

Damaged Hearts Can Heal

by

Mrs Criss 2012

Klaine || AU || M

"As if in every lifetime that you and I have ever lived, we've chosen to come back and find each other and fall in love all over again..." Blaine and Kurt meet in a Coffee Shop.

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Contents

Chapter One	- 4 -
Chapter Two	- 7 -
Chapter Three	- 8 -
Chapter Four	- 13 -
Chapter Five	- 14 -
Chapter Six	- 18 -
Chapter Seven	- 25 -
Chapter Eight	- 33 -
Chapter Nine	- 38 -
Chapter Ten	- 44 -
Chapter Eleven	- 55 -
Chapter Twelve	- 63 -
Chapter Thirteen	- 70 -
Chapter Fourteen	- 78 -
Chapter Fifteen	- 86 -
Chapter Sixteen	- 95 -
Chapter Seventeen	- 100 -
Chapter Eighteen	- 106 -
Chapter Nineteen	- 109 -
Chapter Twenty	- 115 -

Chapter Twenty-One	- 121 -
Chapter Twenty-Two	- 126 -
Chapter Twenty-Three	- 135 -
Chapter Twenty-Four	- 143 -
Chapter Twenty-Five	- 151 -
Chapter Twenty-Six	- 156 -
Chapter Twenty-Seven	- 163 -
Chapter Twenty-Eight	- 172 -

Chapter One

Prompt 2: Falling in Love in a Coffee Shop

Blaine

"Is this seat taken?"

"Yes."

I don't even bother to look up from my phone screen when I answer, I just wait until I hear the woman's footsteps fade away before I pick up my cup and drink, looking around as I do so. The Coffee Corner is busy; hardly a surprise at eight thirty on a Monday, and really, any coffee shop that sits right near an entrance to Central Park is never going to be quiet, owing to the amount of tourists who seem to be a constant and very annoying presence.

The woman whom I suppose asked to have the seat opposite is now glaring her annoyance at me from the line, but I pretend I don't see. Instead, I look past her to where the door opens again and a gaggle of college students enter, bringing with them a gust of the bitterly cold wind. The noise level seems to quadruple, with all of them somehow needing to decide out loud what they're having, and each and every decision needs to be precursed by an in-depth discussion with another member of the group. Huffing my frustration, I go back to my phone.

"Excuse me, is this seat taken?"

"Yes," I almost snarl, and the feet, clad in smart Louboutins, quickly retreat. It's the taste in footwear that makes me look up, and I watch as a young guy heads over to the other side of the shop instead, squeezing onto a bench that's occupied by a couple sucking face. He perches awkwardly, and for a moment I feel bad. He's hot. Very hot, with light brown hair and blue eyes, but he's far too young, and he looks completely lost in his surroundings.

"Excuse me, is this seat...?"

"Oh just have it!" I snap at the woman with a baby strapped to her chest. "I'm leaving."

It's the same the next day, and the next, and I'm starting to think I should find another coffee shop closer to work, but Coffee Corner makes damn good coffee, and I like the view the table by the window affords me. So does everyone else, it seems.

"Could I possibly sit here? Or is it taken?"

This time I look up. It's the college kid from the other day, and he's nervously clutching a takeout cup, biting his lip in a way that could be pretty cute, if one were into cute things. Which I'm not.

"It's taken."

"Oh."

His face falls, and he retreats to the same bench as before, only this time he has to contend with a loud, middle-aged couple who, they inform the whole shop, are visiting from Nebraska.

Lucky Nebraska, I'll bet they're appreciating the peace.

A mid-week trip to Tokyo means I'm saved from the morning coffee hell for a few days, and the insanity of Japan means that when I return to New York, Coffee Corner seems calmer; an oasis of peace, almost.

"Hey! Hi." The College kid stands awkwardly in front of me, and gives a wave. "I know this seat is taken, by someone whom I never actually see, but I was wondering if you are?"

I stare up at him. "Huh?"

"Taken. I was wondering if you're taken...or not?"

Leaning back in my chair, I let my eyes travel slowly from his feet all the way up to his face, where I purposely let my gaze linger on his lips before I reach his eyes. "If I am?"

"Uh...then I'll just uh...go."

"Right. And if I'm not?"

"Then..." He pauses, lets out a deep breath and then says "Then I'd like to ask you out on a date."

"No thanks."

Chapter Two

Kurt

The guy leaves his seat so quickly I barely have time to register what's happening, but as the door closes behind him, and he storms down the street, pulling his overcoat on as he does so, I feel the embarrassment burning inside of me. Honestly? I could cry.

I sip my coffee, smile benignly, and pretend to text someone who is just as imaginary as the occupant of the vacant seat.

Chapter Three

Blaine

"You're late, Blaine."

"Tell someone who cares."

"Your mom cares, and she knows you're late. She's waiting in your office."

"Damn."

I pause for a moment, avoiding the steady gaze of Linda, my PA, a gift from God and generally an all-round wonderful person. I don't like many people, but I do like Linda.

"Blaine."

"Ugh." I turn, forcing myself to meet her pointed look. "Be nice, I know."

"Yes, please. Now go see her and I'll get you a coffee."

"Just had one."

I know Linda will ignore that, she always does. Every day, without fail, a mug of coffee is set on my desk within five minutes of me arriving. Linda knows I always get coffee on my way in, and she knows that two mugs of the stuff in less than an hour will have me using the bathroom all morning, but she says that's merely a good opportunity to get my step count in for the day. Linda is like a mom is supposed to be.

"Hey, mom."

"Nadine when we're in work, please, and you're late."

My mom stands, straightening her sharp navy suit and smoothing one hand over her hair, which is, as ever, scraped back from her face in a tight blond bun. She must surely be gray or even white by now, but there's not a chance in hell of Nadine Anderson ever letting age catch up to her.

"I was getting coffee."

My mother and I play games, and we've been doing so since I was a child. Not board games, you understand, but emotional, manipulative mind games, and our favorite is to appear like we're entirely unaffected by the other person, when the reality is that she's exasperated and disappointed by me, and I'm constantly angered by her.

"When I am not here, Blaine, you are in charge."

"Mm-hmm. I know. That's why the sign on my door says Blaine Anderson, Senior Partner."

"Exactly."

"It just doesn't say 'Only when it suits my mom' after it, that's all."

"That's not true."

"It does say that? I hadn't noticed."

"Behave, Blaine." She watches me closely as I move around the large office, purposely not sitting down just to annoy her. "Please don't be late again. I can't be here as much as I'd like, and so I'm relying on you to keep Anderson and Cole at the top, where we belong."

"Yes mom, whatever you say, mom."

"I'm leaving," she announces, to my relief. "I can't get any sense out of you today. And it's Nadine, not mom."

"Where are you going? To visit Cooper?"

She pauses in the doorway and turns back slowly, fixing me with an icy glare. "Don't you..."

"Coffee," Linda trills brightly. She must've been lurking, because her timing is impeccable, and she once told me that she stands outside and eavesdrops whenever any of my family visit. We have no secrets, Linda and I. "Lovely as ever to see you, Nadine. Doesn't Blaine look handsome today? I do like him in that maroon shirt."

"You like me in whatever I wear," I point out, and as I sit, she hands me my coffee and ruffles my hair.

"I do."

"Blaine always looks handsome," is all my mother manages, and I suppose it's some kind of compliment.

"But he needs to work on his manners."

She leaves, and Linda visibly relaxes, sitting down in the chair opposite me. "She's so sweet."

"Isn't she?" I give a sardonic smile and start up my computer. "I'm surprised she thinks me handsome, since I look so much like dad."

"Well they might have divorced, but there's no denying he was a very good looking man. You know..."

"A nice boy like me needs to find a man, I know."

"Just saying." Linda holds up her hands with a smile.

"But I'm not nice."

"You are," she counters. "You're just a little...damaged, that's all. But the right guy would fix all that."

"Doubtful. Anyway, I just got asked out, actually."

"Really? Did you accept?"

"No."

"Blaine!"

"I'm not interested."

"You are," Linda decides as she heads for the door. "You just won't let yourself, that's all."

That night, despite the chill and the threat of snow looming, I drive far out of the city. I like to do it sometimes, just to escape the relentless bustle and noise. When my brother and I were younger, we would

often talk about growing up and moving somewhere really remote. He wanted a ranch in Texas, so that he could ride horses all day long. I just wanted somewhere with a porch, so I could look out across fields and marvel at the wonders of nature. We neither of us got our wish.

I can't complain; few men of thirty four could own an apartment on Riverside Drive and be senior partner in a corporate law firm. Then again, few men of thirty four find themselves still beholden to their mother and, indeed, even fewer men of thirty four could be as lonely as I am. Once I've had my moment of wallowing, staring out my windshield at the darkened Hudson, I force myself back to the city, make my usual nightly call to my brother, and then head to bed.

The next day, laden with guilt over my mom's reprimand, I make sure I'm up early and in Coffee Corner just after seven. I'll still be late for work; later than I should be, anyhow, but it's a slight improvement. Assuming I'll avoid the tourists, I am dismayed to find the place isn't just busy, but positively heaving with bodies. I get my coffee to go, with no intention of staying jammed in among so many people, only as I'm about to leave, my usual spot opens up, and I'm in there quick as a flash. I deliberately put my briefcase on the vacant chair opposite, and make a big show of looking out of the window, as if expecting someone any minute. I'm not, of course, but I don't want Joe public to think they can come sit with me.

For once, my ruse works, and no one comes near. The shop begins to empty out; people hurrying off to jobs or school; groups of friends and colleagues laughing together as the door opens and shuts, opens and shuts.

"Hey."

I very nearly groan out loud when I see the college kid standing over me. It's not that I don't think he's hot or appreciate the attention, because he is, and I do, but he's needy, clingy, and I just don't want that in my life right now.

Or ever.

"Hi."

"So I was just wondering about yesterday?"

I sip my coffee and try to make myself look as innocent as possible. "Yesterday?"

"Um, yeah. The weird thing, where I asked you out, and then you kinda declined?"

"I didn't kind of decline. I said no."

"Yeah, but..."

"And then left."

"Yeah."

"So..."

"But you said you weren't taken."

"At no point did I say that," I counter, trying to keep my cool. "You assumed. I merely asked what would happen if I wasn't taken, and then you asked me out."

"You didn't have to walk out like that," he says, and I swear to God there's a hint of a pout on those lips.

"Oh but I did." I stand, and grab my cup. "And now I am again."

Chapter Four

Kurt

"You assumed I wasn't taken."

Well, right now, I'd pity anyone who let themselves get caught up with such an arrogant asshole.

Somehow, one dumbass but exceedingly hot guy has riled me to such an extent that I find myself unable to concentrate in class all day. In fact, after work I find myself still unable to concentrate on anything, so I decide to go for a run.

It should be noted that I am not a runner. At all. I mean, it does happen, because otherwise I wouldn't be able to eat as many cookies as I do, but I do not enjoy the exercise, or run at anything like a fast pace. I usually run in Central Park, but darkness is creeping in. My dad is constantly warning me of crazies in the park and, randomly, wild boar, so I take the track along the Hudson instead, where all the high class people live. It's well-lit, and well maintained, and it's gravel, meaning the small stones don't get too slippery in the ice. In fact, it's such a good path to take that I find myself running further than usual.

My watch tells me I've done four miles, and I'm just about to turn around, when I see the Coffee Corner guy getting out of a sleek looking gray Jaguar, and tossing the keys to a doorman before heading inside. I can only assume it's where he lives.

He doesn't see me at all. Why would he? People like that don't take notice of lesser mortals who stick out like a sore thumb in smart neighborhoods like this one. I turn and run the four miles back, consoling myself with the fact that I'll be able to eat an extra cookie tonight.

Chapter Five

Prompt 3- One and Only by Adele (the line I specifically took was "Lose myself in time just thinking of your face."

Blaine.

"Is anyone sitting here?"

"Yes."

"They're not."

"They will be soon."

It's a lie, of course it's a lie. It's barely eight on a Sunday morning and Coffee Corner has ten customers at most. College kid sighs heavily, but this time he gets the hint and leaves, takeout cup in hand.

"Why do you always do that?"

I look up in surprise, to find a guy sitting two tables away, also in the window, and glaring at me.

"Excuse me?"

"He's been coming in here for days, more than once a day, too, just to try and see you. Would it really kill you to talk to him like he's a human being?"

"He keeps asking me out."

"So?"

"I don't want to go out with him."

"Doesn't matter if you do or don't. You could still be polite about it. In fact, it's not just him, either, you never let anyone sit in that seat. What is it, your imaginary friend sits there or something?"

Flustered, I can feel the heat rising in my cheeks, and I'm uncomfortably hot around my collar. I tug at it and clear my throat. "He keeps asking me out."

"So you said, but you can't catch gayness, you know. It's not a disease."

"I know that, and I am gay, anyway," I snap, happy to seize some ground back. I just don't want to..."

"Go out with him, or have anyone sit with you."

"That's not true!"

"It's totally true."

"Jesus, you're rude."

The guy smiles, and it's incredibly alarming. His whole face changes and... well, he could sit *on* me for all I care. In fact, I'd be totally cool with that.

"So are you," he says, tilting his head to one side.

"*You* can sit here, if you want," I offer, and I know the second the words are out of my mouth that they sound ridiculously lame.

"I might sit on Barney."

"Who's Barney?"

"Your imaginary friend."

It's my turn to smile. "Actually, my imaginary friend was called Monsieur Calvet."

"Well, he just would be."

"And he was an elephant, so he probably would've broken the chair, if he'd tried to sit on it."

"Well, I am not an elephant," the guy says, getting to his feet, "But I did eat seven cookies last night, so fingers crossed I don't break it."

He sits opposite and really? Truthfully? I have never seen anyone so damn beautiful in all my life. His eyes are bright blue, and they sparkle. His hair is a light brown, but it holds flecks of blond, chestnut, even red. His features are sharp, his skin clear, and he carries himself with an air of confidence that I find incredibly alluring. He's younger than I am; in fact, he might well be only a student, but he's all man, of that there is no doubt.

Good Lord.

"Have you finished staring?"

"I was not staring!"

"You were. But my seven cookie weight gain can't show that badly, surely?"

"It... No. It really does not. Seven cookies? Really?"

He blushes. I mean, since when has blushing looked hot on a guy? *Since when?* Since now, I guess.

"I'd been out running and I always get hungry after. Actually, I saw you... And that makes me sound like a stalker. I only knew who you were because I'm in here every morning, and I know you as the grumpy guy who won't share his table so..."

"I'm Blaine."

He smiles again. "Kurt." I offer my hand- my mother would be proud- and he shakes it firmly. "Nice to properly meet you, and to be allowed to sit in the hallowed seat."

"Nice to know you stalk me."

"I do not!" He throws his head back and laughs. "You just happen to live near the river, and I just happen to run there, that's all."

"Yeah I do. Riverside Drive. I run there too. I've not seen you before."

"Do you routinely check out the men who run along the waterfront?"

"Oh gosh."

"Just joking. And anyway, I usually run in the park, it's just that it was getting dark last night. But I am in here each day."

"Why?"

"It's close to class. You?"

"It's close to home and delays my getting to work for just that little bit longer. You study at Columbus?"

"Yep. Literature and Women's studies. What do you do?"

"Um.. I work in the city. It's incredibly dull." My phone starts to ring. "Crap. I need to get this. I'll..."

I dash outside, take the call and try to be as quick as possible, but when I return, he's gone- presumably having left by the door on the other side of the shop, and I am left alone with Monsieur Calvet balancing precariously on the recently vacated chair.

Chapter Six

Prompt 4- Can't Take My Eyes Off Of You, by Frankie Valli

Kurt

"I just met the hottest guy ever and he's not an asshole and his imaginary friend is an elephant and I don't know what to do."

"Run away, if a guy your age still has an imaginary friend."

"He's older than me."

"Then run faster."

"Seriously dad, help me out here."

"What do you mean, help you out?" my dad says, laughing. "I'm under a nineteen eighty seven Chevrolet in Lima, Ohio, and you're rambling about some guy who's got a thing for elephants. There's only so much help I can give."

I pause, sit down on a bench in the park, and tell my dad everything. I don't leave anything out; including the fact that I thought Blaine to be a total moron for the longest time, until a two minute conversation with him changed my perception entirely.

"So where are you now? How was it left?"

"Um..."

"Kurt! You ran away, didn't you?"

"Well sort of. A bit... Yes. The thing was, he went outside to take a call, and I was trying to work out who he was talking to. Then his whole face like...softened, and he was...I don't know. Swooning down the line, it looked like. Like he really loved whoever was on the other end."

"Maybe it was his dog."

"Be serious."

"I am! You know, your Aunt Caroline gets Gary to put the dog on the line to her all the time."

"Yes, but she's insane. This guy isn't."

"Well, maybe he's got a kid."

"Ew."

"Don't be like that."

"I think he's got someone. A boyfriend...girlfriend. I don't know. He said he was gay but I've been caught out that way before."

"Once, Kurt. You were caught out once, and that was when you were still young. You're older now. I'd like to say wiser, but then you go running away from something that could potentially grow, so I don't know."

"You're mean."

"I know." I can hear the smile in my dad's voice. "Love you."

"Love you too."

"Now go find that guy."

But I don't, of course. Instead, I walk slowly back to my dorm room, do a little research for an assignment, and then meet with some friends for lunch. I don't tell them about the coffee shop incident; as much as I like them, I don't really know any of them well enough yet to divulge my stupidity. So we chat about the usual stuff; school, assignments, who's dating whom, and then we all go our separate ways.

I try and avoid going for coffee, really, but I seem irresistibly drawn to the place, and though it's busier than it was earlier in the day, it's still fairly peaceful.

"He's not here," the barista informs me, making my non-fat mocha before I can even ask. "The sappy kid...he's been in twice more, but the hot one? He's not been back."

"Right. Well, I didn't come here to see him, actually. I just came here to read for a while."

"Yeah." She smiles and pushes the cup over to me. "Keep telling yourself that."

And I do.

I go there daily, to sit in the window and read, and sometimes I might go in there more than once a day, too. Every time that I go in the early morning, the other boy is there too, the kid that Blaine doesn't want to go out with.

But Blaine never shows.

The snow arrives; something we've all been expecting but even so, it's a pain in the ass. Everything looks pretty for about two seconds, then it all starts turning into a horrible gray mess, and the snow keeps on coming thick and fast. Getting anywhere is treacherous, and even classes are canceled, but I pick my way to Coffee Corner regardless, and for once, fate smiles on me.

"Hey!"

Blaine looks up from his phone and beams. That's what he does. It's not a smile, or a grin, it's something that radiates out of his whole being, and it's because he's seen me.

That in turn has me wearing a grin I can't shift, which is only enhanced by Blaine getting to his feet and pulling out the opposite chair, gesturing for me to sit.

"Kurt! It's so good to see you. I really..." He stops, and clears his throat. "How are you?"

"I'm good." I sit, unwrapping myself from my giant scarf and pulling off my gloves, surreptitiously studying him as I do so.

The first time I noticed Blaine here, growling at a woman who asked to sit down, it was his hair that had stopped me from calling him out there and then. That sounds dumb, I realize, but honestly, it was so wavy, and dark, and swoon-worthy, that I let his rudeness slide. But there's so much more about him that's entirely alluring that it's hard to know where to begin. He isn't tall, necessarily, but he holds himself with confidence, which I like. He dresses well, which I very much like, and he keeps himself in good shape. There's more than a hint of biceps under his shirt, which I very, very much like and his face is, without

doubt, beautiful. Everything about it is sublime, from his smile, to his cheekbones, to the shape of his nose and the set of his chin, but it's his eyes, oh *God*, his eyes, that I adore most of all. They draw me in and make me want to drown there. The deepest, most luxurious shade of honey and brown I have ever seen, with flecks of gold, amber and a spark of...*something*, all conspire to produce the most glorious man I have ever set eyes on, and there's a part of me that just wants to grab him by his tie and lead him to the nearest hotel.

"I didn't see you," I blurt, my cheeks reddening as it dawns on me that now he'll know I've been waiting.

"I'm sorry. Something came up, and then I had to go to London for work. I um... Well, I actually wanted your number, that day that we talked... But then you ran out on me, and I thought maybe it wasn't... Maybe there wasn't... um..."

"Yeah. I'm an idiot." Might as well say it like it is. "I panicked. You were on the phone to someone..."

"My brother."

"Your... Right." The flush of shame spreads across me. "Right. Yeah. Well, if you still want my number, that is more than okay."

He grins. "Yes please."

There follows a silence in which neither of us knows what to say, but it isn't at all weird. We just sit there, smiling, both of us relieved to have gotten past the hurdle that seemed to stand in our way. The door behind me keeps opening and closing; despite the weather it seems as though New Yorkers are still out and about, and then Blaine groans.

College kid walks toward our table and then stops, dead, before he turns away and heads to the counter. I feel bad for him, but I admire his tenacity. If it had been me, I'd have turned and fled.

"Ouch."

Blaine shrugs. "I tried to let him down as gently as I could."

"That was gentle? Wow."

"Okay, well, I tried to let him know I wasn't interested, put it that way." He glances at his watch. "Are you staying? I have about ten minutes before I need to leave, but I'd like to buy you a coffee."

"Sure, thanks. Class is canceled so I'll probably hang out here and read, anyway. I'll have a non-fat mocha."

"I'm on it!" the barista bellows, motioning for Blaine to stay seated.

"How did she hear that?"

Blaine shrugs. "Beats me. But she had my order waiting today when I arrived, and yet there's no way she could've known that I was back in town, or that I'd be in at this time."

"Random. Anyway," I rest my chin in my palm, aware that I'm being incredibly flirtatious. "Tell me about your job. What is it that you do?"

"I'm a senior partner at a corporate law firm."

"Oh wow. Which one?"

"Anderson and Cole."

He says it so quietly that it's almost as though he's ashamed, but even I know that name. "Aren't they like...huge?"

He sighs heavily. "Yeah."

"The ones who do takeovers, right? They act for clients who want to buy other companies out?"

"Yes. Hostile takeovers, mostly."

"Is hostile as bad as it sounds?"

"Pretty much."

"Oh. So you went to a good law school then, right?"

"Where do you think?"

"Well, I was going to say you look like a Harvard boy, but I didn't want to offend."

He smiles. "It's fine."

"Did you like it there, or was it a bit snooty?"

"Ha! It depends on what you're used to, I guess. My brother and I both went to a very exclusive boarding school upstate, so Harvard wasn't all that different."

"I see. Did he study at Harvard too?"

"No." He says it with a finality that tells me now is not the time to question further, and there is a moment of silence before Blaine reaches across the table and lets his fingers gently brush against mine. "I'm sorry if I'm a little harsh sometimes. I rarely speak with anyone on a conversational level, apart from my PA, or my cleaner. But I do..." He pauses as the door opens, and shudders slightly from the gust of cold air. "Gosh, Kurt, I really do like you, and..."

"Kurt?"

I turn about in a daze, but I immediately snap out of it when I see a familiar set of green eyes looking down at me. "Lloyd? Oh my God, Lloyd! I didn't know you were back!"

Leaping to my feet, I throw my arms about him and revel in the fierce hug he delivers. He smells so good, so familiar, that I bury my nose in the crook of his neck, unable to resist dropping a little kiss there.

Then I remember Blaine.

I let go immediately and turn to see him watching with a mixture of confusion and hurt on his face. "Blaine, this is Lloyd."

"I gathered."

"He's uh..."

"We used to date," Lloyd says, smiling at me. "Then I stupidly went to Australia for a semester. But we've stayed in touch, and now I'm back so..." laughing, he offers his hand to Blaine. "Nice to meet you."

Blaine ignores Lloyd's hand completely and stands, pulling on his suit jacket and then his overcoat. "I'll leave you to it."

"Blaine? Did you want...?"

"No," he snaps, his anger evident. "Forget it."

He leaves, head down against the snow storm, and soon he's lost in a cloud of white. Turning back to Lloyd, I fall back into his arms in despair, laden with guilt and sadness.

"Hey," Lloyd says, happily hugging me back. "This is nice. Who's your friend?"

"No one," I mumble sadly, sitting back down in front of my mocha. "Just a guy."

Chapter Seven

Prompt 5: Your Body is a Wonderland, by John Mayer (there will be more on this prompt later in the story) ;)

Blaine

"For the last damn time, I don't care whether Jones can't make it! If I call a meeting I expect him to be present and if he chooses not to attend then perhaps I'll just choose not to represent you. End of!"

I cut the call off, which is not nearly as satisfying as slamming a receiver down, and give a yell of frustration. Of course, that summons Linda, who arrives with cookies and milk.

"I'm not five."

"And yet you're acting like it. For goodness sake, Blaine, if you lose Holder and Jones your mother will never forgive you."

"So? There's a lot I'll never forgive her for, so that'll make us quits."

"What's wrong with you today?"

"Nothing." I bite an Oreo in half and swallow it quickly.

"Did you get asked out again?"

"NO."

Linda watches me as i demolish the cookies and drain the milk, and then she catches on. "That's why you're mad, isn't it? He's moved on?"

"Not him."

"Oh. OH! You met someone?"

"Not really." Sighing, I hold my head in my hands. "I had a conversation with someone, and I asked for his number. He said he'd like that, and then suddenly the ex-boyfriend walks in and I'm out of the picture."

"Seriously?"

I lift my head. "I'm not about to make something like that up, am I?"

"Don't speak to me like that! It's just awful, that's all. I feel sorry for you."

"Yeah well, like I said, it was just one conversation, so nothing to get worked up about."

Except I am worked up, and that night, with the weather so bad, I end up wandering restlessly around the apartment, wishing I had taken Kurt's number after all, if only so I could ask what the hell was going on.

I run back over every second of our conversation. There's no question that things had been going well, and even if there was a little awkwardness at times, it didn't seem uneasy, or like Kurt didn't want to be there. On the contrary, at times I felt like he wanted me to just get on with it and ask him out, but then the ex turned up.

But was Lloyd an ex? He said they used to date. How serious was that? If I was dating someone, to me that would be a casual thing, whereas if I had actually been in a relationship with someone, I'd have said we used to be a couple. And what was going to happen now? It had stung, to see Kurt so happy in the arms of another guy, but they could just be really close friends, and I'd never begrudge him that. Hell, if he decided Lloyd was the love of his life, I couldn't hate him for that, either.

Except I'd wish it was me.

I have no one to ask, no one to talk to about any of it, and no experience to go off of. I could call Cooper, but there's no way he'd want to listen to me moaning about the state of my non-existent love life. In the end, I settle for being maudlin about it all over a large glass of red wine, before falling into bed and waking the next day with a headache. I don't go for coffee.

I do force myself to Coffee Corner the next day, though, because it's a Saturday and I have nothing else to do until the afternoon. Kurt is there; I hadn't thought he would be, so it throws me for a moment, but I nod curtly, take my drink from the barista, and sit in the window at my usual table. Kurt watches, his book shut on the table in front of him, and I raise one eyebrow, hoping it conveys my question.

"What?" he asks, his eyes still fixed on me.

"Are you going to come sit here?"

"Not if you just expect to raise an eyebrow to summon me, no."

"I didn't, I just didn't know what to say, that's all."

"Try hello," he quips. "I hear it's quite the ice breaker."

"You're rude today."

"You're rude every day."

I laugh in complete disbelief. "That's not true, and anyway, I think I've more of a right to be annoyed than you have."

"Oh, so you walking off right after you'd asked for my number isn't a reason for me to be upset?"

"Your ex boyfriend turned up! Why would I want to stick around? Especially after you greeted him so warmly."

This time, Kurt does move, walking quickly over to my table and pulling out the other chair. "He was never my boyfriend, okay?" He sits, leaning across to me and lowering his voice. "We dated for a month or so, but his trip to Australia was always on the agenda. We got on really well, and he's a good friend, so it's natural I was pleased to see him."

I nod, struck dumb by the sheer beauty of him once again. Today, Kurt is wearing some sort of sweater, in gray, which leaves one shoulder exposed.

As in...bare skin.

I shift slightly in my seat and try to tear my gaze away, because I'm aware that Kurt is waiting for conversation to continue, but his shoulder... Oh God. I want, so badly, to kiss there; to let my lips travel over his skin as he lies beneath me, his hands running into my hair.

"BLAINE!"

"Huh? What?"

"Staring." He snaps the word, but when I finally force my eyes away from his shoulder and up to his gorgeous face, I see he's got a small smile, as if he knows he should be annoyed but secretly he's quite pleased.

"Shoulder," I blurt. "Your... shoulder. It's very..."

He laughs, and pulls the sweater up a little, but then he drops his gaze to fiddle with the sugar packets on the table.

"Lloyd and I are dating again." At least he had the decency to look away when he said it, I guess.

