Blaine standing and staring down at Kurt.

It was okay. Everything was okay. After basically a year of hell... everything was okay.

So, please, don't take my sunshine away.