"Oh." Stung, I bring each and every one of my barriers back down as I straighten up in my seat and clear my throat. "I see. Well, I'll let you get on with it then."

He swallows hard and looks me in the eye. "Blaine... I really like you."

"Mmmhmm. I really like you, too, but you can't have it both ways, Kurt. I won't ask you out if you're dating someone else. I might be a cut-throat lawyer but I have no interest in stealing another man's boyfriend."

"He's not my..."

"So you said."

"What about if *I* asked *you* out?" he says, brightening slightly at the thought.

"It would still be a no."

He pouts, just as the other college kid had done, but this time it's a pout I want to kiss away, until he's smiling against my lips. I sigh. "Kurt, how old are you?"

"Nineteen. Why? Are you going to tell me I'm too young for you anyway?"

"No, although fifteen years is quite a gap, I guess. No. I just... I mean this in the nicest possible way, but I think you still have a lot to learn."

The pout grows, his bottom lip jutting out slightly. "So do you."

"Undoubtedly." I shrug lightly. "Hell, I've never even had a serious relationship with anyone and I hate most people. I only mean that you should be out having fun, dating whomever you wish, but I'm not the guy for that."

Still sulking, he scuffs his foot along the floor. "Because you're oh so mature and sensible with a grown up job and everything?"

I'm unable to resist smiling at his surliness. "No, because I already like you far too much to think about sharing you with anyone."

He flushes pink and for a moment I wonder if he'll denounce Lloyd there and then, but he doesn't. Instead, he deliberately runs a finger along his exposed collarbone, then sips his coffee and stares off into the distance, before giving me the saddest look I think I've ever seen.

"I don't know what to do."

"I'll make it easy for you, then. Date him, have fun, do whatever nineteen year olds do. I don't know, I never did any of it. Don't live to regret it like I have, please."

He nods and gets to his feet. "I think I have to go."

"Sure." I smile, of course I do, but inside I'm screaming, willing him to stay here with me. I want to hold him, to soothe him, I want to kiss that goddamn shoulder so much I could burst... but he leaves, and when I'm on my second cup of coffee, I see him walking by on the opposite side of the street, hand in hand with Lloyd.

I make the decision to stay away from Coffee Corner and instead I get my caffeine fix from the Starbucks near to work. It's nowhere near as nice, and the staff are impersonal. I find myself missing the barista who seems to know everyone's business, and the manager who sings loudly whenever he's out back. I even miss college kid, in a weird way, but most of all I miss Kurt.

After a almost week has gone by, I decide to walk past the shop in order to get to the park. I could've taken another route, but this entrance is nearest to my apartment, or that's the excuse I tell myself, anyway. I deliberately take a lingering look in the windows as I pass, only to see college kid practically falling over himself to get outside and talk with me.

"Hey, hi!" He stops in front of me, smiling, bouncing, as if he's waiting for me to pat him on the head and call him a good boy. "How are you?"

"Been better. Can I help you?"

"I noticed you haven't been for coffee."

"I've been busy."

He nods, as if this is an incredibly deep and meaningful conversation. "I thought it might be because that guy you like is dating the other one."

"I don't like anyone."

He frowns. "Oh. I misread that, then." At this, he visibly brightens, and starts bouncing on the spot again. "Maybe you and I could..."

"No," I bark. "No we could not. You're just a kid."

"I'm twenty two next month!"

"A kid. You're hot, and I'd probably screw you if you wanted that, but you don't, you want more, and I can't give you that; I don't want to. Okay? So please, just stop asking me out all the time. You're embarrassing yourself."

"You'd sleep with me?"

One look at his face and I can tell it was the wrong thing to say, because he looks elated. "Oh God. No. No I wouldn't."

"But you said..."

"I lied. Just... Go find yourself someone your own age. Please. And leave me alone."

I turn toward the park and suddenly see Kurt standing there, glaring at me. "You really are a jerk!" he yells, quickly closing the distance between us. "All this time I thought I'd misjudged you, but no, you're a prick, you know that? A giant asshole who just likes to put other people down to make yourself feel good."

I stare at his seething face in shock, vaguely aware that college boy is watching all this unfold. "I am not! And yes, you did misjudge me."

"No, I didn't. What was it, Blaine? You wanted to screw me as well? Are you desperate to get laid? Is that why you were nicer to me than you ever are to him?"

"No!" I try to walk away, but Kurt is having none of it, and quickly pulls me back. "I like you," I say with a groan of despair. "You know I do. I was nice to you because...ugh, you know why."

"Because you have a thing for shoulders?"

"No! Well... yours, I do, but..."

"Why are you so horrible to him?"

I groan again. "Does it matter?"

"Yes it matters!" Kurt cries loudly, making passers by stop in their tracks. "Because how you treat other people says a lot about the person you are. The first time I heard him ask you out, I could have cried when you were so cruel to him. There is no reason for you to be mean, not one. I can't like someone who is so unkind to others."

Finally snapping, I shake my arm free. "It doesn't matter if you like me though, does it Kurt?" I shout back. "Because you're dating someone else, and I've already made my feelings quite clear on that. You wanna know why I'm a dick? Because I'm a mess, that's why. Maybe it is best you're dating Floyd, or whatever his name is, because you wouldn't have wanted this baggage anyhow. Sure, it's no excuse, but sometimes, just sometimes, I want other people to feel as shit as I do, okay? And other times, I just want a little happiness, which I thought I could find with you. Clearly that's never going to be the case."

My voice trembles on the last words, and I stare at the ground, horrified at the thought of tears making their way to the surface. For the first time ever, the silence that stretches between us is uncomfortable, and I need it to end. Clearing my throat, I briefly manage to meet his eye. "Excuse me, I'm going to take a walk."

Chapter Eight

Kurt

"I think I made a mistake."

"Yeah you did." The barista pushes my mocha over to me, and hands me a tissue. "I'm not saying that guy you're with isn't nice, but the other one? The hot lawyer? You two look so right together. Happy. Even when you were yelling at each other outside the other day; the way you both looked as he walked away said all it needed to."

"So what now?" I ask sadly. "He's not likely to come back here, and I have no way of getting in contact with him. Except..."

"What?"

I straighten up, sensing a small glimmer of light on the horizon. "I do know where he works."

"There you go! Stalk him."

I like Lloyd. He's smart, funny, kind and caring. He's good looking, he likes a lot of the same things as I do, and on paper, he could be the perfect boyfriend for someone.

Just not for me.

That doesn't mean it'll be easy to let him down; I've never found it easy to break things off even with the biggest assholes, and I worry over it for days. I even talk to my friends about it, something I've been trying to avoid, and of course, I spend a long time making calls to my dad, who tries his hardest with the advice, as ever. While his response of "don't date anyone at all ever," might not be what I was after, he does offer comfort, support, and most of all, love. It's his continual faith in me that gives me confidence because without it, I'd surely hide away and never try to make anything of myself, and I'd never decide to take any risks.

The snow returns and then quickly freezes, leaving every sidewalk like a deadly ice skating rink. This time, though, classes aren't cancelled and so I leave my dorm extra early to make my way to campus, stopping

for my regular coffee. It is Valentine's Day; the windows of Coffee Corner are decorated in a variety of red and pink hearts, and the chalkboard outside invites couples in to share a hot chocolate. It's all pretty damn nauseating, to be honest, especially given the way I'm feeling right now, but I push open the door regardless, and decide I'll grab my coffee to go.

I'm taken aback when I look over to my usual table and find a single red rose lying there. Looking over to the counter, I see the barista shrug and smile, before she takes my coffee over, pulling out the chair and indicating that I should sit.

"Is this for me?"

"Sure is. And hey, I even decorated your mocha with a heart, and I hate Valentines, so be grateful."

"I am." I reach for my wallet, but she waves me away.

"It's already taken care of. Oh, and this." She darts away and hurries back with a slice of red velvet cake covered in cream cheese frosting. "Someone's got it bad."

"Lloyd?"

The barista says nothing, but looks toward the doorway, where Blaine has suddenly appeared, biting his lip in the most devastatingly sexy way. "You did this?"

He steps forward, blushing slightly. The barista disappears, and for all I know the rest of the world does, too, because right now, this moment, is entirely Blaine and I.

"I know it's inappropriate," he says softly, "given that you're taken, but I needed to apologize for the other day."

"It's not me you need to apologize to," I explain softly. "The way you spoke to him..."

"I know, and I'll sort that, but right now, you're my priority." He stops, drops his head slightly, and rubs the back of his neck. "I uh... I have a thing about you," he says, looking up, and I swear some kind of fire suddenly ignites inside of me.

"Do you indeed?" I ask, hoping my exhilaration doesn't show.

"Mmm, and I've tried to ignore it, and get over it, or whatever, but I can't. So I'm sorry if I'm overstepping, here, but I need to just get this all off my chest, and then I'll be gone. I don't know if you do Valentine's Day, but I never have...until now. I think...if I'm not misguided, that the whole purpose is to confess your romantic feelings to someone, anonymously. Well, this isn't anonymous, but I just want you to know that I think you're incredible, and I'm going to always regret the fact that I missed the boat and didn't ask you out sooner. Anyway, enjoy your cake, and enjoy your day."

He leaves so quickly that I don't get to say a word in response, and anyway, I'm far too dazed to think of any come back, until the door closes, that is, and I snap back to reality. "Blaine!"

I run out of the shop and down the sidewalk, just in time to see him heading into the park. "Blaine!"

I don't see the ice; I don't even register that I'm falling until I land with a smack right on the edge of a raised flowerbed which is deftly hidden under a blanket of snow. The snow doesn't cushion my fall, though; my hip hits the concrete hard, and as I fall forward, I put my hands out to stop my face hitting the floor, scraping the skin off of my palms.

"Kurt!" Blaine is there in an instant, like a knight in a very sharp suit made of some wool blend rather than armor- but it'll more than suffice. Ignoring the cold and the wet, he kneels next to me, immediately pulling off his overcoat to drape it over my shoulders. "Kurt, are you okay?"

"Yeah, I..." I close my eyes to try and block out the burning pain, both from my hip and from the embarrassment. "Are people watching?"

"No. Well... Get outta here!" he calls, then his voice comes close to my ear. "Not now, they're not."

"Good."

"Can you stand?"

"Yeah."

He helps me to my feet, one strong arm wrapped around my waist and the other holding one of my stinging hands. Once I'm standing, though, he still doesn't let go. Instead, his eyes seem to dance as he stares into mine, a small smile on his face. "You ran after me."

"Yeah. That'll teach me." I can't help but smile back despite the throbbing in my hip.

"Are you badly hurt?"

"Only my ego, probably. Look, Blaine... I just wanted to say... I have a thing about you, too. Quite a big thing, actually, which is why I told Lloyd I can't date him anymore."

"You did?"

"Yeah, a couple of days ago, and I've been trying to find the courage to..."

"Kurt?" He cuts me off, hope lighting up his face as he moves both hands to my waist. "Do you have any plans for tonight?"

"No."

"Can I..."

I close my eyes, pressing my forehead against his. "You can do whatever you damn well want."

"Oh. Well. That's...um...that's very forward." He laughs softly. "How about we start with dinner, and see where it all goes from there?"

I dare to open my eyes then, to find him looking back at me and smiling softly. "Dinner. Yeah," I breathe. "Sounds good."

"Okay. I'd better go to work, really. But are you sure you're okay?"

"I'm fine, honestly. I'm going to go eat my cake, and then I need to get to class."

"Okay. I'll see you later." He steps backward, biting his lip again.

It's all I can do not to kiss the life out of him, so I give a little wave and turn back to the shop with what my dad would call a shit eating grin plastered across my face.

"Kurt!"

I turn back, and Blaine runs elegantly and deftly across the ice, stopping right in front of me. "We didn't make arrangements! I don't know where to pick you up, or have your number, or anything!"

"Oh! Yeah I guess we were a bit..."

"Caught up in the moment."

"Yes. Here." I take his phone and enter my number, handing it back with a smile. "Text me."

"I will, as soon as I get to work. Or when I've had coffee. Actually, I probably need to answer some emails and make a few calls, but then I'll text, I promise."

"Sure thing."

"Okay. Going now."

"Mmmhmm. Have a good day, Blaine."

"I most certainly will, now."

And then he is gone, and I call my dad and tell him, through mouthfuls of cake, that I have a Valentine.

Chapter Nine

Blaine

"Happy Valentines!" I set the box of heart shaped cookies on Linda's desk and kiss her cheek. "You look radiant today."

"Who are you and what have you done with Blaine? By the way, you're late and your mom is waiting."

"Cool."

"Huh? And what's all this?"

"A Valentine's gift for the greatest woman I know. And I'm taking you out for lunch."

"Well I'm not going to object. Go see your mom; I'll get you a coffee."

"Good morning, mom!" I throw open the door to my office and smile warmly, then I see the huge bouquet of flowers on my desk. "Oh, hey, you got me flowers?"

"I didn't, no. Why would I do that?" she says, eyeing me warily. "And it's Nadine in work, please."

"Linda, you charmer!"

Linda enters the room with my coffee and laughs. "Not from me, I'm afraid. You're usually a complete grump on Valentine's so I didn't bother. My guess is they're from Louisa, the intern."

"He's gay," mom says, stating the obvious. "He won't be interested."

"Trust me, it hasn't stopped her pining for him." She forces me into my chair and rummages in the bouquet for a card. "Read it."

"Not with you here."

"I'm not leaving." Of course she's not- she never does, but what surprises me is that my mom seems interested too, and I hope it's not because she will fire the sweet, shy intern if she really has sent me flowers.

Blaine- I want you to know I can't stop thinking about you, which is why I'm no longer dating anyone. I'm aware we left things in a bad place but I think you feel the same way about me as I do about you, which is to say, I think you're wonderful. Please call me...

And be my Valentine?

Kurt.

"Ha! He sent these before we talked this morning."

"Who is Kurt?" Linda asks, as my mom leans over the desk and takes the card, a shocked look on her face.

"He's the coffee shop guy."

"The one you turned down?"

"No, the one who was dating someone else. But he's not now. And I sent him a rose, and he sent me flowers, and we have a date tonight."

"You have a date?" Linda very nearly shrieks, but she remembers herself at the last minute and nods curtly at my mom. "That's nice, isn't it, Nadine?"

"Not really. I always thought Valentine's day to be the height of tackiness."

"That's crap!" I can't help but laugh. "I can remember dad buying you..."

"We need to talk about the Holder Jones case, Blaine," she says, shutting me down. "Linda, kindly take these flowers and place them in reception."

"I don't think so," Linda retorts. "They're Blaine's flowers and they'll stay in this office unless he wants to take them home." Standing up straight and squaring her shoulders, she fixes what I call her professional smile in place. "Coffee, Nadine?"

"No."

"Excellent. Call if you need anything."

My mother waits until the door is closed, then turns to me, her blue eyes cold. "Do not get caught up in romance, Blaine. It won't end well and I've made my position on you getting married or having a family, quite clear."

"You have, yes, but this is my life, mom, and I'll live it however I want."

"No you won't, Blaine. When you were born into this family, a responsibility was immediately placed upon you. I've always raised you to be aware of this, and..."

"Bullshit! I had no responsibility! You had an heir and I was the spare. If Cooper hadn't..."

"Don't."

"Fine. But please, don't ever pretend like you raised me. Looking after a child, then sending them to boarding school when they're seven, does not constitute 'raising' someone."

"Whatever you say." She smiles coldly and for a moment I feel almost chilled. Then I think of Cooper, and the coldness turns to pain.

"You haven't seen him for five months."

"I'm very busy, Blaine."

"He knows, you know. All that you think about him, he knows."

"Cooper knows nothing."

"Don't belittle him! Don't you dare!" I yell. "And don't come in here, dictating to me about how I should live my private life. I already run this damn company for you, *Nadine*. What more do you want?"

"I want you to take it seriously, Blaine, and stop running around town chasing boys. I want you to work hard to see that this company succeeds."

"Why? What's the point? When I'm dead and gone there's not going to be anyone to inherit it, is there?"

"The point is success, money, influence, right now. Not when I'm dead, or when you are, but right now. I want to be remembered for something."

"Do you? Well don't you worry, mother, I'll remember you for a lot of things. None of them good."

"You are being extremely unfair and I won't stay to listen to it. Email me a progress report on Holder Jones before noon."

I don't even look up as she leaves, I merely hold my head in my hands and stare down at the mahogany desk, wondering how such a wonderful day can turn so sour.

Then I remember Kurt's flowers.

Thank you, I text. And yes, I will be your Valentine. Tell me what food you like?

Pizza, comes the reply, followed two minutes later by: Cheesecake, pie, ice-cream, champagne, chocolate.

I laugh out loud and start work, but my phone soon buzzes again.

Green beans.

Quite the combination. I'll pick you up at 7? Let me know your address.

It turns out that time really does drag when you're waiting for something. Aside from the fact that I'm incredibly smitten with Kurt, I'm actually just really looking forward to having some company for the evening. It reminds me of the many nights my brother and I would spend together, watching a movie, eating burgers, playing video games...whatever we did it was company, and nothing could better it. Now it's not the same, and it never will be the same, but at least there's Kurt; a beacon of light in the darkness.

"What do I wear for a date?" I ask Linda over lunch. She raises an eyebrow and drains the rest of her wine.

"You're asking me, a woman of fifty seven, who's been married for twenty five years, what you, a gay man of thirty four, should wear on a date?"

"I've got to ask someone."

"I don't know! Where are you going?"

"I have no idea."

"Blaine! It's Valentine's night. Everywhere will be busy. You need to make reservations."

"Yes, and I will, but what do I wear?"

"It depends on where you're going!" She throws her hands up in despair and laughs. "In my opinion, you can't go wrong with a nice shirt and a bow tie."

"But that's my usual look," I complain.

"Yes, but surely Kurt appreciates that? You always look dapper, Blaine, and very handsome. If you really want specific advice, why don't you ask Cooper?"

"Nah." I brush it off, signalling to the waiter for the check. "Don't worry, I'll just go with what you suggested."

"Blaine? Did I upset you?"

"No, it's just... I don't want Cooper to know about this, that's all."

"Why not?" Linda reaches for my hand and I feel as if I may cry. "He'd appreciate the distraction, most likely, and you know he would tease you about it."

"It's not fair, though, is it? Because he... I just don't want to rub his face in it, that's all."

"Okay." Linda nods, and picks up her purse. "Come on then, boss man. Let's go shopping."

So that is what we do.

Linda tries her hardest to convince me that a black shirt covered in red hearts is romantic and not tacky, but I ignore her and opt for a dark green shirt, instead, and a pair of gray pants that are tighter than I'd usually wear for work.

"Do I look okay?"

"Well," she says, turning away. "I need to avert my eyes because they keep wandering to your groin area, so if that's the look you're going for, then I'd say yes."

"Is it too much?"

"Blaine." She sighs and turns back to me, taking my hand in hers. "You're a young, single man with a Valentine's date. Have a little fun for once; God knows you deserve it."

It's true that I rarely do anything like this; in fact I've never been on what could be regarded as a proper date, so it's hardly surprising that I'm incredibly nervous. By the time I leave my apartment to pick Kurt up, I am close to turning tail and running far, far away. The very idea of spending more time with Kurt makes me get in the car, though, because the thought of not taking this opportunity is too upsetting to contemplate. I'm so preoccupied with the imminent date, that I forget all about calling my brother until I'm in the car, so I quickly put the phone on hands free and dial, kind of relieved when it goes to voicemail.

"Hey, it's me," I say as I try to maneuver over to the inside lane of traffic. "I guess you're busy. Probably in the bath or something? Anyway, I'll catch you tomorrow. I just... I won't call later, Coop, because I uh... I have a date, actually. Kind of. Yeah. Kind of a date type thing. Food, really. Just uh... y'know, grabbing food with someone and uh.. I'm not sure... It'll be late and uh... so yeah. Yeah. I'll call tomorrow. Love you."

I hang up abruptly, because there on the sidewalk, waiting outside of his dorms, is Kurt.

Chapter Ten

Prompt: Eternal Flame- The Bangles

Kurt

"That's him."

"Where?" My friend Rachel scans the sidewalk, impatiently trying to look over the heads of passers by. "I don't see anyone. This guy? Is it this guy?"

"In the car," I snap, embarrassment burning my cheeks. "Now please, disappear."

"That's his car?" She gawps at the silver Jaguar pulling to a stop in front of us. "Oh my God, Kurt! Oh, can I say hi? Let me say hi."

"No. Go, Rachel. Now. I mean it."

"Fine," she says, merely taking a step back instead of leaving. "But I want to be introduced next time."

I make for the car, but Blaine jumps out his side and comes around, opening the door for me. "Hey," he says softly, his voice barely lifting over the noise of the traffic. "You...mmm."

He smiles, his nervousness clear and making him all the more irresistible to me. I want to try and return some kind of greeting, but my smile remains absurdly large on my face, to the point where it's impossible to speak, so I just slide into the car instead, forgetting all about Rachel, whose jaw is probably hitting the sidewalk.

Conversation doesn't happen once we're out in the traffic, either. It seems as though, outside of our usual coffee shop setting, neither of us knows what to say. It's awkward, but at the same time, it isn't, because I know the awkwardness stems from both of us feeling incredibly nervous. Blaine glances across at me several times and smiles, and in the end I have to break the silence.

"Where are we going?"

"Oh, well..."

"Is that rude? I'm sorry. I was just trying to think of something to say, that's all. Sometimes my mouth speaks before my brain can catch up. Sorry."

"No, It's just..."

"This is weird, isn't it? Why is it weird? I mean, we've talked a few times now, and you rescued me this morning, so it shouldn't be weird, but it is. It's..."

"Weird?"

"Yeah." I lean back in my seat a little, my heart pounding unusually fast. "Weird."

"Um... well, maybe it's because we both um..."

"Like each other?"

"Yeah." Even in the dark, he blushes. "That."

"I guess so."

The silence falls again, and lasts through two sets of lights. On the plus side, it gives me time to admire the plush and pristine car interior.

"Thank you for my flowers," Blaine eventually says. "They kinda made my day, so..."

"You're welcome. I sent them before we..."

"I figured. Which made them mean more, really."

"I'm glad."

"I mean, when I say they made my day, you'd already made my day by agreeing to this date, so... so they um...enhanced it, I guess."

"Good." My heart rate slowing slightly, I look out of the window to see that we're near to Central Park. "So, where are we going?"

"About that..."

"It's rude of me."

"No, not at all. I just... You see..." He signals and turns, pulling up in front of his apartment block. We've only been in the car fifteen minutes. "I was trying to think of where to go, and then I'd left it too late to get into anywhere because it's Valentine's and seemingly everyone goes out to eat, so..."

"Your apartment?"

"Yes."

"Right." I look up at the building and let out a breath. "Okay. Well, I can't say I've ever been back to a guy's place on the first date, but..."

"Do you want to call someone?"

"Huh?" I turn back to see Blaine looking terrified. "Why would I call someone?"

"Just to let them know where you are. If you don't feel safe, I mean."

"Are you going to jump me?"

"Goodness, no! I would never... No. I just want you to be comfortable, that's all. I would never..."

"Try anything?"

"Exactly."

Summoning up every ounce of flirtatious courage I possess, I give a small smile. "What a shame. I was rather hoping you would."

It works. I don't know why, because to me it sounds forced and unnatural, but Blaine gulps, gives a sharp nod, and then he's out of the car and opening my door for me, tossing his keys to a valet.

"Come up," he says, still slightly dazed by my comment. "We can...um... well, there's food."

"Okay. Aren't you going to say thank you?"

He frowns. "What for?"

"Not to me, to that valet."

"Huh?" He looks over his shoulder, as if noticing the valet for the very first time. "Oh. Right. Thank you, Greg."

"It's Ed, but you're welcome, sir."

"Ed. Right. Good." Clearly at a loss, Blaine looks to me, and I smile in the hope of showing him I'm not mad.

"Thanks. I just... my dad is... you know? He works a blue collar job and I see him, going out of his way to help people, and there's no thanks for his time or effort, just an expectation."

"I get that," Blaine says, and I think he's sincere even though he ignores the doorman and the elevator operator. "But these people are paid, Kurt. They're not standing here for the love of it."

"Minimum wage, most likely," I tell him once we're alone outside his door. "And you never know, Blaine, your thanks could make someone's day. You certainly made mine when you first spoke to me."

"I did? I thought I came off as rude."

"You did. And hot."

He opens his mouth to come back, but he's got nothing so instead he just lets me into the most enormous apartment I have ever seen.

"Holy shit!"

Blaine says nothing, still, but he must be aware that this is not your average living quarters; certainly not for a struggling college student in New York, anyhow. The apartment is vast, with high ceilings and expensive antique furniture

"This place is enormous."

"This is uh...this is the hallway," Blaine says stiffly. "Bedrooms are down there," he gestures vaguely to the right. "Office, Library, room that I don't know what to do with, bathrooms, all that sort of thing. Living room is this way."

He leads me to the left, and into what is essentially a huge space with couches in it. There are tall windows, giving a perfect view of the Hudson and the night sky, and then the room extends around to the right, giving way to a dining area and beyond that, a kitchen.

"It's beautiful."

Blaine shrugs, and holds out a hand for my jacket. I give it to him, and when he disappears to hang it, I slip my shoes off and sink into the carpet. I wander around, taking in photos of Blaine as a young boy, with another, older boy by his side.

"Is this your brother?"

"Yes."

"You look close."

"We were."

"You're not now?"

He stops on his way to the kitchen and pauses as if he's giving my question a great deal of thought. "I think we're perhaps not as close as we could be, which is a shame," he says eventually.

For a long time I stand there, looking out at the river but not really seeing it, as I process Blaine's weirdness. He's embarrassed about his wealth, and awkward when talking about his brother. Something is off, but he's not about to give anything away, and so I resolve to ask more on a second date, if there is one.

"I made pizza," he suddenly says, reappearing with two plates. "Because you said you liked it. So uh... yeah. It's almost done."

Not only is there pizza, but there's champagne to drink, and a dish of green beans, which really makes me laugh out loud. "Okay, that's a good one."

Pleased, Blaine settles back in his chair with a smile. "I wanted to give you your favorite foods. Happy Valentine's Day."

"Thank you." I raise my glass and we toast one another, before demolishing pizza in relative silence. It's strange, but eating in front of people I don't know has always bothered me, but not tonight, not with Blaine. Somehow, despite the many unanswered questions, and the not knowing, everything seems right; easy.

"Are those the flowers?" I ask, nodding toward the many vases on the antique dresser.

"Yeah. You like them?"

"They're lovely. I wasn't sure. You know, you order online and then you just hope they'll be okay. Then, of course, I had to hope there wasn't more than one Blaine at your workplace, since I didn't know your last name."

"Anderson."

"Oh, well now I know for next time." I smile brightly. "Oh, hey, that's funny. You're Blaine Anderson and you work at Anderson and Cole."

He raises one eyebrow, and suddenly it's all I need to know. "Oh my god it's your firm, isn't it?"

"Not mine, no."

"Your dad's, then."

"No." He sighs heavily and sets his glass on the table where he fiddles with it rather than look at me. "My mom's, actually. Nadine Anderson. Her grandfather started it. He was called Cole Anderson, but he switched it up so it sounded like he had a partner when the reality was it was just him in a tiny basement room when he first started out."

"Can I ask how come your last name is Anderson then?"

"My dad took my mom's name when they married," Blaine says softly. "Which was oh so progressive and liberal when they married in the late sixties, but the reality was that there was no way in hell my mom would have relinquished her hold on the Anderson name. Dad married into her family, not the other way around."

"Does it have to be any way? Surely a marriage is a union rather than one side dissolving into another."

"You'd think, but no. Dad married into the Andersons, end of story."

"Well, they all sound delightful."

"Ha!" Blaine looks up then, genuine mirth shining in his eyes. "Yeah, they're the absolute best," he says dryly. "Ah, come on, this conversation is dragging me down, and I don't want to end up maudlin tonight. Follow me."

I trail him into the kitchen, where he pours more champagne and sets a box on the enormous marble island. "Chocolate."

"Oh my god! Fancy chocolates." I want to protest, really, but I also know that money to Blaine clearly isn't the same as money to me, and anyway, they really are fancy. "I'm gonna die," I declare happily as I pop one in my mouth. "What a way to go."

He laughs, and looks over his shoulder at me. The light from the open fridge seems to highlight him perfectly, and I'm reminded again just how incredibly beautiful he is.

"I doubt you'll die, but I'm glad you like them," he says evenly. "I also have pie, and cheesecake, and ice-cream, of course."

"Really? Wow. That's amazing." He sets everything out with two bowls, and I hop up on the island to watch him. "You got salted caramel ice-cream? That's my favorite."

"Yeah. Uh..Kurt?" He steps closer, so he's standing in front of my knees. "What's that?"

"What's what?"

"On your hip there." He gestures vaguely to my left hip, and I pull my sweater a little lower. Of both of us, he looks the most flustered and embarrassed, but he still holds me in a steady gaze.

"It's um... It's a little bruised, from where I fell." I hold my hands up. "But I'll survive, really. Don't worry."

He takes my wrists, holding my hands palms up. "You really hurt yourself," he says sadly, looking at the grazed skin. "Kurt..."

"It's fine, really. I was just...trying to make sure you didn't escape and..."

My sentence ends in a small laugh, cut off abruptly when Blaine raises my right palm to his lips, and kisses it. He keeps his eyes locked on mine throughout, and then kisses the left one, too. "I don't like the thought of you hurting."

My heart racing, I have to lick my lips before I can get any words out. "No, well, like I said, it's..."

"Can I see?"

"It's really nothing." It's not the bruises he needs to worry about, I think; more the flame of desire inside of me that is suddenly flaring very hot indeed.

"Okay." He shrugs and steps back a little. "I won't push you. But I do have some stuff that's good for bruises, if you want it. I think it helps them heal quicker. My assistant says it's nonsense but I swear by it."

Slowly, I lift the side of my sweater, and push the waistband of my jeans down slightly. The bruise is now a livid purple, as I thought it would be, and it covers a good portion of my side. Looking down at it, I see Blaine's trembling fingers come into view, gently tracing the outline. His touch is featherlight, prompting goosebumps to rise over my skin as my breath catches in my throat. I look up, to find him closer than he was, his eyes shining.

"I'll uh...I'll get that cream," he whispers, but neither of us make to move. He just stays there, looking up at me, and I stay looking down at him. The silence stretches, but the moment never breaks, and I know, however hard I try, I'm not bold enough to make the move.

"Do it," I whisper as his gaze drops down to my lips.

He gives a small shake of his head. "I can't."

"I want you to."

"No, I mean I actually can't. I can't reach." He looks back to my eyes and bites his lip as he smiles, endearingly shy.

"Oh." I slide off the counter and then I'm right in front of him, our bodies pressed together as he makes no move to step back. "Better?"

"Much. Kurt..." He closes the gap, grazing his lips over mine and giving a small sigh of contentment. He does it again, pressing harder, and then it's like the floodgates have been opened for both of us. I think it's me who pulls him in for a proper, deep, long kiss, but it could just have easily been Blaine; his hands frame my face as we kiss over and over, and I let my own hands slide around his waist and down to where the top of his ass swells deliciously in his pants.

I feel as though I could kiss him forever; there's no awkwardness now, just pure, heated want from both of us, and it drives me crazy. Pushed against me, I can feel Blaine getting hard, which makes me grab his hips and pull him even closer, making sure he knows I'm the same. Hell, if he wanted to, he could take me right there and then and I'd be more than willing. He doesn't, though.

The kiss slows- an act of remarkable restraint on Blaine's part because I was all for saying to hell with it and going right to bed, but Blaine pulls back, with one final, soft kiss to my lips, and runs a hand through his hair.

"We uh... we should eat that ice-cream," he says, looking utterly dazed and confused. "Before it melts."

I laugh, smooth down my clothing and stand up straight. "That's what you were thinking of?"

"Uh, no." He hands me a bowl and quickly kisses my cheek. "That is most decidedly not what I was thinking about, at all."

"What, then?"

Shaking his head, he steers me back to the dining table and pulls out a chair. "You know what, and I'm not going to say it."

"Tease."

"Tell me about school, instead. That girl you were with, is she your roommate?"

"Kind of. Our dorms are arranged in groups of six. Rachel shares a room with another girl, both of whom are on my course."

"Who do you share with?"

"No one."

"Really?"

"Yeah, my dad wanted me to have my own space. I was bullied in school, and I think he was worried I might end up with a roommate who was homophobic, or something, so he paid extra for a single dorm room."

"That's very sweet of him."

"You have no idea." I smile, thinking of my dad back home in Lima. "He's the best."

"Good. My dad was pretty cool."

"Was? He died?"

"Yeah." Blaine clears his throat and pushes his empty bowl to one side. "Yes he did. There was an accident and he... Well, he didn't make it."

"I'm so sorry." I reach out across the table, taking his hand and lacing our fingers together. "My mom died too. I was five."

"That's rough."

"Yeah, it was. Probably why my dad and I are so close."

"Yeah? Funny, it didn't work that way for my mom and I. Quite the opposite, in fact."

"You don't get along? What's she like?"

"She's focused, driven, successful, cold. She was always all of those things, except cold, you know? I have memories of her being a real mom; playing with us, bathing us, chasing me around the yard, laughing... She wasn't always like she is now. She just wasn't. It was a gradual change, I think. My grandparents insisted Cooper and I went away for school when I was seven."

"You were what?"

"Exactly. I think that was the start of the end for mom and dad's marriage, to be honest. They divorced when I was ten, and dad moved out to Texas, to live on a ranch."

"Wow, that's quite the change of lifestyle."

Blaine smiles, clearly still proud of his late father. "Right? It was heaven out there. Nothing but us, and the horses; all that space, the beauty of nature... Incredible."

For a moment, he looks so wistful that I am almost moved to tears, and once again I find myself more than a little intrigued by this man.

"Incredible," he whispers softly again, and then he seems to remember himself and come back into the room from wherever it is he's been. "Another drink?"

"Sure," I say, even though the two glasses of champagne have already made me lightheaded.

He hurries away, embarrassed, I'm sure, by his outward display of emotion, because when he returns with two glasses, there's a corporate, formal Blaine in place that I don't really care for at all.

"I need to make a call," he says, handing me my glass. "I'm afraid I didn't realize the time. I'll just be a few minutes, and then I'll call a cab to take you home."

He's gone before I can say anything, walking in the direction of his office, so I sit on the couch, the taste of him still on my lips, and wonder why he'd end such a wonderful evening so abruptly at nine thirty.

Chapter Eleven

Prompt- Snow Patrol, Chasing Cars (in particular "If I lay here, If I just lay here, Would you lie with me and just forget the world?)

Blaine

"I don't think it's going well," I whisper into the phone. "What should I do?"

There's silence, of course, because answer phones rarely talk back.

"Anyway, sorry for calling late, Cooper. I'll see you tomorrow."

I run a hand over my face, take a minute to compose myself, and then walk back to the living room, where Kurt is perched uncomfortably on the edge of the couch, as if he'd rather be anywhere else right now.

"Sorry," I mumble, sensing damage control is needed. "I had to call my brother."

"Oh." He nods, and drains the rest of his champagne. "Urgent, was it?"

"No, and in fact I called him earlier to say I couldn't call tonight, but then the guilt was too much and I..."

Alarmed, Kurt turns to face me. "Guilt? What guilt? Over me?"

"No! Gosh, no," I say with a laugh. "Wait, should I be feeling guilty?"

"No."

"Oh. Right. Well, I always call Cooper every night at nine thirty. Every night, for the last seven years, without fail. So I called earlier and said that I couldn't, only then I looked at the time and it was nine thirty three and..."

"And you felt guilty," he finishes for me. "I see."

"Yes." Relieved that he gets it, I dare to move a little closer, but Kurt very obviously shifts himself to the end of the couch and looks away. "Kurt?"

"Is the cab coming?"

"What cab?"

"The one you said you were going to call," he snaps, heat flaring in his cheeks. "Because clearly this isn't working out, so I might as well leave now. I can flag one down outside."

"Kurt, I..." He gets to his feet and I just manage to grab his wrist before he walks away. "Kurt, please." Looking him right in the eye, I move my grip until I'm holding his hand instead. "I don't want you to go. Please. I mean, if you want to..."

"No I don't want to," he says angrily. "*You* told me I was leaving, I never said a word about it."

"I thought..."

"You're weird," he declares. "You know that, Blaine? Weird. Why did you tell me I was leaving if you wanted me to stay?"

"Because I... I thought maybe that thing there, when I was talking about dad, and then I had to call Cooper, and I didn't know how to..."

"You know what? I liked hearing you talk about your childhood; I like getting to know you. And you call your brother each night, so what? I call my dad every day, usually more than once. I'd like to know why you call him at the same specific time, and why you've done so for seven years, but I'm guessing, or hoping, that you'll tell me when you're ready, so I won't ask. I'll just say this; I like you, a lot. I like being here with you, and I can't stop thinking about that kiss, so I'll... I'll just take more of that, please," he says, suddenly turning coy. "The kissing thing. More."

Something strange happens in my chest; something akin to pure joy, coursing through me, and it causes me to grab Kurt's face firmly in my hands, and kiss him hard. He responds eagerly, pulling me down onto the couch so I end up on top of him, suddenly hungry with a lust far deeper and more raw than I felt in the kitchen earlier.

He just feels so incredibly wonderful; the touch of his lips and tongue against mine, the feel of his hands tangling into my hair, the way his body rises up under mine...all of it. I want it all, I need it all, and I'm pretty sure Kurt would let me take it all, if I were that sort of a guy, but I'm not.

Still, it doesn't stop me moving my lips to his neck and, my mind clouded with want, I whisper "Stay," against his skin.

"What?"

Immediately, I sit, aware that I've just crossed a boundary and now Kurt will probably be heading out that door, but he doesn't seem at all worried. He straddles me, instead, and grinds against my very obvious arousal.

"Did you just ask me to stay?"

"No."

He kisses behind my ear, down to the top of my collar, and then he loosens my bowtie. "You did, didn't you?"

"Yes," I get out with a moan. "Yes, I did. I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I want to stay."

"Oh. Oh, well, that's...good." My last word cracks when Kurt gets my shirt open and kisses the hollow of my throat. "Kurt, I can't... I mean, God, I want to, but I can't..."

"I can't either," he admits, coming up to meet my gaze. He's deliciously dishevelled; his hair mussed, his eyes wide, and his lips swollen. "But I want to stay. Just to lie with you."

I smile, properly relaxed for the first time all evening. "I'd really like that. Just to lie with you," I repeat quietly.

"It's important to you, huh?"

"What's important?"

"Sex."

Looking up at him, I rest my hands on his hips. "It never has been before, put it that way."

"Oh."

"But I think... I think maybe it should be, with you. And I think that if I give in, and we do all that I want to do, tonight, then I'll regret it, because I'd rather do all of that when I know you a whole lot better, when we both, hopefully, feel a whole lot more, and when that bruise has gone, because I'd feel terrible if I hurt you."

"You want to know me better?"

"Very much so."

"I see."

He ducks his head, and for a moment I worry I've upset him, until I realize that he's trying to hide a massive, adorable smile, which once again fills me up with happiness.

"You're allowed to feel good about it, it's okay," I tell him. His infectious smile catches up to me and I grin too, taking his hands and trying to get him to look at me.

"I know, I know, I just..." he lifts his head, beaming, and then laughs loudly. "My dad always tells me to tone it down, cause I look kinda demented when I get happy, but..."

"You look beautiful, Kurt. Stunning."

He leans in, trying for a kiss, but we're both smiling so widely that it fails completely. I've never experienced this before; moments spent with another man usually involve lust and not much else. Smiling against someone's face, and sharing laughter over something so silly, is more intimate than I've ever been with anyone.

That intimacy grows still further, when Kurt wraps his arms around me to cuddle in close, his head resting into the crook of my neck. "I'll kiss you in a moment," he mumbles. "When I can control my features."

For a moment, I don't know what to do with my arms, but then he hugs around my neck that little bit tighter, and I find myself hugging back, holding him tight around his waist. Kurt doesn't say a word, but he holds me for the longest time, as if he can sense that I need it more than anything. When he does move, it's only to bring his lips to mine, gently and tenderly, his eyes closed.

Once again, this is new. I want Kurt in a very physical way, of course I do, but I didn't necessarily register that I want him on an emotional level, too, and that maybe he needs me just the same.

His fingers seem to like finding their way to the back of my neck each time, which is fine, and I let myself run my own hands under his sweater, moaning as I smooth over his skin. Kurt cuts the noise off with his tongue, and then the kiss briefly breaks as that sweater finds its way over his head and onto my floor.

His body is exquisite, and I flip him back onto the couch so I can trace my lips over every inch, starting with his shoulders, which instantly makes him laugh again.

"Seriously?"

"I'm sorry!" he shrieks, laughing harder. "I just knew you were gonna do that, that's all. Ever since that day when you couldn't stop staring..."

"That was not a nice day," I huff, kissing first one shoulder and then the other. "You had that sweater on, and all I could think about was... yeah, kissing here, and here, but then you went and told me you were dating someone."

"I'm not now, though."

"You are."

"Am I?"

"You'd better be, Kurt whatever your last name is, otherwise you're getting that cab home after all."

"Hummel."

"Kurt Hummel." I bite softly on his shoulder, then pull back to look at him. "Come to bed with me, Kurt Hummel, forget everything, and in the morning, I want you to tell everyone you know that you are now very much taken."

He laughs harder still, and shoves me away. "I should be offended at your arrogance and boorish dominance, but it's actually really hot"

"Good." I get to my feet and pull him up, too.

"You're joking, though, right?" he asks, momentarily worried.

"In part," I admit, before kissing his cheek. "I would never, ever make you do something, but I would really like for us to be sorta...not dating anyone else."

"We've only had one date though."

"I know."

"But then again, I've never been back to anyone's apartment after one date, much less stayed the night, so..."

"I've never even dated anyone, Kurt, so if we're talking about this being different, then know that it very much is, for me."

"Seriously?" He follows me as I collect our glasses and take them to the kitchen. "You've never dated anyone?"

"No. I told you that before."

"No you didn't," he counters. "You said you'd never been in a relationship. Not that you'd never been on a date. There's a difference"

"I have been on dates, I guess. Drinks in a bar, that sort of thing, but never like this, and never more than once with the same person."

"What? Why?"

"Because I never knew you existed until a few weeks ago."

He smacks my arm. "Behave. Seriously, why?"

"Just because," I say stiffly. "That's all."

"Hold up." He leans back against the counter and watches as I load the dishwasher. "Are you a virgin?"

"No!" I slam the door closed, perhaps a little harder than I intended, and shake my head. "Definitely not."

"Let me guess, then. Your mom is homophobic and you're not out, or you're scared of upsetting her."

"No." Leaning against the opposite counter, I fold my arms across my chest; distinctly uncomfortable with the conversation, but Kurt either doesn't notice or doesn't care. He keeps watching me until I throw my hands up despairingly. "Fine. Oddly enough, my mom and dad really didn't care when I came out. Dad just lectured me about safe sex and not sleeping around, and my mom didn't say anything about it at all, just nodded and carried on with her work. It was a non-issue. Mind you, I'd always been a let-down anyway, and that was before everything happened with Cooper."

"What happened?"

"Don't worry about it."

"Is he gay?"

"He wasn't."

"He wasn't? What does that mean? He is now? He's bisexual?"

"It means I don't know what he is, but I assume he's straight," I snap, feeling everything spiraling out of control. "I don't ask, and I fail to see why it matters to you, either."

"Woah! It doesn't, I was just trying to make conversation, that's all. Why do you get like this?"

"Like what?"

"So defensive?" He doesn't let me answer but steps toward me instead. "You don't need to be, Blaine. I'm here, I'm not going anywhere and I just want to get to know you, that's all. There's no hidden agenda, I promise."

"I'm a mess, Kurt," I mumble, looking at the floor. "I told you that before, didn't I? I'm a mess."

"I don't think I'm much better," he admits, to my surprise. "There's things that have happened to me that have left me damaged, and hurting, and scared to let go, but...I don't know, Blaine. One date and I'm standing shirtless in your kitchen, wishing you'd scoop me into your arms and carry me off to bed. There's something about you. I can't work out what, yet, but something that means that with you is the only place I want to be."

Somewhere deep inside, there's a part of me that wants to run from this display of emotion, this vulnerability that I seem to keep showing around Kurt, but there's another part of me; the huge, overwhelming part, that wants to bury myself in his affection and never let go. For tonight, anyway, that part wins.

I lift him into my arms, kiss him, and then smile. "Bed, then, Mr. Hummel."

Chapter Twelve

Prompt- Frank Sinatra- The Way You Look Tonight

Kurt

Happier than I can ever remember feeling, I let Blaine scoop me up and carry me down the hallway to his bedroom. Every so often, he looks down at me and smiles, and I think he'd like to kiss me, but he doesn't seem all that adept in gentle, slow, romantic kisses yet, just the hot and hungry ones, so he just smiles, instead.

"You are weird," I tell him again. "Very strange."

"So you keep saying. You're heavy."

"Hey!"

"Well, then. Stop calling me weird."

"Not weird, then, just... enigmatic, I guess."

"I like that better."

"You know what else?"

"Surprise me," he says, kicking open a set of double doors.

"You're ridiculously hot, and that makes me horny."

He drops me on my feet in the darkened room and laughs. "Yeah okay, that surprised me."

"Good. That wasn't actually what I was going to say. I was going to say that I think you're the most beautiful man I've ever seen, but you asked for surprise so..."

"You don't mean that."

"I do, Blaine." He flips a bedside lamp on and stands there, looking more open and afraid than I've seen from him before. "You're beautiful," I repeat softly. "I thought that the very first time I saw you, but the more I know you, the more beautiful you become, and the way you look tonight is just..." I stop, suddenly taking in my surroundings. "Holy hell this room is amazing."

The floor to ceiling windows cover the entire far wall, with views over the river, and the huge bed is sideways to them. The decor is white, the furniture mahogany, and the carpet looks beige in the dim light. It's like the most luxurious hotel room, and though it looks impersonable, I'm also very much looking forward to spending the night here with Blaine.

"You're the first one," he says from behind my shoulder. "Who's stayed over, I mean. No one has ever spent the night here except me."

"That's... that's really quite something." I turn to face him, draping my arms over his shoulders. "As I was saying, you are beautiful, Blaine. I get the feeling you don't like yourself very much, and that makes me sad, because you should. When you're not being a grump, you're really quite something, you know that? To me, true beauty comes from within. That's what my dad always says, anyhow. And you, you're funny, and smart, and kind, caring... and all of that, plus all of this," I say, gesturing up and down his body, "makes for one beautiful package."

He bows his head momentarily, overcome, I think, with my words. "When I'm not being a grump," he says, smiling as he lifts his head again.

"Yeah, only then. Otherwise you're ugly and mean." I stick my tongue out at him for good measure, but he just laughs and pulls me into another kiss.

"Blaine? Are you like...half scared, half excited?" I ask when we part.

"Yes," he admits. "My heart is basically about to burst out of my chest, I think. I'm thirty four, Kurt. I should be past all this."

"Are you sure you're not a virgin?" I tease.

Biting his lip, he backs me toward the bed and pushes me down on top of the covers. "No I am not. Quit asking me that."

He quickly slips out of his shirt and falls on top of me, and then we're making out hard, and feelings like I've never experienced before are rushing upon me with lightning speed. Blaine's bare chest, pressed against mine, feels sensational. His hands roam, hot and firm, though I notice he changes to a gentle touch whenever he gets near to my bruised hip, which is sweet. He grinds against me as we kiss, and lifts my leg around his waist until we slot together. Breathing hard, he tugs on my hair until my head tilts back and my throat is exposed, and then he scrapes his teeth down my neck, setting every nerve on fire.

"I am, you see," I blurt very loudly into his ear, and then it's out there and there's no going back.

"Huh?"

"A virgin," I almost yell. He stops right away, looking down at me in confusion. "I'm a virgin," I repeat in a much quieter voice. "I've never..."

Blaine rolls away, onto his back, and runs a hand through his hair as he looks up at the ceiling. "Oh."

"I didn't know how to tell you, or if I should tell you. Or when."

"You've never done anything?" he asks, raising his eyebrows when I shake my head. "But you were so confident!" Eventually he turns to look at me with a frown. "I thought you had a much better grip on the situation than I did, to be honest. Now I'm just confused."

"It's called trying to make a good impression."

"Yeah but... I mean, you were dating that guy..."

"I've dated a few guys, actually," I tell him rolling onto my side and looking down at the bedspread. "I've fooled around with a couple of them, including him. But never... let anyone... or... to anyone. I mean, I've done stuff, but not... I just... It's a long story." I pause a moment, waiting for all the bad feeling to subside. "I've never had the confidence to be with someone in that way. My dad told me not to throw myself around like I don't matter, and..."

"And he's absolutely right," Blaine finishes for me. He turns onto his side too, and closes his hands over mine. "You're worth more than that, Kurt. Much more."

"Thank you."

He lifts my chin with one finger, making me look at him. "You do know I'm not after anything, don't you? I mean, whether we do or we don't have sex doesn't have any bearing on how I feel about you. I still, very much, want to wake up next to you."

"I can't tonight."

"I know that. Neither can I, I told you, but it doesn't matter if you can't in six months, or a year. That's not what interests me about you." He stops, looks down at our half naked bodies, and then looks back up. "Well... I mean, clearly you have an effect, but what I mean is... Ah, hell, just don't worry about it, okay? Please. I like you for you, not because I'm hopeful that you'll put out."

I didn't intend to admit my secret to Blaine, and certainly not so forcefully. I know people assume from my outward display of confidence that I must be sexually prolific, but I'm not. Some guys have been content with that, but some have not been, and it's those that have made me the way I am now.

But Blaine? Not only does Blaine make me feel okay about the whole thing, he makes me feel like my decision is totally valid, too. He also eases the pressure by making me laugh, and then he welcomes me into his arms, pulling me up on top of him.

"I liked the making out thing we were doing though." I feel the need to let him know. "I was comfortable with that. More than comfortable."

"Good. I liked it too. A lot." Reaching one hand to the back of my neck, Blaine draws me down, and into a soft, sweet, and sensual kiss, that sets every part of me on fire. It's not desperate wild passion this time, it's gentle, heartfelt caring, something that he is actually more than capable of, and when he opens his eyes I can see open warmth shining there. "Come on. I'll find you some pyjamas."

Blaine, I discover, has a walk in closet. Or really, an entire room full of clothes, since it's not much smaller than my dorm room. He hands me a pair of red and navy pyjamas that probably cost more than I've ever earned, and shows me into an enormous bathroom that's all black marble and mirrors. It's hideous, but I'm not about to lecture Blaine on interior decor. Besides, I'm too giddy among all this opulence, too over excited to be spending the night with someone whom I really like, and who makes me feel things that are completely irrational after only one date.

"Can I take a shower?" I call through the closed door.

"Of course you can."

"Can I use your stuff?"

"Yes."

"I'll smell like you then."

There isn't a response to that, just some kind of inhuman noise and I worry I might have finished him off completely. Poor Blaine. He's spent most of the evening with an erection that won't be getting serviced tonight. I'm guessing he doesn't usually have that issue if he spends an evening with another man.

I force all thoughts of Blaine being with other people out of my mind. What matters is the here and now, and the fact that I'm the first person to sleep over tells me enough. Blaine also says he doesn't want me dating anyone else, and I have zero intentions of doing that anyway, so all in all it's been a good evening.

Despite some random weirdness at times.

Stepping out of the shower, I wrap myself in a towel so luxurious that I might try and steal it when Blaine's not looking. I like this hotel vibe, though the bathroom needs toning down and the place could use a more personal touch.

"Are you okay in there?"

"Yes. Just drying off."

"There's moisturizer in the cupboard on your left. There's a spare toothbrush, too."

"I can't see it." I fasten the towel tightly around my waist and pull open the door.

"Oh God," Blaine moans. He is sitting on the bed, waiting patiently, but when I appear he rolls over and buries his face in the pillow. "In there," he gestures, his voice muffled.

"I've been looking in there. Come on, Blaine, don't be ridiculous."

"Okay." He sits, looks at me, quickly averts his gaze, and nods. "Okay."

Marching into the bathroom, he throws his hands up in despair. "Left, Kurt. That's the cupboard on the right."

"I didn't know that," I answer lamely. "Well, I did, I do know my left and right, but I just..."

He thrusts a toothbrush into my hand and kisses my cheek. "Stop rambling."

"I'm naked under this towel."

"Okay, shut up," he says, laughing. "Please, just shut up. I'm going to use the other bathroom."

"I've never been naked in front of another guy before."

"Argh! Kurt!" He runs away, still laughing to himself, and when we both finally get under the covers, he immediately reaches for me, pulling me into a long kiss.

"I've had a really good evening," he whispers when we part. "Despite the fact that you like to torment me."

"I do not! I just get..."

"Weird."

"I'm not weird, you're weird."

"That's your favorite word."

"So? What's your favorite?"

"Kurt."

"What?"

"No, that's my favorite word."

"Smooth."

"Go to sleep now."

"Okay." I shift about, and manhandle Blaine until I can hold him, which he's clearly not comfortable with but he accepts it, and I feel him start to relax as his breathing slows. He even snuffles into my neck, and rests his head onto my shoulder.

"Blaine?"

"Mmm?"

"Were you really going to miss calling your brother for the first time in seven years, just because of me?"

"Yeah."

"Wow."

"I didn't though."

"No, and I wouldn't have wanted that. But you were going to, and that means a lot."

"Mmm."

"Blaine?"

"Oh God, Kurt, what?"

"I think I quite like Valentine's Day now."

Chapter Thirteen

Prompt (and for ch 14)- Be My Forever by Ed Sheeran and Christina Perri

Blaine

In the night, I dream of Kurt, of the way his hand feels in mine, and the way he smiles and laughs. When I wake, he is there, sleeping soundly in my arms. We've switched in the night; well, actually we switched as soon as he'd gone to sleep and I moved so that I was spooned around him, and that is how we've stayed.

His knees are drawn up until he's almost in a ball, and he looks so peaceful that I don't dare move, until my need for the bathroom outstrips any romance and I carefully extract myself. When I return, Kurt has left the bed, but he's back in seconds, his hair standing wildly on end and sleep still keeping his eyes screwed shut.

"Why didn't you tell me you have staff?"

"I have staff." I climb back into bed and hold open the covers, but he doesn't move.

"Blaine! I went to get some water and there's two women in the kitchen who looked more surprised to see me than I was to see them, and that's saying something!"

"They come every day," I explain. "But they only do a couple of hours on a Saturday. They'll be gone soon. I'll get you some water."

I get back out of bed, trying for a kiss as I pass, but Kurt is decidedly annoyed, and he huffs his way back into bed, pulling the duvet up over his head.

Carla and Michelle have been coming since the day I moved in, almost three years back. There's a good possibility that I could do without them, but then this place wouldn't look so neat and tidy, and they'd be out of work. They service other apartments in the building too, but I know they like coming to mine because they seem to think this eternal bachelor needs fussing over.

"Mr. Blaine!" Carla says happily, while Michelle giggles and carries on cleaning the worktops. "You have a uh... a friend?"

"Yes."

"He stayed over?"

"No, he arrived here looking like that, Carla. What do you think?"

Michelle laughs again and I shoot her a look while I move around them, fixing coffee, water and toast.

"Was the guest room okay for him?" Carla asks, feigning complete innocence. "He could find all he needs?"

"He's not in the guest room."

"Oh. The pullout couch in the games room, then? Your office?"

"You want me to say it, don't you?"

"Yes please," Michelle says, abandoning all pretence of work and leaning on the counter. "Go on."

"Fine. He's in my room, in my bed, with me. Happy?"

"Are you gay?"

"Yes!"

"Excellent. I told you," she says to Carla, who slides a twenty across to her. "I like him."

"You spoke to him?" I ask, suddenly wary. "What did you say?"

"Nothing! We didn't get the chance. He looked at us, we looked at him, and then he ran away."

"Good. Stay away from him, please, until he's had the chance to settle in."

"He's living here?"

"No he's not! Jeez. But I am hoping he'll stay over quite often. Now if you'll excuse me, Ladies. Enjoy the rest of your day."

"I'll bring that down to you," Carla says, trying to wrestle the tray out of my hands, but I am not as dumb as she thinks.

"No you won't. Stay away, I told you. God. Women!"

Kurt is still sulking when I return, and not even my relaying of the conversation in the kitchen will make him smile. He drinks his water, eats half his toast, and then, finally, turns to look at me.

"I don't like that you have everything done for you," he admits. "You have a valet, a doorman, and elevator operator, household staff, an assistant at work... It doesn't sit well with me, and I don't know what to do about that."

"Well," I sip my coffee and try to think of a decent answer. "I don't know what to say either, I guess. I was born into this life, Kurt, and I'm used to certain things being certain ways. For what it's worth, Carla and Michelle are more like two incredibly annoying sisters who come to visit, and my assistant at work is not only necessary to my job, she's also one of the most important people in my life. I love her as if she were family. I could let Michelle and Carla go, but then they'd lose eighteen hours pay a week, and they've got to make that up somewhere. I know I pay more than double the going rate, and I know they like being here. They're the closest thing to friends that I have.

I don't know, Kurt. If it sits that badly with you, then maybe we're too different from each other?"

"Different can work, though, can't it?"

"I think so, yes. I'd like it to. "

"Prove all the haters wrong?"

"I don't give a damn about anyone else," I tell him, taking his hand. "I want it to work because I know already that it would break my heart if I had to let you go. I feel things for you that I never thought possible, Kurt. Seriously, I thought I was dead inside or something, but you ignite this...this spark inside of me, and every second I spend with you, that spark grows and grows. So I want it to work for us, not to prove anything to anyone, except to prove to ourselves how wonderfully right this is; that we were meant to be."

I stop, my eyes wide. Kurt heard my words loud and clear, and I'm pretty sure we look like two startled rabbits in the headlights right now. "Kiss me and shut me up," I whisper, horrified.

"I think that would be a good idea," he agrees, and then he's on me; hot and demanding, straddling my thighs as he pushes me back down against the pillows. Within seconds, passion is threatening to overwhelm both of us, and I gently pull back, taking a moment to catch my breath. Content, Kurt rolls to his side, resting his head onto my chest.

"Does your brother have servants?"

"Staff. And yes. Lots. We all do, Kurt. Look, I think I'm allowed to be a little defensive about this, to be honest. I work long hours, and when I get home I work some more, usually well into the night. It helps to know this place is being taken care of, and that I don't need to worry about cleaning up, or whether my laundry is done. But I still do things for myself. I cook, I buy groceries, I pay my bills. If you had more money than you knew what to do with, you'd probably do exactly the same."

"I wouldn't. I'd give it away."

"And I do! I support charities, I pay Carla and Michelle more than I should, and if you really want to know, I paid my assistant's mortgage off for her when her husband was sick a few years back. I'm not a bad person, Kurt."

He lifts his head and kisses my lips softly. "I know you're not. I do know that, honestly. Which is why I'm struggling, I guess. I didn't grow up poor, exactly, but there was never money left over, you know? And my dad, he always talked about 'all those fancy people with all that money' like they were to be looked down on, almost. But all I ever wanted was a cleaner." He laughs, embarrassed. "I think what hurts is knowing that my dad might have been wrong, that's all."

"Not wrong, necessarily. There are people who live in their ivory towers and pretend like the world's problems are nothing to do with them, but I'm not one of them. I was, and I won't lie about that, but Cooper made me realize there's more to life than money, or work. Ever since then, I've been trying to search for depth and meaning for my existence, and that's made me very angry at the world. Sometimes I think I'm only here to keep Cooper sane, to call him every night and visit him on weekends."

"Vist? Wait a minute, he lives near?"

"Couple of hours upstate. So I go every Saturday and Sunday."

"You're going today?"

"Yes."

"Oh."

There's a silence, and I wonder if Kurt is waiting for me to extend an invite, but I can't. Not yet.

"I don't go until midday, though, so we could do something this morning?"

"Like what?"

"Coffee?"

He lifts his head and smiles. "I'd like that."

It's still bitterly cold and icy out, which is the reason I give Kurt for why I pull him close and keep my arm about his waist.

"Whatever," he says, with his massive grin. "Keep telling yourself that when summer comes."

"I don't do public affection."

"Doesn't bother me. You're affectionate enough behind closed doors."

"I like that. Being alone with you. I've been thinking about it for a long time. It's nice when something's even better than you imagined."

"I agree. You're a lot more pleasant than I thought."

"Even though I'm weird?"

"Even though."

"You're much hotter than I thought," I tell him, warming inside when his face lights up. "Like you told me last night; your personality makes you even more attractive."

"I don't think I'm all that much to look at. It's why I dress like this, to detract from the face."

The coffee shop is in sight but even so, I stop him in his tracks and force him to look at me. "Are you kidding me? Have you seen you? Do you own a mirror? Kurt, you're sensational. I can't... I can't actually put into words how beautiful you are, especially when you laugh. You... Ah, damnit."

At a complete loss for words, I kiss him instead. It's the first time I have ever done such a thing, but it doesn't come from feeling like I should; it comes from wanting to convey just how much I already adore the man in front of me, how much I feel even though this is still only technically our first date, and how much I want him to know that he is cared for deeply, already, by me.

"I don't do public affection," he teases when we part, and then he kisses me again, quickly. "You make everything so wonderful, you know that? Even with your weirdness."

"I am not weird!"

He pushes open the door of Coffee Corner, a blast of warm air hitting us. "Enigmatic, secretive, strange, weird, odd, I'll let you take your pick."

"Oh my GOD!" the barista yells, alerting the whole shop to our presence. "You two totally got it on last night. Barry!" The singing manager appears from the back. "Barry, these two are doing it. Totally."

I'm sure we both look like we might die, but I manage to smile as we approach the counter. "Please stop," I ask her quietly. "We had a date, that's all."

"You had sex," she decides. "Which is amazing. And you were making out, out there, which is cute. Sit down. I'll bring your drinks over."

We're just about to sit at my usual table, when Kurt clears his throat and jerks his head to the left. It is then that I see college kid sitting there, taking everything in, and I remember that I promised Kurt I'd apologize.

"Oh for..." Kurt gives me the kind of look a mother might give a naughty child, and I cave. "Fine."

College kid eyes me warily, which is hardly surprising, but I smile as best I can and sit opposite. "Hey."

"Hi."

"So I just wanted to um... say sorry, I guess, for the way I treated you the other week. I was way out of line, and I know I probably hurt you."

"He's younger than me."

"Excuse me?"

"That boy you're so obviously sleeping with. My friend knows his friend, and apparently he's only nineteen."

"Yes, but..."

"But you said I was a kid."

"It's not about age. It's about the fact that there's something there between us that..."

"There could be with us, too."

"There's not, though," I insist. "Look, I wish you well, really, but please know that I don't feel the same way for you as you do for me. I'm sorry if my words the other day upset you."

I quickly make my way back to Kurt, who reaches across and pats my hand briefly. "Well done."

"I only did it for you."

"And you shall be rewarded with many kisses. And maybe a second date."

"Good. When?"

"Tomorrow?"

"Yes. I can be back in town by seven."

"Then it's a date."

"Kurt?"

He looks up from his mocha, his beautiful blue eyes shining bright. "Yes?"

"Will you stay over again? Please?"

"Yes," he replies, flushing pink. "I'd love to."

Chapter Fourteen

Kurt

Blaine seems reluctant to let me go home, which suits me, as I thoroughly enjoy being in his presence. When we've finished our coffee, he tells me he needs to go to work and collect some files, but he asks me to go with him, and I won't pretend that it doesn't thrill me, to know that he's more than happy for people to know who I am.

"Will your assistant be in?" I ask as we get in the cab.

"Possibly. We have a kind of a deal; she works Monday through Friday seven thirty until ten thirty, and then does whatever hours she wants."

"That's very trusting of you."

He shrugs. "Linda works her butt off. I don't care if she does work from home, or if she takes time off to visit her parents, or see her kids. It all works itself out in the end. Some days she'll still be sitting by my side at three in the morning as we try to prepare for a case. Other times she'll work all weekend. We're on a big acquisition case right now, but for us, rather than a client."

"Your company is launching a hostile takeover?"

"Yep. Holder-Jones. They were our biggest rivals, really, but they're financially in dire straits owing to a lot of bad judgement. Mom saw an opportunity and swooped in."

"Again, she sounds so sweet."

"Right? It's why I hate corporate law. I'd much rather be a human rights lawyer, or something."

"You should."

"Meh. I'd never be allowed."

"How old are you?"

He doesn't answer, just sticks his tongue out and laughs.

Blaine's building is huge, and an elevator takes us up so high that I feel almost giddy when we emerge. Almost everything is glass, or some weird kind of muted gray color. It's very corporate, very sterile, very... unfriendly.

A couple of people nod in our direction, a few call him Mr. Anderson as we pass. Blaine seems to be well-liked, particularly by one intern called Louisa, who stops to ask if Blaine enjoyed Valentine's day.

"What do you think?" he asks, looking at me. "Was it okay?"

"It was... yeah, more than okay," I say softly. My voice finishes in a whisper as I try not to blush. I can't help it, though; my mind immediately wanders to thoughts of us making out, tangled together, and very, very aroused.

"Yes we did, thank you, Louisa."

Blaine smiles and moves on, missing the look of utter despair on the intern's face.

"She likes you. As in, likes you, likes you."

"Yeah I know. She'll get over it."

"Blaine!"

"What? She will. She'll come to realize that I am essentially not a nice person, even though I try to be, and then she'll move on."

"Really? So how long before that happens to me, then?"

"I don't know," he replies, suddenly turning serious. "I keep thinking my time will be up any moment, to be honest."

"Oh shut up. You are a nice person, I told you."

"My mom says I'm cold and unfeeling."

"Gosh, the love I have for this woman already, knows no bounds."

This time Blaine does smile, and pushes open a frosted glass door that leads to what must be his own offices. A woman sits behind a desk in the outer room, typing rapidly on a keyboard. She stops the second we walk in though, and immediately comes around the desk.

"Blaine!" She hugs him warmly, and then hovers for a moment in front of me before crushing me in her arms too. "Hello, dear. I'm Linda."

"Linda, this is Kurt, Kurt, Linda... and yes," he says, cutting her off before she can even open her mouth. "It went very well, thank you. No need for any questions."

"Good. I'm so glad. It's lovely to meet you, Kurt. When are you coming for dinner?"

"Huh? I uh..."

"Tomorrow?"

I glance to Blaine, who, surprisingly, is smiling at me. "We can't tomorrow," he tells her. "Wednesday?"

"I can do Wednesday," she agrees. "Kurt?"

"Uh..."

"Kurt, please. I've waited years for Blaine to actually bring a boy home, and now he has. Please come for dinner, and meet the family. Well, my husband. I might see if Casey and Will can make it, though. That's my daughter..."

I look at Blaine again, who shrugs, but he also looks undeniably proud, and I realize how much this moment means to him. "It's up to you," he says gently. "You don't have to, if it's too much."

"No, I'd love to, I just... Is it..."

"It's not too soon!" Linda declares. "Not at all. I have to act quickly, dear. Blaine is prone to very bad tempers, and if his mood changes then you might decide enough is enough, so I need to celebrate the fact that momentarily, Blaine has found someone."

"I think he's lovely," I tell Linda, forgetting all about Blaine standing there. "He sells himself short."

"Finally! Yes he does, and then he gets annoyed at himself and moody because of it. Blaine, I like him already. Keep him."

"I'd like both of you to ask my mother's opinion on whether or not I'm lovely," he says, his good mood disappearing. "Because I'm telling you, this apple is rotten inside."

"I'm going home," Linda tells him, kissing his cheek. "You are not rotten. Behave."

Blaine walks into his own office, staring down at the streets of New York while he waits for me to take off my coat and sit in a chair. But I don't. I hang my coat and walk over to him, draping my arms over his shoulders from behind. "Why do you think you're rotten?"

"Because I held my dad in my arms as he died, and didn't do a thing about it, that's why. I didn't call for an ambulance, didn't yell for help, nothing. I held him and then, when he had died, I waited thirty minutes then called the police."

"Oh." Whatever answer I had been expecting, it certainly wasn't that. "Well that's... That's... how old were you?"

"Sixteen."

"That's kind of understandable," I say scrambling to say the right thing. "I mean... How long did he..."

"Take to die? Minutes. It's not like I was sitting there for hours, or anything, but mom said if I hadn't wasted time... because Cooper was..."

He stops, and turns in my arms. Resting his head against mine, he closes his eyes and breathes deeply. "Can we not, right now? Can I tell you more another time?"

"Of course."

"Thank you."

He opens his eyes, which are shining with tears, and searches into mine. "Thank you," he repeats again, and then he kisses me.

There are many, many questions; more than ever, now, but I'm content to wait for the answers that I know Blaine will give me when he's ready. Whatever the circumstances surrounding his dad's death, they're clearly traumatic for him to talk about, and his mother has placed the blame firmly at his door. He'll need time, and I have time to give to him. Endless time, in fact, because for as long as Blaine is kissing me, I don't want to be anywhere else.

"Better?" I ask when we part.

"Yeah." He stops, and opens his eyes. "Although..."

"What?"

He lifts me easily, and sits me on his desk. "I think I might need to kiss you just a little bit more, if that's okay?"

"Oh that is... Yes." I pull him down by his tie, until he's forced to rest one knee on the desk in order to get close enough to my lips, and then I kiss him, hard and dirty.

Blaine responds eagerly, making some kind of growling noise low in his throat and pushing me back even further, until I'm properly lying on the desk, with him between my legs. He moves his lips to my neck, kissing there as he runs one hand up my thigh, firm and insistent. I'm not going to stop him, this time, because every move he makes sets me on fire with anticipation.

"Oh Kurt, you..."

"Blaine?"

It would have been better if Blaine leaped up when his mom enters the room, but he doesn't. He lifts his head, and I drop mine, so the first view I have of Nadine Anderson is of her upside down. Conversely, the first view she has of me, is of me looking disheveled, hanging almost upside down off of a desk, with her son between my legs.

"Knock, mom!"

"Nadine when we're in work, please, Blaine, and it seems as though you very much need reminding that you are, in fact, in work."

Coming to his senses, Blaine gets to his feet and I follow, righting my clothing as I do so. "It's Saturday," Blaine retorts, gesturing to his cardigan as if that explains everything. "I'm just collecting some files to work on at home."

"Good. Nice to know you're not spending all your weekend frolicking with a plaything."

"This is Kurt," Blaine says, taking my hand and pulling me close. He pauses for a moment and glances at me. "My boyfriend."

I feel like cartwheeling across the office and fist bumping Nadine Anderson in the face, but I stay calm on the outside and settle for jumping for joy on the inside instead.

"Nice to meet you, Kurt." She shakes my hand politely, then coldly turns to her son. "Blaine, you can't have a boyfriend, we've been through this before. Do what you want with whom you want on a casual basis, but keep it discreet. Boyfriends, relationships of any kind, are a no for someone in your position, with your level of responsibility."

"Actually, we haven't been through this before," Blaine declares, keeping ahold of me. "This is Kurt. Not a random hookup. This is Kurt, a very real person for whom I have very real feelings. As in...I'm not going to let him go, whatever you say."

"Blaine, do I need to remind you of..."

"No, you don't need to remind me of anything," Blaine snaps. "You need to get out, and let me enjoy my time with Kurt before I go visit Cooper this afternoon. You know, the son you've forgotten about?"

Nadine doesn't answer him, but turns to me, instead. I'm sure the surprise on my face says it all. "That's what he's like," she says flatly. "Always. That's how he treats me, Kurt, how he treats all of his loved ones. If he ever introduces you to his brother, ask him how he felt when Blaine abandoned him."

"Huh?"

"Oh, he hasn't told you? I'm not surprised, sadly. Blaine is a nice looking, wealthy young man, Kurt, and I understand that holds a lot of attraction, but please know that he will treat you the same way he treats everyone in his life; as if they were only here to serve him, and not worthy of any real affection or help, when help is needed."

"Thanks," I say with a smile. "But I don't think Blaine would do that at all."

"He uses men, did you know that? Well, boys, really. Young ones, like you. One night and then they're gone."

I'm shaking on the inside, completely terrified, but I draw myself up to my full height and take a step toward her. "Actually, I think you're lying."

"Excuse me?"

"I think you're jealous of Blaine's heart, of his kindness, and I think you seek to bring him down and make him feel worthless in order to make you feel good about yourself. I think you know that then he's trapped in the vicious cycle of self-loathing which means he'll always work for you, because he's scared to be the magnificent person that he really is. Let me tell you something, Mrs. Anderson..."

"It's Ms."

"Whatever. Let me tell you this. Blaine is mine. I know, and he knows, that this between us is more right than anything has ever been, for either of us. The past doesn't matter to me. I for one am not intending on letting him go. So get a grip on yourself, and your bitter jealousy and resentment, and start to understand that you have a perfect son. Well," I add quickly, "You might have two, but I haven't met the other one yet, so I can't really comment on that. Anyway. That's...kinda...all I have to say, really."

She stares. First at me, then at Blaine, who shrugs his shoulders. "Kurt's my date for the charity gala next month," he adds smugly. "Just so you know."

"Right. I see." Nadine looks at me once more, shakes her head, and walks out, closing the door behind her.

"Oh my God," I whisper, sinking into a chair. "I was so rude! I mean, I was rude even for me, rude. What happened to me?"

"I guess you have questions?"

"I always have questions when it comes to you, but they can wait. Blaine, I was so out of line. I'm sorry if I..."

"You were great!" he kneels between my legs and rests his hands on my knees. "Kurt, everything you said... no one's ever defended me like that before. And you...you just get me, Kurt. How do you do that? *I* don't get me!"

"I mean it, Blaine," I say, cupping his jaw. "Everything I said, I mean it."

"I *belong* to you?"

"I'm your *boyfriend*?" I fire back.

"This is more right than anything?"

"Hey! It is! I'm your date for some gala that I didn't even know about?"

"Oh yeah. About that..."

"Yes I will."

There's nothing to do but laugh, and hug, and as Blaine squeezes me tightly, I run my hands into his curls and sigh contentedly. "For a first date, it's been quite eventful," I murmur into his ear. "And long."

"Second date lasts a week."

"I can't wait."

Chapter Fifteen

Prompt- Save The Last Dance For Me- Michael Buble

Blaine

Our second date doesn't last a week, but it is equally as wonderful nonetheless. We go for dinner at a new Japanese place, and then we walk slowly back to my apartment, where we head straight for bed and then spend the next two hours talking or kissing, which suits both of us just fine.

Being with Kurt is like a drug; the more time I spend with him, the more I crave his presence, and I find it hard to concentrate on pretty much anything, including work. Of course, this doesn't go over well with my mom. The case for the Holder-Jones acquisition is due in court in three short months, but it's hard to be chairing meetings and fielding calls when I know an evening with Kurt is ahead of me.

Dinner at Linda's house is fun, once we've both relaxed a little that is. That night, Kurt stays and from then on, it becomes habit that he stays every time we have a date, no matter where we've been or what we've done. It suits us both, and despite Kurt's protests to the contrary, I know he quite likes it when I drive him the short distance back to his dorms, and a gaggle of girls rush to the windows to watch him emerge from the car.

We continue to date for the next three weeks. Sometimes dinner, sometimes a movie, or an art exhibition and, one time, a poetry reading from students in Kurt's class, in some dark and dingy bar. It's boring, and I feel about twenty years out of place, but I suffer it for Kurt, because I know it makes him happy.

"It's the gala tomorrow," I tell him over dinner later that night.

He stops with his fork halfway to his mouth. "You didn't tell me that."

"I just did."

"I know, but some notice would be nice!"

"This is notice."

"What do I wear?"

"A tux."

He kicks me sharply. "I don't own a tux, you idiot. Why would I? Ugh. Okay. I'll sort something."

"You sure?"

"Yes. Just...don't worry about it. Come on, finish up. I want to get back to your place and kiss you senseless."

I lie awake that night, while Kurt sleeps next to me and rambles on about kittens. I want to give this man the world, but the trouble is, Kurt is the most stubborn ass I have ever, *ever* met. He insists we pay for alternate dates, and he won't even let me buy him a damn cup of coffee without reminding me that it's his turn next. If I even attempt to gift him a tux, he'll likely explode in rage and demand I return it.

"Are you sure you have something to wear tonight?" I ask him over breakfast.

"Yes. Why? I won't embarrass you."

"I know that. But you said you don't own a tux."

He shrugs. "I don't, but I also don't have class this afternoon, and there's a rental place that Rachel told me about. I'm going to make her come with me."

"I see."

Like a gift from the Gods, Rachel is standing right outside of Kurt's dorms when I drive him back, and I decide it's time I introduced myself.

"Please don't," Kurt begs me. "She'll never shut up about it."

But I'm out of the car, opening the door for Kurt, and flashing my smile at Rachel before he can say another word. "Rachel, is it? I'm Blaine."

"Yes!" She tosses her long dark hair over her shoulder and beams. "It's so nice to meet you. Kurt never shuts up about you, you 's always Blaine this, Blaine that."

"Mmhmm. Good. So, Rachel. Are you free this afternoon?"

"I can be."

"I can ask her myself," Kurt mutters angrily, but I'm already handing her my credit card and a slip of paper.

"Excellent. Kurt and I have a gala to attend tonight, and Kurt needs a tux. Take him to that address, ask for Phillip, and pay for whatever he wants with that card, okay?"

I turn to Kurt, kiss him on his open mouth, and run back to the car before he can hit me. "Have fun! I'll pick you up at seven!"

That day, I get seventeen texts along the lines of "I hate you," but then, at three thirty, I get one more message.

Can I buy shoes?

Buy whatever you want.

Really tight underwear that leaves nothing to the imagination?

Kurt!

You like the thought of that?

Please stop, I text back quickly. I'm likely to explode.

I'm gonna buy them. If you're good tonight, I might even let you take them off.

Kurt, I'm about to give a presentation to twenty six high flying lawyers. You're making this very hard.

Literally?

GO AWAY.

He waits another hour, and then sends a simple thank you, followed by so many kisses that I lose count, and I figure that maybe I've done something right. I dress carefully that night; filled with a heady mix of nerves and excitement. I've never taken a date to any work gala before, and not that it matters, but I don't think many people even realize that I'm gay.

They're about to find out, in the most flamboyant of ways.

Not many people could pull off a purple tux, but then, not many people are as effortlessly stylish as Kurt. I thought I was being bold, going for a light gray tux with black lapels, but Kurt stands out, making heads turn on the sidewalk as I pull up to meet him.

"You look sensational," I say, rushing around to open the door. "Wow."

"Is this your car?" he asks, ignoring my compliment and frowning at the Aston Martin.

"No, I stole it."

"Very funny. I've not seen it before, that's all."

"Special occasion."

"Is it?" He stops and looks at me for a moment, and I realize that he's incredibly nervous; more so than I've ever seen him.

"I mean it, Kurt, you look stunning."

"Is it too much?"

"It's perfect."

He tugs uneasily on his jacket. "It was so much money."

"It wasn't."

"Don't do that, Blaine."

"Do what?"

"Make me feel poor."

"I wasn't! I just..."

"Let's go." He gets in the car and shuts the door quickly, leaving me to flounder on the sidewalk for a moment until I come to my senses and head to the driver's side.

"I only meant that it was worth every cent to see you dressed like that," I say softly as we pick our way through the evening traffic. "I've never seen a tux that color, and if I had I'd never have been bold enough to wear it. But you just look... You make me so happy, that's all. I feel so proud to have you as my date tonight."

Kurt doesn't reply, but his hand makes its way to my knee, and when we pull up at the gala to wait for the valet, he turns to me and offers a wobbly smile. "I'm sorry. I'm terrified, you see. The last time I saw your mom, I was so rude, and there's going to be all these people here who are richer, more educated, smarter... I don't fit with this crowd, Blaine. And I never will."

"Are you kidding me?" We step from the car and I give the keys to the valet, making sure to thank him. "Kurt, you're so smart, so vibrant...no one here can hold a candle to you. You fit with me, right? And that's all that matters. Not where you went to school, or whether you've ever been on a cruise."

"I haven't."

"Neither have I, actually." I pull him close, sliding my arm about his waist. "Maybe we should do that some time. And maybe, Kurt Hummel, I want you to have a really good night, because I care more for you than you could possibly imagine."

He takes my kiss, and gives a small nod. "That's nice."

"Come on. I bet I can make you smile before we go inside."

"Yeah?"

Leaning close, I let my lips brush against his ear. "Did you buy the underwear?"

It works. Kurt throws his head back and laughs, his eyes crinkling in the way I love so much. "As a matter of fact, I did. I wasn't going to, but then that Philip guy said they don't show under the pants, and since these pants are quite tight..."

"I noticed."

"Hmm." Infinitely happier, Kurt links his arm through mine and we walk inside the hotel. "Good."

Maybe Kurt doesn't belong, but I know whose company I'd rather be in, so maybe by default, I no longer belong either. It's hard to feel sorry about that. Apart from Louisa, the long suffering and dedicated intern, and Linda, there's no one else I care for in the room. It's all rich, corporate clients, doing their bit for Nadine Anderson's charity, which was only set up, I believe, to ease the guilt over her ignorance of her son. She doesn't feel guilt over what happened, of course, because that is my cross to bear, but she never visits Cooper, citing too much work or too many functions to attend. The charity is just another convenient excuse: no I can't spend time with my son, but look at all I'm doing to help sick children.

"Isn't that your brother?" Kurt asks, looking down at a brochure.

"Yes."

"Is this charity to help him?"

"No. Others like him. He has all the money and assistance he needs."

"When was this photo taken?"

"When Cooper was about nineteen, I guess."

"Why not use a recent photo?"

"Because my mom hasn't seen Cooper in months," I say, not even bothering to lower my voice as we take our seats at the top table. "And she certainly wouldn't have any photos of him. She wouldn't want people to see him, anyway. Not how he looks now."

Kurt studies the brochure in silence, while I greet various top-notch law executives and their partners, and when we get a quiet few minutes, he turns to me. "He's quadriplegic, isn't he?"

"Yes." I bow my head and wait for the feeling of pain and despair to pass. "He uh... He..."

"Not now," Kurt whispers, covering my hand with his own. "Later, if you want, or another day."

"I don't know how to find the words, Kurt. How to tell you what happened. I just don't know."

"It's okay," he says, sincerity burning in his eyes. "You'll get there when you're ready. And oh, here comes your mom." He fixes a false smile in place that makes me laugh in return. "Remember, Blaine, I'm wearing really tight underwear."

"Kurt!"

"Good evening, Blaine, Kurt," my mom says, bending to air kiss my cheek. "Nice to see you again, Kurt. I believe I'm actually sitting next to you for dinner."

Kurt catches on quickly to the politeness game that is being played and he stands, pulling out the chair to his right. "How lovely," he says with a smile. "You can tell me more about this fantastic charity."

"You do belong," I tell him when dinner is over and guests are starting to leave their tables to mingle with one another. My mom was quick to vacate her seat, of course, and is now sitting among a large group of fat male executives who are positively drooling over her. I watch as she laughs flirtatiously, and takes another sip of champagne. "You can lie, and schmooze, and feign enjoyment with the best of them, I'd say."

"Not as well as she can," Kurt says from over my shoulder.

"No. A lifetime of practice, I guess. Kurt?"

"Yeah?"

"In a minute, the music's going to start, and I'm going to have to get up there and waltz with my mom, and then a succession of wealthy women who will be trying to snare the eligible Anderson and Cole heir."

"Oh. Right."

"I want you to promise me something, though."

"What's that?"

I turn, and quickly kiss his lips. "You'll dance with me too, at some point."

"Save the last dance for me," he sings softly, beautifully, and then he kisses me again, longer this time; his eyes shining brightly when we part. "Of course I will."

Despite the fact that I've been open in my affections with Kurt all evening, and clearly have a male date, each and every one of the women I dance with makes some kind of comment about me being single. Whether it's to blatantly ask me out on a date, or to inquire if I'd like to date their daughters, I respond with the same line each time, with growing satisfaction.

"Thanks, but I'm very much taken. By that man over there, the one in the purple tux."

"Does your mother know you're..."

"Gay? Yes. She's met Kurt and likes him a great deal."

Yes, I can play the game with the best of them.

It's getting late by the time I finally manage to get back to Kurt, but he immediately stops his conversation with Linda and stands, taking the hand I offer.

"Finally," I say, as I almost melt into his embrace. "Hey, why are you leading?"

"I'm taller. It's the law."

"Did you have a good evening?"

"It was okay. I liked being with you, and talking with Linda. I think I prefer it when it's just us, though, watching dvd's or eating take out."

"Same. You're coming home with me though, right?"

"Do you even need to ask?"

"I was thinking maybe you could start leaving some stuff at the apartment, if you wanted. Clothes and stuff. I could give you a key..."

"That's quite... fast, isn't it?"

"Oh. Right." We dance on, Kurt's arm tight around my waist.

"I'd really love that, though."

"Oh thank God." I let out a breath and laugh quietly. "I thought I'd gone too far."

"No. I think we're pretty much on the same page about everything, I'd say."

As I watch Kurt, dancing slowly with me, the depth of my feeling towards him grows ever stronger, until I stop, right there on the dance floor, and draw him into a long, sensuous kiss. I have to, because if I don't, I think I might spill the contents of my heart.

Maybe the kiss conveys my feeling, though, because when we part, he seems almost reluctant for the kiss to end, and he buries his face against my collar. "Take me home," he whispers, his voice just coming over the music. "Take me to bed."

Chapter Sixteen

Prompt- At My Most Beautiful- REM

Kurt

I think there's something altogether wonderful about feeling comfortable enough with another person to let them see you at your most vulnerable. I have that level of trust with my dad, but no one else.

Until now, that is.

I've known for some time that Blaine is different to any guy I've dated before. Yes he's older, and richer, but it's more than that. There's an understanding between us; a mutual trust that comes from knowing that neither of us would rather be anywhere or with anyone else.

I don't know all his secrets; I've barely scratched the surface of his story, and neither does he know mine, but we both know there's so much time ahead for us. I want to open my heart to Blaine, and I want him to do the same in return, but at the same time I know it won't be easy for either of us. Perhaps, to get there, we need to be more intimate with one another on a physical level, first.

I've shared many kisses with Blaine now. Quick ones, slow ones, ones that are all tongues and teeth and ones that are slower, softer, and more romantic. Sometimes, when we haven't seen each other for a few days, we don't even make it past the hallway before one of us is pinning the other to the wall and kissing them hard, grinding up against them. Other times, we can be watching lame TV, sharing the occasional kiss and then Blaine is there between my legs, pulling my sweater off in order that he can kiss over my chest, whispering softly about how much he adores me.

Blaine sets me on fire with a passion that I didn't know it was possible to possess; a burning deep inside that won't be sated any longer by kisses alone. I need his hands on me, on all of me, and I need that release that both of us have been craving for almost a month.

He knows it, too.

I can tell from the way he keeps his hand on my thigh as he drives, and the way his hands shake slightly when he unlocks the front door. His kisses are different tonight; raw and hungry, yet undeniably loving

and tender. There's hesitation there, too, as if he's not quite sure whether this is all okay; whether he really can take what I'm offering.

We go right to the bedroom, and it's me that turns the lamp on, because I want, so much, to see his face. For the first time ever, I unbutton Blaine's shirt for him, kissing over his chest as I do so. I hear his breath hitch, feel his fingers grip my shoulder just that little bit tighter and, when he's shirtless, I reach for his belt buckle, a funny kind of feeling growing inside of me when he gasps.

"Kurt, you don't..."

"Have to? I know. I want to."

I push his pants to the floor and he steps from them, then guides me back down onto the bed. He's quicker; his hands deftly work the buttons on my shirt and the fly on my pants until I'm matching him in just my underwear. He starts to move in for a kiss, and then pulls back. "Hang on. I need to..."

He looks down, his eyes growing both wide and dark at the sight of my tight boxer briefs. I'm so aroused that I'm barely contained in them, and Blaine lets out a low whistle, which breaks the tension and makes me laugh.

"You approve?"

"Very much so, Kurt. Wow."

Of course, he looks like some kind of adonis himself; all tanned skin and dark hair, with strong, defined muscle and all of it finished off with a pair of black briefs. I don't feel intimidated though, or afraid, like I always thought I would if I was in this situation. There's been no alcohol, either, apart from one glass of wine at dinner, and I'm glad. I've been down the route of drunken fooling around before, and it's lead to so much regret and shame. Not this time, though. Not with Blaine.

I reach for him, pulling him close against me. "You're the most amazing person I've ever met," I tell him honestly. "You make me so happy, and I just... I think you know, don't you?"

"I think I do, yeah." He nuzzles his nose into my neck, something he often does when we're alone, and it grounds me in the sweetest possible way. "You know all the right ways to make me smile."

"By wearing super-tight underwear?"

"Yes, that's exactly it."

He grins and rolls on top of me, and I welcome his kisses until I feel his hand traveling higher up my thigh.

"I don't know what I'm ready for," I blurt. "How far I can...go."

"Wanna find out together?"

"Yes please."

"If it helps..." He stops, and kisses along my collarbone. "I'm so tightly wound up that it's very likely this'll all be over long before we reach your stopping point."

"Good to know."

He laughs against me, something that feels amazing, and then he lifts my leg again, grinding against me while we make out.

We've done this many times before, and it always ends with one or other of us rolling away, but not tonight. I let my fingers dip below the waistband of his briefs, and dig into the soft flesh there. Spurred on, Blaine grinds harder, his breath hot in my ear. "Take them off," I whisper, not brave enough to do it myself. "Take mine off, too. Please."

He nods, and strips us both silently. Sensing my nervousness, he takes me into his arms and holds me. That's all; he holds me close, smoothing his hands over my back, until I'm ready, and then he lets my hands explore first.

He feels perfect, every inch of him, and he also seems incredibly overwhelmed with my touch; stopping my hand momentarily so he can catch his breath and get a grip on his rush of pleasure.

When he does finally move his hands over me, I nearly cry with blessed relief. It feels far more pleasurable than it ever has before; Blaine is no fumbling first time lover. He's a man who knows exactly what he's doing, only he's also a man who actually wants to know what I want, what I like and how it feels. He stops

frequently, his eyes questioning, seeking the permission he needs, and when he holds a packet of lube in his hand, I find my voice.

"I'm not sure..."

"Not for that. So we slide against each other, that's all."

"Okay."

"Sure?"

"Yes, because I know we can stop if I say."

"Of course we can, though I don't think you'll want to. Just try."

He's not wrong. The moment he rubs the lube onto both of us and then slides against me, I know this is all going to be over very soon. Having never been in this situation with anyone before, I had no clue how glorious it could be when two people connect physically as well as emotionally. I cry out, I know I do, but Blaine keeps up his pace; holding me tight and pressing sloppy kisses into my hair and against my skin.

"Blaine, I really can't hold off."

"Don't even try. Give in, Kurt. Go on."

It's clear he's been holding back, because the moment I heed his advice, he spills too, warm, and wet, and utterly delicious. Some kind of carnal instinct takes over and I flip us, kissing Blaine hard and dirty, and then moving low to kiss over his stomach.

"Oh hell, Kurt... you're trying to kill me."

He's still panting; his whole body heaving, but the feel of my tongue over his muscles makes him shiver. He takes the kiss I offer, too, hungry and wanting, yet equally worn out and drained.

Falling down beside him, I close my eyes contentedly, and I even stay there while he tenderly cleans both of us, then flips out the light before spooning around me.

"You're something else, Kurt Hummel," he murmurs, kissing the back of my neck. "Thank you."

"For servicing your needs?"

He laughs, deep and low. "Yes, but no. For letting me see you at your most beautiful."

Chapter Seventeen

Blaine

The day after the gala, when I wake with Kurt in my arms, I feel so deeply at peace with everything around me, that it's a shock when my phone rings, and I drop it twice in my effort to answer.

"Mom?"

"Get in here, Blaine, now."

She sounds more angry and annoyed than I have ever heard, and my stomach plummets. "What? Why?"

"You've dropped the ball, big time, and now you need to sort this mess out."

"I..." I look over to Kurt, who's sitting with the duvet around his waist, waiting for me to return his sleepy smile. "I can't," I say in the end. "I'm with Kurt this morning, then visiting Cooper this afternoon."

"No, you're not. You'll be lucky if you leave the office at all for the next week. I mean it, Blaine, I want you here now, and if you're not prepared to come of your own free will, then I swear I'll track you down and frogmarch you in here myself."

"But..."

"Now. And don't bring Kurt, either. I knew this would happen, Blaine. One whiff of happiness and that's it, you throw everything out of the window, and now we stand to lose sixty million because of it."

"Okay." I sigh heavily and try to figure out what I've done to incur such wrath. "I'm on my way."

"You have to go?" Kurt asks as soon as I hang up.

"Yeah, it seems I've uh... I've messed up at work, or something. My mom... ah, shit. She's really mad. I need to go now, otherwise I won't get done in time to visit Cooper."

Kurt's upset, I can tell, but he swallows hard and nods. "Sure. I mean, maybe I could come visit Cooper with you, or something?"

"No. Um... that's not... no. I'll call you, okay? Tomorrow, probably."

"Tomorrow? But I thought... Nevermind." Pulling on his tux quickly, Kurt barely looks at me as he grabs his phone and keys from the nightstand. "Talk about the walk of shame."

"I'll drive you. Gimme two minutes."

But he doesn't. In the time it takes me to find a clean shirt and suit, Kurt is gone, and when I try to call him from the car, his phone is switched off.

Nearly everyone who is anyone is at the office when I arrive, and given that it's Saturday, I know this is bad. Linda is waiting in the foyer, where she grabs my arm and steers me to the bank of elevators.

"You didn't file the motion in time," she whispers urgently. "I don't know what happened, Blaine, but now it looks as though someone else has beaten us to it, and the Holder-Jones acquisition is off the table. What's worse, is that Corby have now launched a takeover bid, which looks likely to go through, and now they're filing one against us."

"They want to take us over?"

"Blaine! What planet are you on? Yes, that's exactly what it means."

"I filed it," I say, as I try to recall all that's gone on in the past few weeks. "I definitely filed it."

"Yes, but you missed the deadline."

"No, the deadline was the second."

"It was the first, Blaine. Your date with Kurt was the second, when you went to that poetry reading."

The elevator opens, but I don't even attempt to move. Everything suddenly hits me at once and I realize my mother was exactly right. I've just cost her company millions, as well as a great deal of respect, because a date with Kurt was more important.

"Shit."

My mother is waiting in my office, and I can see that the conference room next door is filled with the entire board of executives. There's no way out. "I'm sorry," I say, rushing to sit the other side of the desk. "I got confused. I had this date with Kurt, and I..."

"Not good enough." Pale with rage, Nadine Anderson is at her most fearsome and terrifying as she leans across the desk. "Do you know how hard I fought to convince everyone in that room that you were capable of a senior role? Do you know, or even care, how many times I've fought back against all of those who claim you're only here because you're the boss' son? Because I do, Blaine, I fight for you. I fight the bigotry, the hatred, the ones who say you're giving us a bad name because you're gay, or because you sleep around. I fight all of those who say you only got to Harvard because of my name, that you're more suited to family law, of human rights. I fight and I fight and I fight, because you are my son. You know what else? Sometimes, there's a part of me that says you deserve happiness outside of work, too. That you deserve a shot, just like I had with your father, of having it all; a loving husband, some kids, all of that. I see you with Kurt, I hear you and Linda talking, and I think yes, he should have that, have his chance. But you know what else? I know it's not possible. I know it has to be the job or a family, because I've lived it. I've been there, and it's impossible to juggle it all. Your heart takes over your head, Blaine. You're just like your father; ruled by emotions."

"And I need to be more like you? Is that what you mean? Because we all know you chose your career over us."

"Yes I did, Blaine, and I'm not sorry, because I've never put people's jobs on the line by making one stupid, rookie mistake. I've never put an entire company's worth in jeopardy because I confused a date with a boyfriend over a fundamentally important, legally binding deadline!"

I drop my head into my hands and stay there until I feel like I can actually breathe again. "I'm sorry," I repeat softly. "I don't know how to make this better. I'm just so, so sorry."

"You can't make it better," my mom snaps. I hear her get to her feet. "But I'll tell you what you will be doing, right now. You, and your team, will be fighting this takeover with everything you have. I want you in London first thing Monday morning to meet with the Corby execs, and from there, you will ensure that we win this case. Anderson and Cole is, and always has been, the top corporate law firm in the world. We won't stand to be taken over by our competitors and if we are, then you, and all your team, including Linda, will be fired."

I don't make it to visit Cooper that weekend, and I don't even make it to call Kurt until I finally arrive at my hotel in London late on Monday night. There's a coldness to his tone that is entirely understandable, but it still hurts, nonetheless.

"So you didn't have time?"

"I genuinely didn't."

"Not even thirty seconds while you were waiting for your flight, or in line to get coffee?"

"No. I was working, making calls, compiling files... Kurt, I have a team of twelve lawyers, six paralegals, and Linda. I can't have them all fired. I can't watch my mom lose her company."

"Why?"

"Because she's worked so hard, that's why."

"But she's horrible."

"She's my mom! And whatever I think of her, or her ethics, she works harder than anyone I know. That company will be mine, you know that?"

"And that's the real crux of the matter, isn't it?" Kurt snaps. "Nothing really to do with saving people's jobs, or looking out for mommy dearest. It's all about you not wanting to lose your millions or your extravagant lifestyle."

"Bullshit!"

No, Blaine, you don't get to call that. I say when it's all bullshit, and I'm saying it, now. Call me when you realize what you're missing."

I don't call Kurt again in the week that I'm away, but when I land at JFK the following Friday, exhausted from eighteen hour workdays and two long haul flights in a week, I go straight to his dorms, and call him to let him know I'm outside.

I'm amazed he appears, but he does, and holds the door open for me to come inside. "Oh. I thought maybe you'd..."

"I'm not coming back to yours to be tossed out like trash in the morning. You can come in here."

"Right."

I want a shower, and my bed, and the comfort that having Kurt at home with me brings, but I know I'm in no place to argue with him, so I follow him up to his tiny dorm room, with its small bed and brightly colored posters on the walls.

"It's very..."

"Bijou," Kurt finishes for me.

"Yes. That."

I perch awkwardly on his desk chair and watch as he slides onto his bed and picks up his book.

"So, you hate me."

"I don't hate you" He throws down the book in despair. "I'm hurt. You kicked me out a week ago and in that time I've had one short call in which you told me you'd made a massive fuck up, and that you might lose some money. But you know what? Any money you lose will be more money than I could ever hope to have, and you'll still be left with more than I'd know what to do with! You didn't call me again, Blaine, until you're back in the country and want to get laid, but I'll bet you called Cooper each end every night, didn't you? I bet you managed that."

"I don't want to get laid," I whisper. "I just wanted to be with you, because I..."

"You what?"

"You know."

"No, I don't, Blaine, because I don't think we're on the same page after all."

"I want us to be, though, please?" I move from the chair to the bed and reach out to cup Kurt's cheek. "I'm desperate, Kurt. I feel sick all the time, I'm working my ass off, and you know... I know you know... that I'm not doing it for me. I can't see all those people lose their jobs, and she'll do it, I know she will. She has to keep up her reputation."

Kurt blinks, and two tears escape. Suddenly, I'm pulled tight into his arms, and the relief that floods me is instant. So much so, that I have to choke back a sob by hiding my face in his neck. "I need you, Kurt. Please."

"I'm here," he says quietly, pressing a kiss into my hair. "Always here."

Chapter Eighteen

Kurt

Holding Blaine, I suddenly become aware that he's gotten heavy, and then I realize he's practically passed out with exhaustion. I maneuver him until he's lying down, take his shoes off, and then sneak into the corridor to call my dad.

"It's no way for a man to live," Dad informs me through mouthfuls of his dinner. "The kid needs a break. His mom shouldn't put all that pressure on him."

"Yeah but he messed up. Like, really, really messed up."

"He sure did, but people make mistakes, Kurt. Remember that apprentice I had who totalled that Ferarri? I mean, it cost me, but I didn't fire the kid because of it. This world needs more compassion if you ask me. So, where do you go from here?"

"I don't know, to be honest. Blaine says this'll go on for weeks, so I guess we'll see each other when we can, and then try to get back on track when it's done."

"Look after him, Kurt."

"I'm trying."

"Hey, you still coming home for your birthday?"

"Yep."

"Bring Blaine. The break will do him good, and you'll get some time together."

"I will, yeah. Thanks, dad."

I swear Blaine is barely conscious and so, though it's against the rules, I decide he can stay over, and I curl up beside him until he wakes shortly after five.

"I slept here?"

"Hmm. Yeah. C'mon, it's early. Settle down and we can go get coffee a little later."

"I have to work."

"Of course you do."

"I'm sorry, Kurt." He does settle down again, though, and kisses me lovingly. "You could come over tonight, when I get back from Cooper?"

That again. I feel the rage building inside of me, but I know that if I ask to go with him, I'll be turned down.

"Sure," I say instead. "And hey, you know what? I'm going home in two weeks, for my birthday. Thursday through Sunday. My dad said to invite you. I'd kinda really like you to meet him, so..."

"I can't, Kurt." He sits, running his hands through his hair. The look he gives hurts my heart; I can see he's tortured, but it doesn't make it any easier.

"Can't, or won't?"

"No, I can't. That's like... two weeks before I'm due in court. There's no way I can make myself unavailable for four days."

"Just come the weekend, then. Fly out late Friday."

"Kurt..."

"Cooper, right? Of course." I see red, getting to my feet and kicking my desk chair for good measure. "How could I forget? It's always fine for you to spend time with me, as long as it doesn't interfere with work, or the mysterious brother whom I'm not allowed to meet. What is it. Blaine? Are you that ashamed of him? You go on about how your mom is embarrassed by him, but you sound exactly the same! Or is it me? Is that it? You're embarrassed to be seen with me?"

"No!"

"Really? So...what? I'm the boyfriend you like to woo, to court, to play games with, but heaven forbid it should get as serious as meeting the family, no depth or meaning needed to fool around with a nineteen year old boy, I guess."

"That is not true! You've met my mom."

"Yeah, because you know that'll piss her off! Not for any other reason. Blaine, you know what? I'm done. You won't explain shit to me about your brother. You say you're a mess but never elaborate, you tell me your dad died but won't say how. I ask you for one thing, Blaine ONE THING, and you won't drop work or your visits to Cooper to fly home and meet my dad. Well, it's your loss." I sit in my chair, sulking. "He's the best man in the whole world. I should've listened when he told me not to throw myself around."

"You didn't throw yourself around. Kurt, I've told you, I don't know how to find the words..."

"Then TRY!" I yell. He gets to his feet, but I push him angrily back down onto the bed. "Go on, Blaine, tell me. What happened? What did you do that was so horrific and awful that your brother demands you pay penance by calling daily and visiting each weekend?"

"Kurt..."

A fierce hammering on the door makes us both stop, and I pull it open to find a wild Rachel in her babydoll pyjamas. "Will you keep it down! It's not even five thirty, and it's a Saturday."

"Don't worry," I snap. "Blaine's just leaving."

"I am?"

"Yes," I inform him, staring at the floor. "You are."

Chapter Nineteen

Prompt- How Deep is Your Love? The BeeGees

Blaine

"How was it left?" Linda asks down the line.

"It wasn't. He just told me to go."

"And that was two weeks ago?"

"Two weeks, four days, and seven hours ago."

"And you haven't called him?"

"I have! His phone was off for days, and so then I left it for him to cool off, then he wouldn't pick up, then he was home for his birthday..."

"You missed his birthday?"

"Shut up. But he was coming home Sunday, and he still won't pick up. And now I'm in London, and I'm trying to work, but my mind won't let me concentrate, and I just..."

"You'd better be working, Blaine," Linda barks. "I swear. Look, I think that if Kurt doesn't want to be tracked down right now, you have to leave it and try again after the court case, okay? Nevermind about how many days and hours it's been since you saw him, it's only twelve days until you meet with Corby's lawyers in court, and you have to be ready."

But not even Linda's words can distract me from the fact that everything in life hurts without Kurt. I knew he made things better, but I didn't realize just how much light he brought to my darkness, until it suddenly went out.

I work long hours at the office, pulling fifteen hour days before going home and eating toast or cereal as I work some more. My sleep is down to three or four hours a night, and I feel like I'm on the edge of

breaking down and never getting back up. I need Kurt's warmth, his caring, his funniness, his sass... I need his love.

My flight home lands early in the morning, and after throwing my bags into the hallway of the apartment, I head right to Coffee Corner before work, hoping that Kurt will be there.

"Hey!" The barista gives me a warm smile. "Long time no see. How's Kurt?"

The fact that she knows his name takes me off guard for a moment, and I struggle for words. "He's...uh... That is, we're not... He's fine, I think."

"He's better?"

"Huh?"

"Kurt. Is he better?"

"I haven't seen Kurt," I manage to clarify. "I don't think we're together anymore."

"Oh. I didn't know that. His roommate comes in. Small, annoying thing, and she said he's been sick. Like, really, really sick. I just wondered if he's better."

It's a split second decision, and the barista seems to pick up on it, because she quickly pours my coffee into a takeout cup and shoos me out of the door. I don't even bother going back for the car, I just do a weird sprint-like walk thing to Kurt's dorms, with burning hot coffee in one hand, and a briefcase in the other.

I can't get in, of course, and it turns out that if you ask random students for access they become very wary, so I'm forced to wait almost an hour before Rachel appears, and then I sprint across the road and catch the door.

"He's sick?"

"Oh Blaine, thank God." Ushering me into the building, she fumbles in her purse and gives me a key. "Yes. He doesn't want to see you, I should say, but I've been calling your work. Did you get the messages?"

"No, I've been in London."

"Okay. Kurt has flu, I think, but really bad. He didn't even go home. He hasn't left his room in a week, and he's lost so much weight. I've been doing what I can, but..."

"Right. I'll go see him."

"I'll be back at three," she says with a smile. "Make sure you're in, as you have my only key."

"But..."

She's gone before I can tell her I need to work, but one look at Kurt tells me I won't be going anywhere anyway.

He's sleeping, and doesn't stir when I enter. His body is pale, and skinny, but his cheeks are red and he's burning right up. A bucket of vomit sits stinking next to his bed, and his sheets are stained with who knows what. There's a glass of stale water on the side, and Rachel's work is scattered over his desk; she's been sitting in here with him, I'd guess, but also trying to do her school work.

In the communal living area, I find all I need, plus two girls. After I've explained who I am, they scatter, giggling, seemingly entirely unaware that I'm here because Kurt is sick, and not for any other reason. I assemble a vast collection of cleaning products, quickly email my mom and tell her I'm working from home, then I email Linda and tell her the truth, and then I call Carla.

"How do I change sheets if someone is sleeping in them?"

"Do you need to dispose of a body?"

"What? No! Kurt's sick, and I need to change his sheets, but he's sleeping on them."

"I know how to dispose of a body."

"Wonderful. So, about the sheets."

"Roll him, gently. Do one side and then the other. How sick is he?"

"Like, really sick. I was thinking of bringing him to the apartment, but there's no way I can move him."

"Well doesn't the boy have parents? Call them and let them know, for goodness sake!"

"Right."

After Carla talks me through literally everything, I set about cleaning the tiny room from top to bottom. When that is done, I peel the sheets out from under Kurt, and manage to get clean ones on. Kurt himself, reeks. I peel off his pyjama pants with a whispered apology, and wash him as best I can before wrestling him back into a clean set, which I know belong to me.

Kurt barely stirs, just moans and groans from time to time, but he never opens his eyes.

I call the doctor, who comes out after I promise to pay a ridiculous amount, and he looks him over. "Flu," he declares. "Nasty strain of it, too."

"He'll survive?"

"I should think so. Try to keep him propped up so his lungs stay clear. Plenty of fluid. Keep his temperature down with tylenol otherwise he'll keep vomiting. He'll need someone with him until he's better."

"Okay. Why is he unconscious?"

The Doctor stops in the doorway and turns back to me with a smile. "He's not unconscious, Mr. Anderson. He's ignoring you."

He's right, I realize, as I sit in silence and listen to Kurt's breathing. There are times when he's definitely awake, and though he might be unwell, it's apparent that he is aware of my presence, at least. I still don't know what to say to him, though, so when he's sleeping, and I've let Rachel back into the building, I steal his phone and tear back to my apartment to gather some things.

It's strange, to call the father of your first ever boyfriend, who is possibly an ex-boyfriend, and introduce yourself. It's stranger still, to then tell him that his son is sick, and it's downright awkward when Burt Hummel chooses to ignore all of that and inquire after your own welfare, instead.

"Because you've been working too hard, sunshine," he booms at me. "Too hard. Kurt was so upset you wouldn't come home. That's why he's sick, you know, because he got himself so worked up over it all."

"I don't think that's why he has flu."

"Whatever. Listen to me, boy. Get Kurt better. If you need me to fly out, let me know and I'll drop it all."

"No, sir, I think he'll be okay, but I just thought you should know; especially since he'd told you it was a bit of a cold."

"I appreciate it. Like I said, get him better, and then bring him here, okay?"

"Sure. I'll get him a flight as soon as..."

"That goes for you, too."

"Huh?"

"I want you out here to recuperate with him, you hear me? No job is worth sacrificing your mental health or your relationships, Blaine. Not one."

"I spoke with your dad."

That 'wakes' Kurt, and he opens his eyes, blinking up at me. "Huh?"

"I called your dad to let him know you have flu." Kneeling next to the bed, I cover Kurt's hand with my own. "How are you feeling?"

"Aching." His voice is hoarse, and I can barely hear him. "You cleaned up?"

"Yes. I am capable of such things."

He gives the smallest of smiles, which turns into a coughing fit. I help him to sit, and drink some water, but then he falls back down onto the pillows, exhausted. He watches as I fuss about; righting his sheets, throwing away soiled tissues, and then I kneel on the floor next to the bed, keeping one hand on his.

"I love you, Kurt. And I'm sorry that I've been hiding myself and my life away from you, because I didn't want to. I just didn't want to disappoint you, or have you think I wasn't the person you thought I was. I've been working so hard, but I've come to realize my mom was wrong to choose her job. I choose you, you

see, everything else be damned. I have to win this case, of course, and I'll do it, but after that? I choose loving you over anything else that's on offer."

I've said everything with my head bowed, because just getting those words out was hard enough, but when I summon enough courage to look Kurt in the eye, I see he's drifting off to sleep again, but still trying to keep his eyes open.

"Don't worry," I say, kissing his fingers. "We can do all this another time."

He gives another small smile, then closes his eyes. Just when I think he's asleep, his fingers tangle into my hair, and lightly scratch my scalp.

"I love you too, Blaine," he murmurs. "Deeply."

Chapter Twenty

Prompt- Yellow, Coldplay

Kurt

"Kurt?"

I wake slowly, blinking into the dim light that could be early evening, or maybe dawn.

"Are you awake?"

"A bit, yeah."

I rub at my eyes, and lift my head slightly. Blaine is on my floor, where he's been for the last I don't know how long. Hours? Days? He's lying on his back, a blanket over him that makes me think it must be dawn after all.

"How are you feeling?"

"I don't know, really." I let my head flop back down onto the pillow; holding myself upright wears me out quickly. "A little better, I think. Just so tired."

"Yeah."

I wait and I wait, but Blaine doesn't say anything else, so I assume he was just checking on my welfare. Then, just as I'm on the edge of sleep, I become aware that he's talking again, very quietly, and I pull myself back from the brink to listen.

"My dad's ranch...", he's saying. "I told you about that, didn't I? How amazing it was out there? Cooper loved the horses, Kurt. So much. I mean, I liked to ride, but Cooper? He was out there morning to night. He was at Harvard, training to do the job that I'm now in. That was his destiny. Not mine. No one really cared what I did, you know? I wanted to be a musician, and dad was happy if I was happy and mom was happy if I was out of her way so she could concentrate on molding Cooper into exactly what she wanted. Everything I go through now, Kurt, he went through then."

But Cooper was a free spirit. All he wanted was to move out to the ranch with dad, to work with the horses. It would've suited him; marrying a nice country girl, having a whole heap of beautiful children, being outdoors all the time. It was never going to happen, and we both knew it, but it didn't stop us fantasizing about it all the time. I was going to live there too, in our dream. I'd sit on the porch and write songs, while he was out riding, and we'd all come together each evening for a big family dinner."

"Sounds pretty perfect to me." I lift myself up onto one elbow, but Blaine is sitting up against the wall now, staring out into space, reliving every moment.

"The summer that Cooper was twenty two and I was seventeen, he was thrown from his horse."

"Oh God, Blaine."

"It was this wild stallion...He should never have tried to ride it. He was new, and dad had told Cooper he could try and break him in, only Cooper thought he knew it all. Well, you do when you're that age, I guess. I know I did. So I was there, sitting on the fence, watching...laughing, even, as Cooper tried over and over again to mount the horse. Dad came up in his truck just as the horse started to buck. He was yelling for him to stop, and I remember the fright in Cooper's eyes right before he was thrown clear. His body... it looked like a piece of rag, Kurt. It flew through the air, so high, like he was lighter than a feather, and I screamed, and I screamed. The horse was wild, bucking all over the place and foaming at the mouth.

Cooper landed with a sickening crack, and I thought he had died. I was off the fence by then, trying to get near, but dad pushed me out of the way and he went in instead, to try and drag him out of the way, but the horse caught him."

"Blaine, you don't need to go on if..."

"It's funny," he says, cutting me off. "How quickly life can end. One minute my dad was standing there, and then one kick...one fatal kick to the back of his head was all it took. He died in minutes. No chance of survival. That's what they said. He wouldn't have known."

"Blaine..."

"And my dad, my big, strong, beautiful dad, who made life worth living... he just crumpled, right before my eyes. I ran to him, and I held him, and I remember thinking that there should be more blood. That's weird, isn't it? It was like I was watching this all happen to someone else in a movie, and there needed to be more

blood. I was talking to him, rambling on about how he'd be okay, but I knew he wasn't. I knew he had gone.

I think... I think that whatever really happened next, I'll never know, because there's bits missing. I know I was worrying about mom being mad, and about the fact that one of the mares was due to foal, but I forgot about Cooper, and I forgot about the stallion, too. I seemed to become aware of both things at once. The horse trotted close by to me, and I lost it. I mean, I went totally crazy. I was yelling, and screaming, and as I moved, I became aware that there was blood after all; pouring endlessly from the back of dad's head onto my jeans, my arms, my hands... and then... I don't know... I just... there was blood, and yelling, and then the horse bucked again, and his legs came down on the back of Cooper's neck. I didn't move him, you see. I forgot about him. I just... I messed up. That blow was what made Cooper how he is today. Not the initial fall. His spine was broken, but he would only have been paralysed from the waist down. Thanks to me, and my stupid inability to act, Cooper barely exists."

"Blaine, I don't think..."

"He can't even breathe by himself. He has a trach tube for that, and he has to be connected to a ventilator while he sleeps. He can't speak, unless he wears a special speaking valve, which he hates doing, so when I call, I just ramble on and on and try to gauge his reactions from his breathing. I know his laugh, because it's all wheezy, and then sometimes he coughs. That's good. Coughing is good, it clears his lungs, so I try to make him laugh... But it's not Cooper's laugh, Kurt. It's not my brother. He was in hospital for a long time. Best part of a year, and then my mom had our country house remodelled for him. That's where he is now. Cared for twenty four seven by a team of nurses and physicians, but never living. Only sitting, and waiting, until it's time to die."

"Blaine!"

"It's true! And I've been the worst kind of brother to him, I know. Apart from the fact that it's all my fault, because I didn't move him, I also didn't visit for so long. I saw him twice in hospital and then that was it for a year. After that, I took my mom's stance on it and stayed away, only calling in on birthdays and Christmas. I took my anger and grief, and frustrations out on people...men, I guess. I used guys for one night stands, I worked hard and drank harder. The only pleasure I could find in life was from some quick fuck with someone whose name I didn't care to find out. Then two things happened. One was that I totalled my dad's classic corvette when I had been drinking, and the other was that when I woke up in

hospital, one of Cooper's nurses was sitting there, waiting to tell me that my brother had asked her to kill him.

It wasn't a joke, either. He'd planned it, taken all these details down in his head about what meds he took when. She told me that unless we gave Cooper a reason to be, then he'd keep trying and keep asking until someone helped him. As soon as I got out the hospital, I went to him, and we talked. Well, I talked. That nurse? She's Linda's sister. She still works for Cooper now. The day I visited him, I stayed late, and she was putting him to bed. His room is huge, on the ground floor, and it looks out over beautiful rolling hills. I lay with him, and we looked out at the night, at the stars that seemed to be shining just for us. We talked about dad, about my life, about his, and I swore to him that no matter what, I'd always be there for him. That was seven years ago."

Stunned, I let silence fall as I try to take everything in. I don't know how long passes; it could be two minutes, it could be twenty, but eventually, I speak.

"That's why, isn't it? Why the calls are so important, why you visit all the time."

"Yes."

"You can't hide in guilt forever, Blaine. You know that, right? Cooper doesn't blame you."

"He does."

"Hmm, no, I don't think he does, actually. Because if he did, he wouldn't want you around. In fact, I think he would have killed himself long ago. I think that whatever he felt at the time has long since been replaced by the deep love you two share. I think he wants his brother to be free from guilt, and happy in his own life. Does he know you've met me?"

"Kind of. I said I might be seeing someone, but then I didn't really say anything else."

"I think he wants you to be happy, Blaine."

"How do I tell him I've fallen in love, Kurt? How do I tell him that I've met my soulmate, when I know there's no chance of him meeting his?"

"By realizing that your happiness directly affects his, that's how."

"I'm never going to stop hating myself for leaving him there, Kurt. Never."

Into the silence comes a sound, and it takes me a moment to realize it's the sound of Blaine crying as quietly as he possibly can. On wobbling legs, I make my way over to the curtains and pull them back, relieved to find there's just enough of the night sky left.

"Get up here."

"What are you doing on your feet? You'll..."

"Just get up here. Humor me."

He does as he's told, and thankfully he wraps his arms around me too, otherwise I know I'd fall. "Right. Look up there. What do you see?"

"Yellow light."

"Shut up, you're supposed to see stars."

"They're not visible, dummy. This is New York."

"Okay, fine. Look up at the yellow light, and think of Cooper looking up at the actual stars, then. Now, I don't know what you spoke about that night, seven years ago, but I do know this. You have a brother who loves you, and who needs you as much as you need him. You've done your best, and I don't dispute that, but you can do better. You know how? You need to let go of that day, Blaine, of what happened, and you need to live your life in the here and now. Those stars aren't going to shine down on the both of you forever, you know. Let him share in your happiness, let him truly be a part of your life, just as you are a part of his. And stop trying to hide the fact that you're crying, too, because real men do cry, despite what you might have learned growing up. You should see my dad when we watch Beaches."

And Blaine does cry, softly, against my shoulder, before he kisses my cheek and murmurs a thank you. "All this is a fancy way of saying you want to meet my brother, isn't it?"

"It is really, yeah."

"Then you will."

"One more thing, Blaine. I think that maybe I wasn't really attuned to the stress you were facing, with work, and the whole Cooper thing. Thank you for telling me, because I feel like now I get it; i get how important it is for you to keep all those balls in the air. But let me help you, please? Let me love you, and support you, because that's all I want to do."

Chapter Twenty-One

Prompt- I Will- The Beatles

Blaine

It's nearly six in the morning by the time Kurt goes back to sleep, and in all honesty, that's what I want to do too, but there's work to be done, and that means leaving Kurt under the watchful eye of Rachel for a couple of hours while I go into the office, and then we swap so she can go back to class.

It's been this way for days, but Kurt does at least seem to be slowly getting better. He can sit for more than a few minutes now, and managed some soup that Michelle and Carla made. I'm hopeful that soon, I can get him back to the apartment, because five nights on the floor and crappy wifi is really starting to get to me.

"You have one week until you're in court, Blaine," my mom warns me when I rush into the office. "One week, and you're telling me that yet again you can only stay for a couple of hours."

"I know, I know, but I'm doing all the work I can from home, I swear."

"Home," she scoffs. "You're not at home, you're sleeping on the floor of a college boy's dorm, for goodness sake. Hardly the place for a senior lawyer."

"Wherever Kurt is, is home."

"Oh please. I think I've just been sick in my mouth." She heads for the door, but she gives a small smile as she says it and then she stops. "How is he?"

"Getting there. I want to try and get him back to the apartment if I can, and then back to his dad for a few days."

"Good. I like him." She nods, almost to herself. "Yes. I'm glad he's getting better."

"Coffee!" Linda calls loudly. "Hello, Nadine. Coffee?"

"No thank you, some of us have real work to do."

"Excellent. Now, Blaine, I know you missed visiting Cooper this weekend, because of Kurt, but I was thinking I could sit with him later, if you like, and you could quickly run up there."

"I can't. Just in case I'm getting sick. Doctor said to wait a week."

"Of course. Damn. Well, I'll ask Claire if she can call in some extra."

"No, don't do that. She does enough."

"I'm asking anyway."

"I think my mom quite likes Kurt, you know."

"Yes, she does. I overheard her telling someone the other day."

"She's always going to be difficult though, isn't she?"

Linda sits on the desk, and rests a hand on my shoulder. "Yes, she is," she says softly. "But you know what's lead her to be this way, Blaine. You know what's shaped her."

"That's true."

I drift off, thinking of mom's life; a life full of expectation and demands, both from her and those that she's placed on others. A life of tragedy, too; she lost her brother when she was young, and then lost her ex-husband in an accident during which her son ended up as a quadriplegic. It gets me to thinking whether she's really only so hard on me because she's scared.

"You're useless," she suddenly announces, invading both my thoughts and my office. "You were supposed to have met with Frank and Sally at ten this morning."

"I was?"

"I'm warning you, Blaine, don't mess this up. You know what will happen if you lose this case."

The juggling continues.

I pack as much work into two hours as I can, including a quick meeting with my team, and then I race back to Kurt, who is sitting up in bed and actually smiling.

"Oh thank God. Hey, you think you can make it back to mine? It'd just be so much easier for me to look after you there; I can work from my office, and Carla and Michelle can be around... Plus the bed's big enough for both of us."

Kurt watches me rushing about. "Sure."

"Great, good. Wonderful. Let's do that, then, let's go."

Kurt is unsteady on his feet, and every step out to the car seems to take forever, but eventually we're on our way, with most of his closet packed into bags, it seems. As stubborn as ever, Kurt then insists on walking from the car to the apartment, even though it would be much quicker for me to carry him, and the result is that by the time we get inside, he falls face first onto the bed and stays there.

"You okay?"

"Home."

"What?"

"Feels like I'm home."

"Oh." I straighten up, appreciating the rush of warmth that comment brings. "Good. Right. Work to do."

I work solidly while Kurt sleeps. Then I feed him soup, then I work some more. Then I help him to shower, then I work some more. Then night falls, and Kurt sleeps, and I sneak down to the office to work even more. Whatever happens, I will not lose this case. I will not let people down.

"Blaine!"

"Huh?"

I lift my head to find Kurt in the doorway of the office, clinging on to the wall.

"Was I asleep?"

"Yeah."

"Damn. Right. I just need to..."

"You just need to nothing, Blaine, come to bed."

"I can't, Kurt. I've got..."

"No, listen to me. You're doing too much. You need to rest, Blaine. You're so worried about losing this case, but you will lose if you're too tired to concentrate on anything. Come on, come and hold me. It feels like forever since I was in your arms."

It's hard to give in, but when I do sink into bed, and Kurt cuddles close, I find myself relaxing so much that the tears come for the second time in twenty four hours.

"Jeez. What is wrong with me?"

"Years of pent up emotion," Kurt answers bluntly. He kisses each one away, then smiles down at me. "I love you, you know that? I think I told you the other day, but I wasn't really with it, so I'm saying it now. I love you, Blaine. I think you're the most special person I've ever met."

That only brings more tears, but I blink them away as fast as I can, and kiss him gently on the lips. "I love you too."

"How do you feel after last night?"

"Better, I think. Like I can breathe a bit. I'm sorry if I made a fool of myself, and if I rambled. You probably wanted to sleep, and I just..."

"Are you kidding? Blaine, we both needed to hear all of that, out loud, and I'm so grateful that you shared it all with me. I love you, I told you. I want to share in your life, and that means the good and the bad, the happy and the painful."

"Thank you."

Kurt settles down, his head on my chest. It feels amazing, to finally have him here with me again.

"You know what else you said last night?"

"No, what?"

"You said you'd met your soulmate."

"I was talking about someone else."

"I'm sure."

I laugh, ecstatic to feel his laughter too. "I'll love you forever," I say, lifting his chin so that I can study him in the dim light. "Always."

"You will?"

"I will."

"I like the sound of that, Blaine. I don't know where life will take us; whether it'll always be plain sailing or whether there's a hundred twists and turns ahead, but I'll love you forever, too, soulmate."

"You will?"

Kurt sighs contentedly and snuggles closer. "I will."

Chapter Twenty-Two

Kurt

Gradually, as the days pass, I get stronger. It's mainly thanks to Carla and Michelle, who feed me an endless array of wholesome and nutritious foods, while insisting that I rest as much as possible. Each morning, when they arrive, Blaine goes to work, and that's when Carla makes me sit outside for fifteen minutes for fresh air.

I've decided that maybe I misjudged Blaine's decision to have housekeepers; it's clear they think of Blaine with a great deal of love and affection, and it warms me to know they're around to keep an eye on Blaine and stop him from working too much.

His hours are endless, despite my nagging him to sleep more. He's up before me, working in his office, and then he goes out to work. He comes home, we eat dinner, and then he's back in the office again. He's even taking to sitting in bed with the laptop, and tapping away while I drift off to sleep.

He does let slip that he still goes for coffee each morning, though, and when he leaves the apartment on the Friday before he's due in court, I give him a five minute head start before telling Carla I'm going to join him.

"You can't do that! It's too far. Michelle, tell him it's too far."

"It's too far, Mister Kurt. Really, you need to stay here, where we can look out for you. Sit on the balcony."

"Please, I haven't been anywhere or done anything for three weeks now. I'm going steadily insane."

They exchange looks, then Carla turns back to me. "I'll walk with you."

"It's over the road! If you look out of the games room window, you can see me!"

"I'm not happy about this," she mutters angrily. "Not happy at all. If you fall down dead, it's not my fault."

"I'll keep that in mind," I say with a smile, then I duck out of the door before she can change her mind.

The air is fresh, and very welcome on my face. Looking up, I can just about make out Carla and Michelle pressed against the window, so I make a big show of walking tall, with confident, quick strides. By the time I've made the short journey to Coffee Corner, I am so weak and wobbly that I have to hold on to the wall before I can go inside.

I can see Blaine, just as he was when we first met; head down, buried in his phone, frowning at something. I can see college boy, sitting across at another table, mooning over Blaine, as my dad would say. That's a crush that's not going away anytime soon. Then I see the woman, collecting her drink, and walking over to the empty seat, and I know it's time to move.

"It's taken," Blaine is barking as I open the door. He doesn't look up from his phone.

"By your briefcase?"

"No, it's just taken."

"But there's no one here."

"There is now."

Blaine does look up then, at the sound of my voice, and his whole face softens and lights up. "I told you it was taken," he says smugly, and the woman walks away to ask college boy if she can join him, instead.

"Hey, you." Blaine quickly gets to his feet, pulls out the chair, and sets his briefcase on the floor. "I thought I said goodbye to you not ten minutes ago."

"You did, but I'm so sick of being stuck inside that I thought I'd join you."

"Well, it's very welcome."

"You are so rude, you know that?"

"Not to you though." He grins, ushers me into my seat and heads over to the counter, where the barista is waving at me.

"Carla must be having a fit," Blaine remarks when he returns with my drink.

"You can say that again. But honestly, I'm feeling so much better. I know I'm not quite there, but I feel ready to be out and about a bit more."

"Good."

"I can go back to my dorms tonight, if you want?"

"No I do not want," he says, his annoyance clear. "Jesus."

"Okay. I just thought I'd ask, what with your case being on Monday."

"Don't worry about that. Worry about the fact that you're meeting Cooper tomorrow."

"I am?"

"Yes." He smiles brightly, as if he's suddenly decided on it. "You are. You're not infectious now, right?"

"Doctor said I'm not."

"Good."

"I'd go back to class next week, but it's reading week."

"Hmm." He sips his coffee and thinks. "Why don't you make the trip home, then?"

"Because last minute flights are expensive, and I want to go when you can come with me."

"Well, I'm paying anyhow, but why don't you go mid-week, and I'll come join you on Friday?"

"Will your case be done?"

"Doubtful, but I'll join you either way, I promise."

"You don't like public affection, do you?"

"Why?"

I lean across the table and kiss him softly on the mouth. "Because I just needed to let you know how much I love you, that's all."

That evening, Blaine comes in from work, goes right to his office, and stays there. The loud slam of the door tells me to leave him be, and I give him a full hour before I head down there, to find him sitting with his head in his hands.

"You want tea? Or something stronger?"

"No," he mumbles. "I want you. C'mere."

I can't deny that something flares inside of me at those words, and I go, falling into his lap and wrapping my arms around his neck. "I thought you'd tell me to get lost."

"I probably would have, if you'd followed me when I first came in. Thank you for giving me some time."

"Bad day?"

"Just one of those where everything goes wrong, you know? One of my team quit, suddenly and without warning, and they were supposed to deliver our opening argument on Monday. Then one of the paralegals had to go home sick, and now Louisa has a boyfriend."

"Is that the intern that has a crush on you?"

"Yes."

"She's nice. Why is it bad that she has a boyfriend?"

"It's not, I guess, but I liked being the center of her universe."

"Blaine Anderson! You're the center of my universe, does that ease your pain?"

"Little bit."

"I am sorry about the other things, though."

"Hmm, me too. Kiss me."

I oblige happily, familiar sensations stirring inside of me when the kiss deepens and takes on a new level of intensity. I shift about, so that I'm straddling him rather than sitting across him, and just the touch of his hands, firmly splayed across my back, makes me weak with desire. Blaine gives a soft moan into my mouth, but pulls back, just as things are getting interesting. I pout, and he laughs, kissing me quickly again.

"I remember you pouting when we first talked," he says. "I wanted to kiss it away then, too."

"Kiss me some more."

"I'd love to, but I can't."

"I'm okay, you know. I won't break." Taking his hand, I place it firmly over the front of my pyjama pants, encouraging him to squeeze. "Kiss me some more."

"Oh God, Kurt, you're gonna kill me."

"Come on." I lean in, loving the way my teasing gets him so worked up. "Kiss me some more."

"Bed." He says, pulling back from the kiss and tapping my thighs.

"What? Why?"

"Because we've only been intimate once, and I want to keep it nice for you, that's why. I don't want you getting down and dirty on my desk."

"What if I want that, though?"

Blaine throws his head back and groans, and I take full advantage; kissing under his chin and down his neck. "What if I want your hands on me, right here and now? Does that make me dirty?"

"Kurt..." His hands twitch, gripping my hips as he subconsciously licks his lips. "Please..."

"What if I want your mouth around me, Blaine?"

"Oh my God."

"What does that make me then? Dirty? Or positively filthy?"

Blaine pounces. That's the only way to describe it. Suddenly, I am out of the chair and on the desk with him over me, kissing me fiercely. Everything inside of me comes alive and I cry out, desperately tugging at any clothing I can reach.

We're both fumbling, attempting to kiss while undressing ourselves and each other, and it's far, far from the glamorous love-making you see in the movies, but it's sublime and perfect and I wouldn't want it any other way. Soon we're somehow both naked, and Blaine sits me back on the edge of the desk while he takes the chair, and sinks his mouth down around me.

"Oh. My. Fuck," I say, breaking off with a sigh. Blaine's mouth feels amazing. I've only ever had one guy do this to me before, and it was wet, quick, and not much else. I remember it ended long before I was ready but this...this is something else.

Blaine is exceptionally talented with his tongue, which I knew from kissing him so many times, but now I'm feeling pleasure like I've never known before, and it makes me grip his hair tight and drive myself further into his mouth.

What surprises me the most, is that Blaine is enjoying it too; it seems as though he can't get enough of me, and that in turn makes everything even hotter. I know my orgasm hits way too soon, and it doesn't occur to me to give any kind of warning- not that I could have vocalized anything, but suddenly I come hard, into the warmth of his mouth.

Blaine swallows everything, looking up at me with dark eyes. "You are incredible." His voice is low, husky, and it thrills me to know I've made him that way. I position myself in his lap and kiss him, tasting myself on his tongue as I work one hand over him. It's dry, and rough, but I know Blaine is close to tipping point and sure enough, he quickly spills into my hand, slumping down in the chair with a satisfied sigh.

"I love you."

Laughing, I lean in, kissing his lips before curling up in his arms. "I love you too. Your desk is kinda..."

"Fucked?"

"Blaine!"

"Well it is." But he laughs instead of trying to organize the mass of papers that are now in disarray. "I'll do it after we shower."

"We?"

"Yep."

It's an oddly domesticated evening after that; we do shower together, and then Blaine straightens his office while I cook dinner. That night, we work side by side at the dining room table, and for once, Blaine comes to bed at the same time as me, and lets me hold him all night long.

He's on edge the next morning, though, getting up and going for a run long before I stir. He refuses breakfast, but reluctantly lets me drag him out for coffee, scowling at college boy and almost kicking his table until I kick him instead, and fix him with a glare.

"Don't you dare."

"He's always in here."

"We're always in here," I point out as we take our seats. "Leave him alone and stop being grumpy."

"I am not grumpy."

"You are, because now you're having second thoughts about me meeting Cooper, which is dumb."

Blaine protests, of course, and then he tries to make out like maybe he has too much work to do, but he knows, and I know, and hell, Cooper probably knows, that Blaine is so tightly bound to his past, so scared that I'll judge him for Cooper's condition, that he will do all he can to avoid that meeting. This time, though, I'm not giving him any choice, and so, after lunch, we start the drive in yet another unfamiliar car.

"What is this?"

"A car."

"What type?"

"Porsche."

"Is it yours?"

"No, Kurt. I stole it, just like the others. It's what I do at night when you think I'm working."

"You're hilarious. How many cars do you have?"

He thinks. He genuinely has to think about his answer, which just about sums up our very different circumstances. "Five, now. I sold a couple."

"Five? Where the hell do you keep them all?"

"In the garage under our apartment."

I'm about to pick him up on the 'our apartment' thing, but then I figure he probably means either Cooper or his mom as the other person, so I leave it, and just give a nod instead, because I don't know what else to say.

"Don't judge me. I like cars. They're pretty."

"I like cars too," I protest. "And I'll bet I know a whole lot more about what's under the hood than you do."

"I don't doubt it." He shrugs, entirely unaffected. "I just pay people to look at them if I hear a strange noise."

"You know, my dad's a mechanic."

"Really?" Blaine glances across at me in surprise. "I didn't know that! Wow. You think he can source a fifty four Cadillac for me?"

"Ha! I don't know. Probably."

"Awesome. Yep. I like him already. That's how you know about cars?"

"Yes. Just like you know about horses, I guess."

"Did." He tenses immediately, and stares at the road ahead. "I did know about horses. I don't now."

"You won't ride again?"

"No."

"Don't they say you should get right back on the horse or something like that?"

Blaine gives me a look that's so dark and full of pain that I'm speechless, and the silence that falls is full of anger.

"That was really insensitive of me, I'm so sorry." I reach out, placing my hand over his. "My mouth..."

"I know." He laces our fingers together and squeezes softly. "You speak first, think later. But meet my brother, Kurt. Then you'll understand."

Chapter Twenty-Three

Blaine

I know the house where I grew up is insanely large. I know it's impressive, when you come swooping down the driveway and then suddenly there it is laid out in front of you, sprawling out over a lush green hillside. I also know that when I was very young, before I was sent away to school, I used to feel embarrassed about bringing friends here. After that, I never really had any close friends, or people that I would want to invite to stay. All through my Harvard years I stayed away, resolutely away, and if I did visit my mom it would be at her house in Westchester, because that meant I didn't have to stay with Cooper.

It's different now. Now I can appreciate the beauty of this place, and all that it gives to Cooper, and I no longer feel embarrassed, because I feel as though Kurt gets it. He does gasp, as we turn the corner and see it for the first time, but he holds his tongue, and follows me inside.

His only reaction to the vast entrance hall is a small bite of his lip, and a brief glance around, and then he trails after me down a corridor to the much brighter west wing of the house, where Cooper mainly resides.

"I gotta say it," he suddenly blurts. "This place is gorgeous. Like, stunningly beautiful."

I stop dead. "You like it?"

"Yeah, why, don't you?"

"I do now. I didn't. It was hard, living here as a kid. Then we went away to school, and it never felt like home, I guess. We'd come home on spring break, or for Christmas, but mom and dad were fighting, she was at work more and more... Then dad was gone, of course. The ranch was home, though. It felt that way from the moment we first saw it."

"I get that. But yeah, I think this place is really lovely. Does your brother have an eye for interior design?"

I laugh loudly at that. "Hardly. He used to have an eye for women and cars."

"A playboy?"

"Very much so, but with a heart of gold. That was always his downfall. Each girlfriend was 'the one' and each heartbreak hurt worse than the one before."

We stop in front of two white double doors and I kiss Kurt quickly. "Here we go."

As usual, Cooper is sitting in front of the large conservatory windows, and he turns his motorized chair toward the sound of the door. He smiles, then stops, looks at Kurt, and raises his eyebrows.

"Shut up," I say, and he grins widely, his blue eyes laughing. "Kurt, this is Cooper, Cooper, meet Kurt."

"Nice to meet you," Kurt says politely. He remembers at the last second that Cooper can't shake hands and he settles for a smile instead. "Blaine's told me a lot about you."

I watch closely, but Kurt seems entirely unaffected by Cooper's appearance. I know it's unnerving, to see someone essentially locked in their own body. Cooper has free movement of his head, slight movement in his right hand, that enables him to operate his chair, but that's it. The way he has to be seated, to keep himself upright and his lungs inflated, means he looks stiff and unnatural, with his head tilted back so that the air can flow freely around his trach tube.

I also know that my brother is exceptionally handsome, in a very different way to me. His hair is a light brown, and he keeps it quite long, his eyes are a bright, vivid blue. A waste, is how my mom has described Cooper's face on more than one occasion, but Kurt seems quite taken.

"Hey."

"What?"

"You know what."

Kurt blushes, which is beyond adorable, and takes my hand. It's at that point that the door opens and Claire comes in.

"Hey Blaine!"

"Hi Claire. Um... this is Kurt."

"Oh I know all about Kurt from Linda," she says happily. "Nice to meet you. I'm Cooper's friend. Well, one of his nurses, technically, but it's a bit past that now."

"Linda's sister," Kurt says, shaking her hand. "Blaine told me."

I like Claire, and if it wasn't for her I think Cooper would be a lot more depressed and lonely. She calls in extra nearly all the time, and she's the only nurse who can convince him to take trips out to museums or art galleries, or even the movies.

"Put his speaking valve on, Blaine," she tells me. "He has something to say."

"No he doesn't."

"You boys." She sighs, and attaches the valve to the front of Cooper's trach while we sit on the couch opposite.

"I do too," he says. His voice makes me laugh now; it used to make me cry. When the Doctors first trained him how to speak with the trach, it would pain me to hear him, and any speech seemed to require so much effort. He's used to it now, of course, though it means a different way of breathing and swallowing when the valve is attached, which is why he tires of it quickly. He sounds gravelly, as if he has the world's worst sore throat, but there's still his same old mirth there, still my brother.

"Kurt, huh? And when... When were you going to tell me?"

"I just did! I have! He's here, isn't he?"

"Relax. I've known you were dating for ages. Claire tells me everything."

"Oh. Well. I just... You know."

"I know. So, tell me Kurt, what do you do?"

"I'm in college. Literature and Women's Studies."

"Interesting. What do you want to do with that?"

"Um, well..." Kurt shifts a little closer to me, clearly nervous. "I'd quite like to write books about women who've changed history, and I'd love to do my masters and then teach at college level. Aside from that, I'd like to help women who are fleeing persecution in one way or another. I think that maybe...Maybe I haven't worked out the finer points of that, yet."

"Wow."

My brother is impressed, I can tell, and so am I. It's the first time I've heard Kurt talk of any future career plans, and I wonder why I've never asked him before.

"Very noble," Cooper continues. "When do you graduate?"

"Not for some time. I'm nearly finished my first year, so..."

"Ah, you're in dorms."

"Yes. It's okay, I guess. Small."

"Very small," I chip in. "I had to sleep on his floor for a week."

"Yeah, but I'll get an apartment soon," Kurt adds. "Live off campus with some friends."

Claire comes back, with coffee, and takes her place in the armchair next to my brother. One of the reasons I like her so much is that she reminds me of how Linda is with me; she constantly swaps jibes with Cooper and bosses him about, but there's undeniable tenderness when she holds his beaker for him to drink his coffee, and she gently wipes away any that escapes his mouth.

"Sorry," he says to Kurt. "I'm a mess. Not much good at swallowing. Better with beer, though. I don't spill that."

Kurt smiles politely. "Blaine's good at swallowing..."

"NO!"

Kurt cuts himself off at the same time that I realize where the sentence is going. All four of us get it, and three of us are mortified, but Cooper laughs louder than I've ever heard, wheezing and coughing so hard

that Claire has to pull him up by the chest. "You and your mind," she moans, while Cooper continues to cough hard. "Blaine, lift him up for me."

She pulls his speaking valve off, giving him more air, and I drape his arms over my neck, lifting him as upright as I can. "I really hate you," I tell him, our faces inches apart, but Cooper just continues to laugh, and choke, and choke, and laugh, until tears are rolling down his face. "And you," I say over my shoulder to Kurt. "Please think before you speak. Just...please."

"I do try," he protests weakly, his face on fire. "I was just going to make a joke, and then I realized it wouldn't be funny and now..."

He stops as he becomes aware that Cooper is trying to communicate with him. "What? I'm funny?"

Cooper nods.

"Thank you." He beams. "See, Blaine? I'm funny."

"I knew you two shouldn't have met," I grouch. Lowering Cooper back into his chair takes considerable effort and when it's done, Claire has to suction his tube clear again. It's something I'm used to, but I can tell it jars with Kurt, and he doesn't know where to look or what to say.

"Come on, Kurt, let's leave them to it," Claire announces when she's done. "I'll show you around."

Left alone, Copper just grins inanely at me, until I give in and roll my eyes. "Yes, okay?"

He raises one eyebrow, questioning.

"Yes. He's the one."

He raises both eyebrows.

"My soulmate, endgame, person, lobster, whatever you want to call it. I am deeply, profoundly in love with Kurt and I think I will be... Well, I think I will be forever."

Cooper jerks his head to the right, where his speaking valve sits on a small table.

"Nope. No way."

He does it again.

"Fine, but only for a minute. It's too much. For you and for me."

"He's a lucky guy," Cooper rasps. "And so are you. I like him, a lot."

"He's not too young?"

"You're thirty four, Blaine, not ninety. He's funny as hell, intelligent, sweet, and he clearly adores you."

"I hope he'll stay," I admit quietly. "All through college? It's a lot. A big change in one person's life. And I don't want to drive him away, you know? I'm trying, to let him in."

"I think he'll stay. It might not always be easy, but I think it'll be worth it." He breaks off, coughing, and I have to suction his trach clear again.

"Right, that valve is coming off."

"No, no, just one more thing, Blaine. I want you to promise me something."

"Like what?"

"Chase your dreams with Kurt, please? Love him, openly and honestly, and share your life with him. You need that, and you're such a good man, Blaine, you deserve love and happiness."

Overcome, I find myself kneeling at his feet, my hand covering his. "Cooper, I don't..."

"You do. You need to move on, Blaine. What's done is done. You and I, we're still here, still living, and we have to make the best of the life we've been given. I'm trying to do that, but I think you need to let go of the past and do the same. Be the lawyer you want to be, or if you don't want to do that, then do something else. Love Kurt, be happy, raise ten kids and fifteen dogs..."

"No way!"

"No, okay, but do what you want to do, is all I'm saying, please."

"I'll try."

"Good. And promise me one more thing?"

"What?"

"Sometime, get Kurt up here for a whole weekend. We can get him really drunk and see what he has to say then."

"No way." I get to my feet and smugly remove his valve. "Not gonna happen."

When Kurt and Claire return, it's to announce that we're all going for a walk, and so we head outside. Though Cooper remains silent, it appears that, like me, Kurt doesn't need to hear his voice to understand him, or to have a conversation. They talk endlessly, one side out loud, the other side through various head movements and eye rolls, and I find myself feeling rather stupid for letting all my hangups get in the way of my two favorite people meeting each other.

"A success, I'd say," Claire comments as we head back inside. Cooper and Kurt settle in front of the TV, with Kurt rambling on about his favorite musical films and Cooper nodding eagerly when he mentions Mary Poppins.

"Yeah. I'm glad."

"So am I. I'm guessing we'll be seeing a lot more of Kurt now?"

"Well, I think it's been arranged, against my will, that we're coming to stay once my court case is done. There's talk of beer. Please make sure there's no beer."

"Of course." Claire nods. "I'll make sure it's champagne, instead."

"What?"

She laughs loudly. "Chill out, Blaine. But do come and stay. Cooper would really like that. And you know, one day...if you and Kurt ever wanted to move here on a more permanent basis...There's plenty of room."

"Cooper says I should raise ten children and fifteen dogs."

"Ah, well...maybe not, then."

We end up staying for dinner, and late into the evening, which is something I've not done in many years. Claire stays too, even though the next nurse arrives for his shift, and it becomes an evening of board games, pizza, and lots and lots of laughter. Kurt makes near the knuckle jokes, Cooper laughs and coughs, and Claire and I berate the both of them, with no consequence whatsoever. A new friendship has been formed, and when we finally leave, Kurt settles down into his seat with a contented smile on his face.

"I love your family, Blaine," he says. "Cooper is brilliant, your mom is insane, and evil, but somehow I think she means well, and you? You're the best of all."

"Did Cooper give you any beer?"

"No! But he did make me put his speaking valve on when you were in the bathroom."

"Oh God. And?"

"And he said to tell you we should have ten children and fifteen dogs."

Chapter Twenty-Four

Kurt

It's gone midnight when we arrive back at the apartment, and I'm secretly kind of glad that Cooper told Blaine not to visit tomorrow; it gives Blaine the whole day to work on his court case, and it means I can hopefully catch up with my friends, whom, I'll admit, I've been neglecting recently.

I put all this to Blaine in the car, and he readily agrees; in fact, he actively encourages me to spend time with other people, and then he goes and breaks my heart a little bit by saying he'd do the same if he had friends.

He's lying in bed when I emerge from the shower, which is nice, since it means that he's intending on getting some rest, and it also means I get to hold him, too. In a moment of madness, for me, I remove the pyjamas I've only just put on, very aware of Blaine's eyes on me, and then I climb under the covers.

"Oh? What's brought this on?" he asks.

"A desire to be close to you, maybe? I don't know. I think I'm probably too tired for anything except cuddles, I think."

"Same, but if you're offering naked cuddles, I could be down with that. Are you sure you feel comfortable?"

"I always do, with you. I don't feel like you're staring at me."

"Really?"

"Well, I know you are," I correct, making him laugh. "But it feels good, rather than weird."

"Because you stare at me."

"True. Now get those shorts off."

He obliges quickly, and then our nightly tussle ensues until we both get into a hold we're happy with, which tonight is Blaine curled around me, his face buried into my neck. "Thank you for liking my brother," he says quietly when the light is out.

"No need to thank me, he's great."

"Yeah, he is."

"And Claire."

"She's a godsend."

"Hmm. So nice that they've found each other like they have."

"Yeah." Blaine lifts his head then, looking down at me in the shadows. "Wait... What?"

"Cooper and Claire."

"She's his nurse."

"Yeah, and the rest."

"Seriously...what?"

I sit then, unable to quite believe he doesn't know. "They're in love, Blaine. You must've seen that?"

"Huh? What... Why would I... Why would I have... What?"

"Has it not occurred to you that the reason she's always there is nothing to do with her job and everything to do with Cooper and her being a couple?"

"That's absurd! She's...like... fifty."

"So? You're a lot older than me."

"I know, but..."

"Don't you dare say it's different because she's a woman, Blaine Anderson, don't you dare."

"No, not that. Cooper. I mean... Nothing works... you know...down there. He has no sensation."

"So? That's not the be all and end all of a relationship, is it? You and I didn't do anything for a long time, and we still haven't done all that much."

"No, but we have that option, and we can hold each other, appreciate being in each other's space."

"And so can they! I don't know, maybe she's not after a physical relationship through choice, or maybe she just fell for Cooper and the rest doesn't matter... either way, Blaine, I'm telling you, they're smitten."

"That's just... Right." He reaches across me and dials, leaving his phone on speaker. "Evening, Paul. Can you put my brother on, please? Sorry it's so late."

He waits, and though I don't hear anything, he clearly knows when Cooper is on the other end of the line. "Put your speaking valve on," he snaps. "I want a word with you, and I need you to talk back."

He waits.

"Don't ignore me, Cooper."

Eventually, a cough comes, followed by "Okay."

"Good. Are you and Claire a thing? A couple?"

Cooper laughs, then coughs. "Kurt's very per... per..."

"Perceptive? Yes he is. And maybe I'm not, but you never said a word! How long?"

"Couple of years."

"Cooper! Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why didn't you tell me about Kurt?"

"You know why."

"Tell me."

"Because I didn't want my happiness to make you unhappy, that's why. I didn't want to think of me having someone to love and you having no one."

"And now you know why I didn't tell you about Claire."

"I'd have been so happy for you, though."

"Likewise, little brother."

"Is it..."

"Physical? Not likely."

"Love."

"Oh, yes. Very much so, but we're happy with how things are. She goes home to her place each night. Not many people who'd want to share a room with a cripple on a ventilator and a nurse, is there?"

"Cooper, don't."

"It's okay, Blaine, I can't be sad about it, truly. Like I said, I'm living the life I've been given, as happily as I can. I've been blessed with the love of a good woman, and I never thought I'd get that, ever."

"Two years?"

Cooper laughs again. "Two years, Blaine. I'll see you soon."

"I'm not here next week. I'm supposed to be flying home with Kurt."

"Good. I mean, I'll miss you, but that's good. You'll be up here the week after anyway, for our drunken shenanigans."

"Oh God."

"We'll be there!" I call, but that takes Cooper into a massive coughing fit, and he gets replaced by the nurse, who quickly hangs up.

"Told you." I settle back into bed and hold my arms out.

"Ooh, someone's smug."

"And rightly so!"

Blaine falls down next to me and digs me in the ribs. "You two are trouble together."

"Hmm. Tell me, how do you feel right now?"

"About two hundred pounds lighter," Blaine decides. "And... Happy." He sits up again, resting his hands either side of my waist. "I feel really happy, Kurt."

"I'm glad."

Leaning down, he kisses me gently, and that should be where it stays, given that we're both so tired, but emotion has a funny way of taking hold, and finding pleasure at the hands of Blaine is something it seems my body is always ready for.

There's something entirely wonderful about the press of our bodies together, the feel of Blaine's hands over my skin, the touch of his tongue. I want more, I know I do, I know that I feel comfortable, and ready, and wanting, but I also know that now is not the time, and anyway, I am more than happy to feel Blaine sliding against me, holding me close.

"I love you," he whispers, his hair damp and sweaty against my temple. "Kurt, I... I just really love you."

I'm unable to answer, because my orgasm hits and that makes me pretty much useless, but I do remind him of my love later, when we're right on the verge of sleep.

"You know you're the best thing that's ever happened to me, right?"

"Yeah, right."

"I mean it! I love you, Blaine Anderson. I'll miss you next week."

"You'll only be at your dad's two nights before I get there."

"I mean tomorrow, when I'm back in dorms."

For the second time that night, Blaine sits up and stares at me. "What? Why?"

"You'll be so busy. I don't want to be in your way, and..."

"I don't want you to go." He says it so simply; no pleading, just a statement of fact. "I really want you here. I can't promise I won't be stressed, but I can promise that the thought of seeing your face, of sleeping in your arms, is something that I look forward to all day."

"You like it when I hold you?"

"Don't tell a soul."

I grin, and pull him close to me, forcing his head onto my chest. "I never would. And yes, I'll stay."

There's no denying that Blaine is stressed the next day, but he does make time to run with me along the pathway by the river. We don't go far, and we don't go fast, but it feels good to be back to it, and I feel back to full strength at last. We call in for coffee after, too, but get takeout since we're both a sweaty mess.

"Hey."

College boy makes it clear he isn't talking to me, by bouncing on his feet in front of Blaine, his eyes shining.

"Hi."

Blaine's disdain is clear, and I turn back to the counter, trying to hide my smile. I figure I'll let him handle this in his own way, because while I know what's coming, Blaine surely does not.

"So, my friends said to ask, since if I don't ask I'll never actually know for sure, so... this thing... with um... him. Is it serious?"

"Hmm. Kinda casual, really," Blaine says, while the barista makes our drinks in silence, her dark eyes fixed on them both. "It's just sorta... y'know."

"Oh. Right."

I feel a pang of sadness for the guy then, because the hope in his voice is evident, and he's about to be torn to shreds, so I try to intervene. "Blaine, I think..."

"Medium drip, Kurt," he says. "As always."

"Yes, *Kurt*, as always," College boy snarks, and any sympathy I did have, disappears. "So if it's casual, I was wondering if you and I could... I don't know. You don't seem to like dates, but uh... Maybe we could get a drink, and see where things go from there?"

"Are you actually insane?" It's the barista that booms it, before Blaine even has a chance to reply. "Do you have eyes? Blaine and Kurt are head over heels for each other! Is it serious? Blaine's banging this one twenty four seven, you moron. Kurt's as much a part of the furniture in that fancy apartment as the bed, which is probably ruined by now. Jesus, boy! I mean, I appreciate you like him, but give it up already. It's never going to happen and you need to get that in your head, because if you come between them, then I swear to God I will cut you."

"I just..." He stops and looks between Blaine and I. "Is that true?"

"Pretty much, yeah," Blaine says, quite kindly for him. "Except I'd phrase it a little differently. I love Kurt, you see. It's not about dating, or any um...physical elements, and everything to do with the fact that I love him. Sorry if that's not what you want to hear, but it's the way it is."

College kid nods. "Sure. Okay. I get that. You shoulda just said. You know the guy who comes in on Mondays and Wednesdays? The redhead? Is he... Do you know if he's single?"

"I have no idea."

"No. Right. Well, I guess I'll find out."

He leaves, and Blaine looks at me and the barista, astounded. "What was that?"

"That was a jerk who wants to get laid by a hot guy, and nothing else," the barista decides, and I can't really disagree.

"Thank you for your interjection," Blaine says as he pays for our drinks. "Hey, you know, we're always in here, and you know our names, and even where I live, apparently, but we know nothing about you. What's your name?"

"Santana," she says, handing back his change. "But don't you dare let on that you know me, or that we have some weird friendship going on. I don't want the other customers to think I'm a friendly face."

Chapter Twenty-Five

Blaine

"Kurt? I was wondering if it'd be okay for me to have a meeting here this evening? It'd be easier than going into the office, and it might be nicer for the team to come here. More informal."

He looks up from his essay, looking so damn beautiful that I feel I could kiss him forever. "You don't need to ask," he says, smiling softly. "It's your apartment."

"Yes, but..."

"I'll go back to..."

"Don't you dare go back to dorms!"

"Just to get some stuff, and to see Rachel and a few others."

"Oh. Well, I don't want you to feel like you have to be out."

"I don't."

"Would you... I mean... Could you come back early, before the meeting is done? That way everyone can meet you."

He looks surprised, but quickly recovers, and I'm warmed to see a smile as he turns back to his study.

"Sure. I can do that."

The meeting goes well; the team are all prepared, and really all we can do is make sure we arrive at court tomorrow ready for battle. It'll be long, and tough, but hopefully it'll prove to be worth it in the end. To my surprise, my mom turns up for the meeting. I copied her into the email, but never expected she'd show; she's only been to this apartment a handful of times and that was merely to berate me and then leave.

"Is Kurt here?"

"Later," I tell her, realizing she's actually only here so she can be nosy. "Linda? Come help me in the kitchen."

My ever loyal assistant follows me through, and immediately starts collecting cups to make coffee.

"Did you know about my brother and your sister?"

She stops, sets a mug down, and leans against the counter. "No, but I did have my suspicions." I know she's being honest, because Linda never lies, to the point that sometimes I wish she would.

"Well, Kurt figured it out, actually. I was quite shocked."

"I only wondered because of how she talks about him and how she talks about the rest of her patients. So they're together?"

"It seems so."

"Will she have to stop being his nurse?"

"I don't see why. Cooper's care is a private arrangement, and Cooper says they've been together for a couple of years."

"What?"

"Exactly." I laugh, and give her a hug. "There's the shock that I felt."

"Well, I'm happy for both of them, if they're happy."

"Yeah, I think they are. It was good, yesterday."

"I'm glad. I hear your mom's taking over visiting duties next weekend, when you're in Lima."

"Huh?"

"That's what she told me on the ride over."

"She gave you a ride? What the hell is going on in the world right now? I can't keep up!"

I look at my mom in a new light, then, and I find myself thinking back to Kurt's words, that she possibly does have good intentions, somewhere. There's no question that her contribution to the meeting is useful; she's an exceptional lawyer and she really does work hard. She puts me down a few times, dismissing things I say outright, without even letting me finish, but I'm so used to that by now that I let it slide, and choose to focus on the positive, instead.

Kurt arrives home a little after eight, and if my mother has any comments on the fact that he has his own key, she chooses not to share them. He arrives in the dining room with a small, shy wave, clearly unnerved by the presence of fifteen people crowded around the table.

I introduce him, and he quickly takes his leave again. I'm torn between going after him to check on his welfare, or not giving my mom the satisfaction, but Linda makes my decision for me, by announcing she's going to get more coffee, and I know that means she'll find him for me.

Kurt only really reappears when the meeting is done and people are chatting before going home. He is polite to my mom, much warmer with Linda, and very talkative with Louisa, about her new boyfriend. I hear my mom telling him she's going to visit Cooper next week, and Kurt manages to rein his surprise in, and instead tells her how beautiful the gardens are looking in the spring. Eventually, people drift away, until there's only my mom and Linda left.

"Do you think you'll win?" Kurt asks.

"I don't know."

"Don't go in with that attitude," my mom snaps. "Because then you'll lose."

"It's hard to be positive, when the jobs of all those people are riding on my success."

Mom shrugs, entirely unapologetic. "That's your problem. You were the one who messed up. Yes, Kurt, Blaine should win this case, hopefully, if he's prepared correctly. He's a brilliant lawyer. Not just a good one. He has an ability to win everyone over with his convincing arguments, which comes from hours of research and preparation, and he also speaks from the heart, something I've never quite managed to do."

"See, she does like you!" Kurt says happily, causing Linda to hurriedly hide her laughter.

"Of course I like him, he's my son," mom snaps. "And when he puts his mind to it, he has the ability to make me quite proud."

"When he's working, as opposed to chasing a relationship with me?"

"I didn't say that. I think that maybe... Blaine is managing to find a balance, after all. I can see you're very supportive of him, Kurt, and I thank you for that."

"Oh. Well..."

"Mom?" My heart is pounding but I know this is the moment to ask. "I realize we're a corporate firm, but I was thinking that maybe in the future there might be the capacity for Anderson Cole to branch out a little? Maybe into human rights law? We could offer a not for profit service. Helping refugees fighting extradition, or maybe women who are fleeing persecution or abuse? I don't know. I haven't really thought it through. Kurt would know much more about women's issues than I, but human rights is something I've been wanting to look into for a long time now."

I'm expecting instant dismissal, or a scathing, withering put down. Instead, my mom stands, collects her purse, and briefly rubs affectionately at the back of my neck. "Win this case, take a week off, and then we'll discuss it."

The second the door is closed, Kurt leaps into my arms, wraps his legs tight around my waist, and showers me with kisses. "You're incredible, amazing, and I am so proud."

"Yeah, well, let's wait and see. This time next week, a whole bunch of people might be unemployed because of me."

"But you asked, Blaine! You've made her proud, you know. She was impressed, I could tell." He kisses me again, but looks a little dismayed when I set him on his feet. "Don't be like that. You know what else I realized? All those people... They were so grateful to be invited into your home. You say you don't have friends, but everyone that came tonight likes you, Blaine. It's just that your heart is so damaged that you assume everyone is the same. You need to stop shutting yourself off, because you could have friends, and lots of them, it's just that you won't let that happen."

"Leave it, Kurt. I love you, you know I do, but I don't think you can glance at me, sitting in a room full of work colleagues, and instantly decide I have friends. What's more, whether anything comes of my mom's

comments or not, I don't want you to think you can magically make everything okay again. Yes, you've turned my life around in many wonderful ways, but you're never going to make everything perfect."

"I know that." He follows me into the bedroom where he takes my hand and leads me to the bathroom. "It would be silly for either one of us to be reliant on one person for our happiness." He sets the shower running and then returns to me, draping his arms over my shoulders and kissing me on the mouth. I find myself kissing back, becoming more and more aroused as steam fills the bathroom and Kurt looks me in the eye and begins to undress me.

"Damaged hearts can heal, Blaine, just remember that."

Chapter Twenty-Six

WARNING- This chapter contains descriptions of sexual abuse (no actual abuse takes place, it's just talked about). I don't want to trigger anyone, so I've written it in such a way that if you want to skip this chapter and pick it up at 27, you can.

Kurt

I wake to an empty bed, and squinting at my phone I see it's not even five yet. Last night, although we went to bed with whispered I love you's and plenty of kisses, I know both of us lay there for a long time, awake, and brooding. I can't shake the feeling that an argument was narrowly avoided, and with Blaine now absent, I worry that he's simmering somewhere, waiting for me to wake.

I go to his office, but he's not there, or in the living room, and neither is he in the kitchen. It's only on my way back to the bedroom that I see him, out on the balcony. He's staring out at the water, a mug of coffee in his hand. He's still in his pyjamas, his hair adorably wild and curly, a line of stubble shadowing his face. A large gray blanket is around his shoulders, and he looks so lost in thought that I'm tempted to leave him alone, but I also know I don't want him heading off to court if things aren't quite right between us, so I collect my own coffee and then go outside to join him.

"Hey."

"Hello." I lean down and kiss the top of his head. "It's still dark."

"Getting lighter. Dawn breaking over the city is beautiful."

"Can I join you?"

"I'd like that." He shifts to one side on the small love seat, and I curl up next to him, leaning on his thigh. Wrapping the blanket around the both of us, Blaine kisses into my hair, closing his eyes momentarily. "I love you."

"I was worried you might be mad at me for what I said last night."

"No. I was worried you might be hurt about what I said. I didn't mean to make out like you don't make everything better, Kurt, because you do. So much."

"I didn't take it that way. I just... I only meant for you to realise that you do have friends. Ask those colleagues to a bar, invite them over to watch some kind of godawful sport involving a ball, I don't know."

"Godawful sport." He laughs. "I could do, I guess."

"You will heal, Blaine. I mean that. In time."

"I hope so. It's been years already though, Kurt."

"But things have gotten easier," I point out. "You told me what happened, for a start. You've made huge progress with Cooper... maybe you could even see about riding again one day."

"No," he says, tensing immediately. "Some arguments you're never going to win, kurt, no matter how hard you try, and I will not ever get on a horse again. You have to understand that. I need you to."

I'm alarmed by his fierceness and I immediately look up, into his eyes. "I do. Okay. I promise, I won't ever raise it again."

"You will," he says, and probably quite rightly. "But just know that it's not something you can change, okay?"

"Okay."

"But you can and do make so many other things so much better. The joy you've brought into my life is just... unparalleled. You make me want to be a better person, you make me appreciate what I have, how lucky I am. I couldn't see that before. All I could think was that I'd been cheated, robbed. My dad was taken, Cooper was a wreck, my mom was distant... I was so angry at the world. Then you arrived and suddenly there's this new energy, this new reason for being, and now I don't see any of it that way. I lost my dad, and it was sad, yes, but Cooper isn't a wreck. He's a pain in the ass big brother who thinks life is one big joke, just as he's always been. And my mom is distant, but there. She fights for me, she's in my corner. She might be more of a lurker, than an all-out, flag bearing supporter like you are, but she's there, and I have to be thankful for all of it. It's you who's made me see it that way though, Kurt, no one else."

Draining my coffee, I set the mug down and cuddle closer, wrapping my arms about his neck and kissing his shoulder. "Thank you for that. You know what, though? I don't think you recognise that you do all of that for me, too."

"Hardly."

"You do."

"I make you happy, I do know that, but you're not a mess like me."

"I am, Blaine. Maybe not in the same way, but I have my issues, and your love is healing me just as I'm healing you."

Blaine doesn't reply. He waits. Just another reason why I love him so much; his endless patience with me, the ability that he has to remain calm and wait for me to speak, or reach my own conclusions.

"When I was in school, I was the only gay kid. Probably for at least two hundred miles. Anyway. Senior year, this new kid starts. I didn't pay much attention, to be honest. He was a jock, played on the football team, you know the type. Then one day, he finds me in the choir room..."

"You were in choir? Cute."

"Be quiet. So he finds me, and he pins me up against the wall and kisses me. Hard. So hard that when he pulled back there was blood."

"He what?"

"I ran. I was so scared, and I went right to my dad's garage and told him everything. My dad isn't the kind of person who... well, he's quite protective, put it that way. He'd spent seventeen years as a single father raising a gay kid in Ohio. He'd fought for me all his life, and he didn't want anyone to hurt me. That's life though, isn't it? You do get hurt."

"Yes, but not like that, Kurt, sheesh."

"Well I was dumb, I know that now, but when Dean turned up at my house, I lied to my dad and said he was a friend from science class. I wanted to hear what he had to say, his reasons, and I didn't want my dad

to scare him off. Dean said he liked me, but he was so far in the closet that there was never any hope of us being together like I wanted. I'm a romantic, you see, and he was the first guy who'd paid attention to me in that way. So I agreed to this... clandestine affair, I guess. I even managed to convince myself that was romantic, in a way, and that lying to my dad was okay, because one day Dean would come out and then it would all fall into place."

"Yeah right."

"Exactly. The thing was, he became more demanding; not actually interested in spending time getting to know me at all. He only wanted to meet under the bleachers and make out, and he'd try to grope me over my clothes. He did that a lot. Whenever we were in school, he ignored me, or laughed at me along with the other jocks. He was cruel, so damn mean, but then he'd text and I'd go running. Every kiss reminded me of that day in the choir room, and I knew it'd never go away, so eventually I told him I couldn't see him any more. He came to my house again, I let him up to my room and tried to talk with him, but he um..."

I feel Blaine tense; his fingers gripping my arm so hard I fear he'll leave bruises, but then he notices and lets go, gently smoothing his hand over me instead. "Sorry."

"He was bigger, and stronger, and God, Blaine, there was this part of me that was turned on. I mean, I was hard, but my brain was screaming no, and I was *telling* him no, then there was this instinctive part of me that wanted, so much, to feel another guy's hands on me."

"I get that."

Blaine's comment snaps me back from reliving the nightmare and I sit upright to look at him. "You do?"

"Of course. Tell me the rest, and then I'll explain."

"I was trapped, basically. Pinned against the wall while he fumbled to get our pants open, and then, when his hand finally got there, I started to freak out. I bit him on the lip, which made him pull back slightly, and then I did what my dad always told me to do. I brought my knee up."

"Ouch." Blaine winces instinctively. "I mean, good one, but ouch."

"Yeah. I was filled with anger then. Indignation, and I hurled him out of the house. The tears, and the hurt, and the panic, that all came later. My dad found me in the hallway, with my pants still open. That's what I remember so vividly, is him doing my zipper for me. I was so ashamed."

"Did your dad kill him?"

"No, and when you meet him don't you dare mention it, because he's still disgruntled that Dean only got expelled, not arrested."

"He should have been."

"Of course, but the police in Lima don't exactly know what to do when one seventeen year old boy claims another touched his junk without permission."

"Kurt... I am so sorry this happened to you. So... sorry. God, that's lame."

"It's not lame, I appreciate the sentiment. You know what was worse? After, when Dean had been expelled and word got out, I was the pariah. I lost everyone, all my friends. The girls thought I'd turned him gay, the guys said I'd led him on deliberately. I was bullied endlessly, and I sought attention and comfort the only way I could, by driving to the city and going to gay bars, making out with guys, maybe letting them grope me a little, then I'd leave before things got too heavy. My dad despaired, and tracked me down more than once. It's a miracle I passed my senior year.

Coming here was a fresh start for me; I felt like I could be me, the old Kurt, the real one. And for a time, it was great fun. I dated a few guys, nothing serious. Some were jerks, some were nice, some were, apparently, straight, and some were so lovely and kind that I allowed myself to touch and be touched. It felt good, I guess. I mean, a random hand that's not your own is going to make you orgasm, but whenever it came to vulnerability; removing clothes, or being touched in intimate places...I'd just freeze."

Blaine shifts about, taking my hands in his and looking me in the eye. "That's what I mean, though, Kurt. I get why you wanted and didn't want that guy on you. You were seventeen, and experiencing someone else touching you for the first time. There's a physical, innate reaction to that, and you know what? It would have been the same whoever it was, and whether that person was a guy or a girl. Anyone can be anything if you close your eyes and block out what's really happening. I've done it a thousand times."

"Girls?"

"Once."

"It's hollow though, isn't it? An empty satisfaction."

"Very much so."

"And the guilt comes after, and the sadness. After Lloyd, when I couldn't get further than that, I figured I was probably destined to remain a virgin. Then I met you, and it all became different. The desire, the need...that was different first of all. It wasn't just making out that I wanted; it was you. *Your lips, your tongue, your arms around me.* And then, being intimate... Well, it was exactly that. Intimate; a moment between the two of us when we both connected, we both shared in it, we both owned it. You make me feel so safe, so loved... What happened on your desk last week... I thought moments like that only came about because of the brute force from one party. I didn't know it could be playful, romantic, loving, and so damn hot, all at the same time. I didn't know that intimacy could just evolve from kissing, like ours does. I didn't realize how it really, truly meant to be with someone, until I met you, and you healed my damaged heart."

Looking down, Blaine nods, and it's only when I feel the splash on my hand that I realize he's crying. "I feel the same," he says hoarsely. "I'm coming at it from a different angle, I know, but that connection, that level of understanding, of love... it's the same for me, too." He looks up then, and kisses me gently. "Thank you for trusting me, and for telling me all of that. I promise you, Kurt, that whatever happens in the future, I will never, ever, hurt you in any physical way. I won't ever force you to do anything you don't want to do, and I'll always respect your wishes. I want to say I'll never hurt you period, but I think we all say and do stuff, intentional or not, that might hurt those closest to us, and I'm aware that I still have a way to go in dealing with a lot of things. But I'll try, I promise. I'll try my best to love you, and support you, and to take care of you, because really? It's my honor and my privilege that you trust me enough with your heart."

I feel it then; the sensation of everything floating away from me; all my hangups, all my fears. I've told Blaine my past, and now I can let it go. There's no burden anymore, no worry. There's me, and there's him.

"Forever?"

"If that's what you want."

"I think I do."

"Good."

There feels like there's nothing left to say after that. Not for now, anyway. Instead, Blaine pulls me back against his chest, kisses my cheek, and together, we watch the sun rise.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Blaine

When the plane touches down in Ohio, I feel a strange sense of homecoming, despite never having visited the State before. Perhaps it's because I know Kurt is waiting for me just the other side of the checkpoint, maybe it's because he's been here two days already and when we speak, he sounds so happy and excited that my heart could burst, or maybe it's just because wherever Kurt is, I belong.

We see each other at the same time, and I recognize his dad standing next to him from the photo frame that surreptitiously appeared on the nightstand at home, on Kurt's side of the bed. I'm not sure if it's okay to run, or whether Kurt will think I'm embarrassing, but I can't help myself and anyway, Kurt runs too, leaping into my arms and wrapping himself around me.

"We won," I whisper into Kurt's ear, and then I find his lips and kiss them before he can shriek. "We won the case."

"What? Already? How? I mean... yeah, how?"

I shrug, and set him lightly on his feet. "Convincing arguments, I guess. What can I say? I nearly missed my flight because the ruling was taking so long to come in, and I was on the brink of calling you when we got called back in. I went straight from court to the airport and I didn't want to call and tell you, I wanted to see your face."

"So everyone has a job and you're the best corporate lawyer in the entire world ever?"

"Pretty much, yeah."

He grins, and smooshes my face in his hands. "I knew it! I love you, you smart lawyer person, you. Come meet my dad."

I hold out my hand to Burt Hummel, but I'm crushed immediately in a fierce embrace which knocks the air out of me, and then he ruffles my hair.

"He's shorter than you, kiddo!" Burt laughs, then claps an arm about my shoulders and steers me out to the car. "Good to meet you face to face, sunshine, and congratulations on the court victory."

"How do you know about that?"

"I follow the news. It came on the radio just before we left to drive here. Didn't tell Kurt, though. I figured you'd want to be the one to do that. From what I gather, it went through much quicker than anyone thought?"

"Yes, which means I now have the week off."

"You need it, from the sound of things. Kurt says you never sleep."

"I do sleep! I just don't sleep much, that's all."

Lacing our fingers together, Kurt smiles. "Blaine has a predilection for working until the small hours, then watching the sun rise over the city."

"Well, I don't have a fancy riverside apartment, but I do have a nice porch out back. Come on, kid, let's get you home."

I immediately like Burt, despite the fact that he calls me kid, sunshine, or son all the time. In fact, that's one of the reasons I *do* like him so much; I'm immediately accepted, loved, and treated like part of the family. Burt asks blunt, probing questions, and when Kurt goes to take a shower after dinner, it becomes obvious that he really does tell his dad everything.

"So. sex."

I choke on my beer, and wish the couch would open up for me to hide in it, but somehow I muster the courage to look at him, and answer "Um... yes?"

"I don't know how much Kurt has told you, but you've been dating for a while now. I know you're older than he is, and you might be expecting things to move faster than Kurt is ready for."

"No, no, we're good," I manage to reply. "It's uh... we've talked. I mean, I know. That's what I'm trying to say. I know what you're getting at, and what the issue is, and it's not... It's not an issue between us."

"Oh. I see." Burt nods, and drinks his beer in silence. "So you're not sleeping with him?"

"We share a bed," I say, frantically thinking of the answer he wants to hear. "Um... we... I don't really know how to say... we... stuff... has happened but we're both uh... comfortable? Yes. Comfortable with how things are between us."

"Woah there sunshine, I don't need to know any specifics. I just need to know that you respect my boy."

"Very much so."

"Good. He's head over heels for you."

"And I feel the same in return."

"Hmm. Well, just so you know, you ever hurt him, and I'll..."

"Dad! You will not, now quit." Kurt strides into the room, and promptly digs his dad in the shoulder.

"Just gotta do my bit, Kurt. You've never brought a boy home before, and I've gotta make a few things known before we can proceed, that's all."

Kurt flops onto the couch next to me, smelling clean, fresh, and familiar. "He's not a boy, he's a man."

"He's younger than me. He's a boy," Burt declares.

I turn and sniff into Kurt's hair. "Did you use my stuff?"

"Kind of, a bit." He at least has the decency to blush. "Yeah."

"Why do you always do that?"

"Because your stuff costs more than I have to spend on products in a year, that's why, and it's gorgeous. Feel my hair. It's so fluffy now, since I've been using your shampoo."

"I'll buy you some, if you like it that much."

"No, don't do that. Just buy more for you, and I'll continue to use it."

I laugh, putting my arm around him. "That makes no sense."

"You two are crazy," Burt mutters, getting to his feet. "I'm off to take a shower myself. Do not misbehave while I am gone," he adds in a booming voice, which ensures I wouldn't dare, even if I wanted to.

Kurt has other ideas, it seems, and tackles me back until I'm lying the length of the couch, and he's on top of me.

"Woah, no way."

"Just a little making out? I've missed you."

"And I've missed you too. It was strange, not seeing you for a couple of days. Kisses later."

He pouts, because he knows that then he'll get one kiss, at least, and it works, of course. "I win."

"You always do." I lace our hands together, wrestling him slightly to keep him from smothering me in more kisses. "So, I'm the first boy you've brought home?"

"Yes. Why? What of it?"

"Nothing. Just makes me feel honored."

"Well, you'd better get used to being here, I suppose, if this is a forever thing."

"I better had."

He pauses a moment, and glances around the room. "It's not what you're used to, I know."

"I love it here."

"Are you kidding?"

"No! Why wouldn't I? It's a proper home; loving, caring... your dad is great, plus you're here, of course."

"My dad likes you. Sorry for that whole protective papa thing. He's been waiting years to do that. I think he practices daily."

"That's okay. I think I'd be the same. You're a precious commodity."

"I am not a commodity!"

"You are, now get me more beer or I'll trade you for six camels."

He laughs, and gets to his feet, dragging me with him. "One more, and that's it. I don't want you going sloppy on me tonight."

"We're in your dad's house, Kurt! What do you think is going to happen?"

He pauses, one hand on the refrigerator door, and turns back to look at me, his eyes unusually dark. "A lot."

"Beer?" Burt booms, suddenly reappearing. "Excellent. I'll have another. Kurt, you can have one too, if you want. That way you might sleep tonight. Blaine, drink as much as you like because if you pass out then I can rest easy."

"Dad! Jeez."

Burt passes me to collect his beer, and I get a whiff of a familiar scent again. "Burt? Did you use my stuff?"

"Yep. Not the shampoo, though, because," he rubs the top of his head. "You know. But the soap? Yeah. Lovely, like Kurt said."

"Told you he likes you," Kurt whispers as we walk back to the living room. "You're part of the family now."

Burt is like no one I've ever met before; hilarious, blunt, hard-working, kind, and loving. He loves football, but has also educated himself about all sorts of things that Kurt loves; from Disney musicals, to the latest feminist literature. As a father, he's exactly the man I would hope to be, if I ever thought I could possibly do such an important job.

"What are you thinking about?" Kurt asks as we settle into bed.

"Fatherhood."

"Oh God."

"No, no." I laugh, and pull him close to me. "No, you haven't got any worries on that score."

"Not ever?"

"No. I'd be terrible."

"You'd be terrific. I didn't realize you don't want kids."

"It's not that I don't want them, more that I couldn't mess a kid up by being their parent, that's all. I just don't let myself think about it as a possibility. Is that like, an issue for you?"

In the dark, Kurt rests his chin on my chest and studies me. "No. It's you I want to be with. I just happen to think you would be perfect as a father, that's all. But we can discuss it another time. It's many years ahead of us."

"Discuss it another time? That doesn't mean you'll change my mind, Kurt."

"Whatever." He kisses my lips and settles down. "I always win, Blaine, just remember that."

Kurt is right, he does always win, and by the time I settle down to go to sleep, I've come to the conclusion that maybe parenthood is something I could do, with him by my side. I feel I could achieve pretty much anything with Kurt by my side, actually. I contemplate waking him and letting him know, but he looks so peaceful and content, and I value my life, so I curl around him and drift to sleep.

It's a kiss on my hip that wakes me, or more accurately, a string of kisses, and when I open my eyes I'm surprised to see that first of all, it's broad daylight, and second, Kurt is lying between my legs, kissing along the top of my pyjama pants.

"Hey sleepyhead."

"Don't you dare wake me up like this, Kurt Hummel. Not with your dad right across the hall."

"It's nine thirty, Blaine. He left for work an hour ago."

"Oh." I let out a breath and lie back, my hands behind my head. "In that case, carry on."

He grins, and then suddenly my pants are on the floor, and Kurt is at the foot of the bed, his eyes trained on me as he strips.

"You don't have to do this."

"I want to. Damn, I've been waiting since... when was the last time?"

"Sunday."

"Sunday? That's outrageous. Yes, I've been waiting since then."

"Outrageous." I laugh, watching as Kurt, now naked, carefully folds his pyjamas. "Listen to you."

"It's your fault." He gets back on the bed and kisses each thigh. "You and your stupid face, and body, that makes me all horny." He kisses higher and then pauses. I look down, brushing his hair out of his eyes.

"Are you sure about this?"

"Yes."

"Okay. But make sure you stop whenever you want."

"I want everything, Blaine, that's the problem. All of it."

"I'm not a machine, Kurt. I can't service your needs twenty four seven."

"Ha! No, I just meant..." He stops talking and takes me into his mouth, instead making me gasp.

I know it's Kurt's first time doing this, but he's surprisingly adept, and I find myself desperately trying not to grip his hair or drive my hips forward, for fear of upsetting him or bringing back bad memories. I never want to be any kind of trigger, I only want for him to feel safe, and comfortable, but Kurt? Well, Kurt has other ideas.

He reaches under me, pushing me up, encouraging me to move as he takes me deeper and deeper. He gags a little, but then he relaxes his throat completely and holy hell it's sublime.

"Oh fuck, Kurt! You just... I had no idea you were... Oh fuck."

There's nothing I can do other than lie back and enjoy each and every second. When Kurt pulls my knees up and takes me deeper still, I feel I might explode, but it's not that that finishes me off; it's Kurt, pulling back slightly, and looking up at me with a small smile, before running his tongue the entire length of my cock.

"Oh Jesus Christ," I groan, and with that, I come. I do grab Kurt's hair then, because his mouth is back around me, taking all I have, and it feels so utterly amazing that I can't help myself. I fall back, spent, and tap the side of his head. "Get up here."

His face is up by mine in seconds, grinning, insanely pleased with himself. I can't help but laugh, and I pull him into a long kiss, rolling him over until I can feel his erection pressed between my legs. "You're beautiful, even when you're smiling like a madman."

"I told you! I can't help it."

"Don't help it. Keep it up, please. I love seeing you happy."

"You felt good in my mouth. Tasted good."

"Well, um... good. I enjoyed it quite a bit in case you didn't notice."

He blushes then; my man, the complex individual who can go from shy, sweet and innocent to rampant sex fiend and back again in a matter of moments. "I did think that you liked it, yes."

"Gonna let me return the favor?"

"Hell yes."

It's a lazy, loving morning spent entangled in each other's arms. Nothing and no one matters except for us, and we only move when Kurt's stomach growls so loudly that it makes him jump.

It turns out that Burt works a half day on a Saturday, and Kurt takes me to the shop to see him at work before we all go for lunch. That afternoon, at Kurt's insistence, we go on a hike. I can't say I'm entirely happy about it, and Burt grumbles good-naturedly about the distance, but eventually we arrive at the summit of what we would call a mountain, but what Kurt insists is a hill.

"Nice view," Burt tells me, pointing as if I might not be able to see. "Kurt and I used to come up here all the time when he was small. I'm not so fit now, though." He heads off to the other side, binoculars in hand, to watch the birds, but I'm content to sit on the grass, with Kurt between my legs, staring out at the beauty of nature.

"It was worth the climb," I tell him, and he nudges my knee gently.

"Told you."

"It's nice to be away from the city, actually."

"Yeah? Would you move out one day?"

"Maybe. If you would."

"I would."

We sit like that for a long time, ignoring the occasional hiker who arrives and then disappears again. It's cloudy overhead, but the sun shines down on a small town in the distance, and I'm fascinated by the way the light touches everything.

"Have a baby with me, Blaine," Kurt murmurs, leaning his head back onto my shoulder. "I don't mean right now, or even in the next few years, but one day. Give us a chance to share in something, or someone, so magical."

I hold him tight, my arms across his chest, and tease him by tugging his earlobe between my teeth. "Yeah," I whisper, feeling more content and at peace than I've ever known. "Let's do it."

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Kurt

Our time in Ohio is nothing short of perfect; my dad and Blaine get along great, and when we leave, it's on the promise that dad will visit New York next time. The break also gives Blaine and I time to focus on something other than his work; namely, each other. I know I feel more deeply in love with him than ever before, and I'm looking forward to the coming week, when Blaine has no work and can spend time resting.

We arrive home late on Sunday evening, and both of us are too tired to do anything other than go right to sleep, but when I wake, I see that Blaine is back to his old habits already; the bed is empty and I find him sitting alone on the balcony in the early morning light.

"Come on, Blaine. You need to sleep."

"I got more than enough at your dad's place. C'mere."

He holds his arm out and I go, shivering slightly, though the dawn holds the promise of warmth to come.

"I have to go away."

"Huh?" I pull back again. "You're not supposed to be working this week."

"I know. As it turns out, I'm going to China."

"I thought that was your mom's case?"

"It is, but it's proving more complicated than she thought."

"So when do you fly?"

"This afternoon."

"What?"

"I'm sorry, Kurt."

He looks so terribly worn down and sad, that all I can really do is hold him close, kissing into his hair. "S'okay. I'm just worried about you, that's all. Can't you just tell her no?"

"Not really. If I go this week, she'll let me draft a proposal for Anderson Cole to branch out into Human Rights law, and then I can deliver it at the board meeting in September."

With Blaine's head resting into the crook of my neck, I smooth over his hair as I think it all through. "She's got you over a barrel then really, hasn't she?"

"Yeah."

"She irritates the fuck out of me."

"Kurt!"

"She does! One minute I feel sorry for her, then I like her, then she pulls something like this."

"She'll never change."

"No, I know."

"But...if I get my way... this sounds awful, I know, but that company is going to be ours one day; you, me, Cooper... we can decide how it goes, and then, we can pass it down to whatever small people we may or may not own by then."

"If your brother has his way, there will be ten kids. At least one of them's gotta be a lawyer, right?"

Cheered slightly, Blaine manages a smile. "Right."

"So when will you be back?"

"Two weeks."

"Okay. Well, I'll get my stuff together and..."

"Don't do that! You don't have to go back to dorms just because I'm not here."

"Hmm, well, I kinda do. It'll be weird if you're not around. Anyway, I haven't shown my face there in like...two months."

"Well, it's up to you, I guess. But you have a key, and I want you to feel like you can have friends over or whatever, please. It's as much..." He stops with a frown. "I don't know. Invite friends over for dinner or something."

"Sure," I say, knowing full well I'll bring Rachel here for a quick look around and that's it. "I need to get ready for class. Do you have time to go for coffee?"

"Yep. In fact, I could walk you to class, if you like?"

"Hmm." I get to my feet. "Hot lawyer boyfriend walking me to class, now let me think... Yes please."

"Good. And Kurt?"

"Yeah?"

"I have time for a shower, too."

We don't even bother with the pretense that the shower is for anything other than getting down and dirty, and a thrill runs through me when Blaine places lube on the shelf. As soon as the water is running, he's on me, and I am only too happy for him to kiss every inch of me while his hands roam.

Standing behind me, Blaine is bolder this time, more dominant; biting down on my shoulder as one hand wraps around my cock. "You're so hot," he murmurs into my ear. "Kurt, I..."

"You want me?"

"Yeah."

"Then take me."

He laughs darkly, something that makes me weak, and his other hand squeezes my ass. "Not today."

"What? Why not?" I try turning back to look at him, but Blaine very deliberately places my hands on the glass, and goes back to what he was doing.

"Because you can't just go from nothing to...to..."

"To you, inside of me?"

"Oh Jesus. Yes. That. I'd rather we take our time with it, than rush to fit it in when we've got places to be. And anyway," he bites my shoulder again. "There's lots more fun stuff we can do."

We're out from under the spray now, and Blaine keeps me up against the glass, pressing a slick finger against my entrance. "If you don't enjoy anything, tell me."

"I will." It comes out as a needy whine, and I subconsciously push back against his finger. That gives him more room to use his other hand around me, and suddenly there's so much pleasure, in so many places, all at once, that I just don't know what to do.

Blaine is as gentle as can be, but it's still a little bit unnerving to feel his finger inside of me. Only for a moment, though, because pretty soon something altogether amazing starts to happen, and I moan, biting my lip hard.

"Good?"

"Yes. That's... that's... Yes."

"You're hot like this, you know." Blaine's voice is low, soft, and it only serves to turn me on even more.

"God, Kurt, You just..."

Suddenly, his hand is gone from my cock, and he puts my hand there instead. I only become aware of what he's doing when I feel his fist knocking against my lower back, and then he comes, with a loud shout, this time; something he's not really done before. A quiet moan, or an utterance of my name, yes, but this is an all out yell of satisfaction, and he momentarily rests his head on my shoulder, breathing hard.

His fingers leave me, but then they're back, warm and very wet, and when I realize why, I stand upright, leaning back onto Blaine's shoulder, my eyes closed. "Blaine, I think I'm gonna come so hard I might die."

He laughs softly, replaces my hand with his own around my cock, and keeps the fingers of his other hand in place. "Not yet. Just..."

"Fuck me that's good!"

"Yeah." Whatever magic he's working is so pleasurable, so intense, that I'm grateful I'm leaning against him, because I surely wouldn't be upright otherwise.

"Blaine..."

"Go on."

I come harder than I ever have, and it feels wonderful. Blaine holds me close, works me through it, and then turns me to face him, kissing me tenderly. "Fun stuff," he whispers against my lips. "See?"

"Very fun. Wow."

And it is fun, and loving, and altogether glorious, but it also means time has passed, and time passes again when we're having coffee, and when we're walking through the park to get to class. Before I know it, we're on the steps of my building, with neither one of us wanting to say goodbye.

"We can just say... I don't know. Nothing, I guess."

Looking down at his shoes, Blaine nods. "Nothing. Nothing is good, I think. I'll miss your face though." He looks up then, taking my hands in his. "Your crazy ways, your humor... Your ass."

"Hey!"

He kisses me then, right there, with the sunshine beaming down, hundreds of students milling about; Blaine kisses me, tells me he loves me, and then he is gone.

It's not that we can't survive without each other, it's just that everything is so much better when we're together. My dorm room seems tiny, and incredibly lonely. Rachel has a new boyfriend, and two of the other girls have gone back home for the summer already, so I'm alone a lot more than I thought I would be. I go for coffee, take walks, and study, and of course, I make sure to talk to Blaine every day.

I call into the apartment most days, to study somewhere with a nice view, and hey, if Carla and Michelle want to fuss over me while they're there, then that's okay. I don't stay, though. It would feel too weird to sleep in someone else's apartment when they're absent.

"I'm coming home tomorrow."

"I know." I press the phone close to my ear- that's how desperate I've become- and sigh. "Can't wait."

"When I get home, make sure you're wearing that tux."

"Why?"

"I'm taking you out for dinner."

"You are? How come?"

"Because it's been ages since we had a date, and I missed your birthday."

"Oh Blaine, don't be..."

"Just wear the tux, Kurt."

"Fine, but pick me up from dorms."

"I was rather hoping you'd be at the apartment."

"I can't, because if I see you, I'm liable to jump you, and then we'll never make it out for dinner at all."

"Dorms it is."

Sure enough, he's there promptly at seven; his sleek silver jaguar pulling up to the sidewalk where I wait with a bouncing Rachel and, oddly, Santana. The pair have found an unlikely friendship and are off to the movies together.

"Nice car."

"Nicer contents," I remark, and then Blaine steps out and I run, not caring about the traffic. He catches me, the breath knocked from his lungs, and squeezes me tight. Neither of us can say anything, but that seems perfectly okay. We're happy to give dumb grins at one another, as my dad would say, and it stays that way until we're well on our way to dinner.

"You're so beautiful," Blaine suddenly announces. "I'm not even sorry if I stare at you all night, because I have to."

"You can stare. I'm yours." I tighten my grip on his thigh. "Tell me you're not going away again."

"When do you finish the semester?"

"Two more weeks. Why? You're going away? Blaine!"

"With you, yes. I thought I'd carry on working and take vacation time when you finish."

"Ooh! Where are we going?"

"You know that cruise neither of us have been on?"

"You booked a cruise?"

"No, because you'd kill me if you didn't get to choose, but I thought we could do that, if you wanted."

"I do want."

"Good."

The restaurant is classy, like Blaine always chooses, and we're tucked away in a corner, where I can slip my shoe off and rub my toe against Blaine's ankle all night long. We talk endlessly over dinner, about his trip and about my time alone.

"Next time, take a car and go visit my brother."

"I can't do that! Those cars terrify me."

"Yeah you can. I'll take you out over the weekend if you like. We can start with the Porsche."

"It's stick."

"So? You're good with your hands." He winks, making me laugh loudly. "Anyway, enough of that. I got you a gift."

"Why?"

"Birthday."

"I told you, that doesn't matter."

"It matters to me, and I've been thinking of how to make it up to you." He hands over a small box and I open it to reveal a ring made of jade, encased in two thin bands of gold. "It's not an engagement ring," he says quickly. "I'm not asking anything. Not yet, anyhow."

That makes me look up in surprise, and Blaine bites his lip. "Oh shit. We've never discussed that, and clearly, that was too much."

"Okay, can we just..." I break off, look down at my empty desert plate and compose myself, but when I look back up again, Blaine looks so completely terrified that I can't help but laugh. "That wasn't too much, you fool! It was adorable. You're adorable. And one day... yes."

"Oh thank God."

"For now though, I'll say this; thank you, it's beautiful."

I slip the ring onto my right ring finger, where I'm pretty sure it will always stay. "I've never owned anything jade before," I say, admiring it under the light. "I'm pretty sure I've never owned anything this expensive before, either, knowing you."

"That's irrelevant. I saw it and had to get it for you. Do you know what jade is for?"

"Looking pretty?"

"Healing." Intrigued, I stop admiring my hand and listen as Blaine continues. "I'd kinda like to think we're healing each other here, Kurt, and I thought this might be a good reminder."

"It's the most perfect reminder I could have." My eyes fill with tears then, and when I look down the ring seems blurry. "And it's true."

Blaine's hand comes into sight, resting over mine, his thumb smoothing gently. "I love you, Kurt. Being away from you sucked, but it gave me time to think about how incredibly lucky I am that you yelled at me for being rude to College kid that day. You bring so much light, and love, and laughter to every single aspect of my life."

Those tears fall, then. Not through sadness but through utter, total joy. I raise his hand to my lips and kiss it softly, then smile at him. "I love you too. Can I ask... Do you feel like maybe... I don't know. Like maybe things are shifting? Changing? It's... like it's more profound than it was before. For me, anyway."

"Yes. Very much so."

We stay like that; eyes locked on one another, for far longer than necessary. The charge between us is palpable, and the longer we stay silent the more it grows until it's unbearable. "Take me to bed."

Blaine stands, holds out his hand, and we walk swiftly from the restaurant.

I know he drives too fast on the way home. I know we're old enough to know better than to make out passionately in the lobby of the building, and I definitely know that the poor elevator operator has to hide her smile when we both step inside with our tux jackets held in front of us.

I know it, and I don't care one bit. We practically fall through the front door, shedding clothes as we move down the hallway, kissing hard. Tumbling naked onto the bed, we have to take a moment to just be; reconnecting after two weeks of no bodily contact is something that could overwhelm both of us very quickly.

We lie on our sides, facing one another, and I never thought in all my life that I'd feel comfortable enough with another man to lie like this and study each other openly. I love Blaine, though; I love his body, the way the strength and softness contrast one another. I love his dark chest hair; how it tapers off to a line running over his stomach and then lower. I love his stomach; hard, defined, strong, and yet there's still a softness to it that reminds me of his love of ice cream. I love the way his hands feel on me; tender,

passionate, caring, loving but firm. Blaine lays claim to me in the sweetest of ways, and I am only too happy to let him, because I know how much he respects me, and I respect him.

There are moments when we devour each other; when we have to reach our climax quickly and by any means necessary. Not tonight, though. We both knew before he even left for his trip that this was how things would go on his return. It's been wanted and waited for, and it feels like hours of teasing and exploration go by before Blaine finally settles between my legs, and enters me.

He is shaking; filled with a sense of nervousness but also of excitement, as well as a healthy dose of worry, which I keep having to tell him isn't necessary.

We fit.

I know it, he knows it, and in that moment, in those first few seconds, we become almost as one. "You okay?"

"Yes, and quit asking."

"Sorry." Blaine leans down and kisses the tip of my nose. "Just want it to be perfect."

"You're here, Blaine, so it is."

A pause, and then we both laugh, aware of how incredibly cheesy we sound. "Gonna move now," Blaine says, calming himself. "Just..yell, or bite me, if you..."

"Do it."

"Right."

It's slow to start, and there's a weird dragging sensation, but the more Blaine moves, the better it feels, and the more I crave, until I draw my knees up, lift my hips, and cling onto his back. "Blaine it's..."

"What? What?"

"Don't stop!"

"Oh."

"It's good. So..damn...good. Go harder, faster."

"Kurt... I think if I do that, I might just kinda... lose all power of restraint."

"Good." I dig my fingers into his ass and urge him deeper. "I want that."

"You sure?"

"Please, Blaine. Give me all of you."

Something almost primal, instinctive, comes over us both. The sweet, tender, slow lovemaking turns into burning passion and all out lust as Blaine hammers into me again and again. It feels sensational; he's filling me up, ripping me open, claiming me over and over, and all I want, all I see, all I can think of, all that I feel, is him.

Him.

"Turn over," he pants, pulling out briefly. "Need you closer."

With Blaine behind me, the angle changes and everything is intensified. Pressed flush together, we end up turned onto one side, and Blaine takes a second to kiss my shoulder. "I need you." He kisses my shoulder again, and somewhere in my brain I figure the reason he's turned us is only so he can reach there; my shoulders have been his biggest weakness since the day I wore that sweater to the coffee shop and distracted him so.

"Kurt, I want you to..."

"Touch me, Blaine," I gasp as I feel my insides coiling tight. "Oh, I'm gonna..."

"Just try to hold on, Kurt, just..."

I know he's close, from the way his voice breaks and his thrusts become deeper and harder. I feel his teeth on my shoulder, his damp hair pressing against the back of my neck and then finally, his hand, wrapping around me, moving in time with his hips.

My orgasm hits me and Blaine follows just seconds after. This time, both of us cry out, loudly, and it feels as though he's pulsing inside of me for the longest time, before he goes still, then carefully withdraws, ending up half on top of me.

"That was..." I stop. There's nothing to be said, because we both know, and because neither of us can really breathe, so I wait until we catch our breath, and Blaine kisses my neck, and then I try again.

"That was..."

"Move in with me."

"What?"

I spin about so fast that Blaine is thrown not only off my back, but out of the bed entirely, hitting his elbow on the nightstand for good measure. "Fuck, Kurt! What the hell?"

"Nevermind about that, what did you just say?"

He sits naked on the floor, rubbing his arm and frowning. His cheeks are red, his hair is wild, his lips swollen, and I have possibly never loved him more than I do at that moment in time.

"Please?"

There's a soft vulnerability to him and I reach down, helping him back up onto the bed where he sits opposite me, his legs folded under himself.

"I've been dropping hints for ages," he admits with a laugh. "But I just... I hate it when you're not here."

"I've never really gone home, though, from our first date. I mean, I just kinda...stayed, whenever we were seeing each other."

"I know, and I don't really know how it happened...when you got sick, I guess, I realized I like you being here, I like your stuff being here. I like sharing with you. I know you still have two weeks left in dorms, but..."

"You really want to live with me? I get so moody!"

"I know, but you know I do too. We give each other space, we're able to communicate, we're good at making each other feel better, I think. I know we've already established that we want to share our lives together, but I'd kind of like it to start now. Move in with me, Kurt, please?"

I look at him; my man, my beautiful lover, so sweet and kind yet so fierce and wild, and I know there will never be another. This is where I belong, with the man who healed my heart just as I hope I've healed his.

"Do you promise sex like that on a very regular basis?"

"Of course."

"Then yes," I say, kissing his lips that are already curving into a smile. "I'll move in with you."

The End