

# **And The World Spins Madly On**

**by**

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**Kurt/Blaine || AU || R**

*A few weeks after visiting Kurt in New York and confessing to cheating, Blaine is attacked and left for dead.*

*Burt finds him on his way home from work and calls Kurt to let him know.*

WIP 6/?

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## Chapter One

*"Hey there, pretty boy, where do you think you're going?"*

Blaine exhaled sharply, his lungs piercing with each staccato breath. He wasn't aware of how long he'd been on the ground—and when had the sun gone down? His heart thumped wildly against his fragile ribs, gracing him with the image of it bursting right through his brittle chest. He told himself he needed to get up, to find help, but some pretentious part of his brain insisted on staying down and resting; the rest of it tried to work out what had happened. Blurred faces attached themselves to giants with baseball bats; his body ached all over as he relived each hateful blow.

*"I—I don't want any trouble—"*

*"Shut up, faggot."*

He flinched at the memory of the first contact—metal bat to the back of his knee—and his entire body tingled dauntingly. It was no use; none of his limbs were cooperating. Something far more pressing disturbed him though—he could actually *feel* all of the blood leaving his body, trickling out from untraceable orifices, and suddenly he realised his jeans were halfway down and he was soaked and sticky. He clenched his eyes shut, his stomach lurching viciously as he recalled the other use his attackers had found for the baseball bat. When everything ached all over it was difficult to pinpoint the exact locations of real damage; he narrowed it down to "everywhere" and wished, more than anything, he could at least cover himself up before someone found him.

*If someone found him.*

The idea of being left all alone, no saviour, elicited a gasping sob from deep within his raw vocal chords. No one was going to find him; he was going to lay in this muddy field until he bled out or dehydrated himself after several hours of straight crying. The faint glow of headlights caught his attention, the pale yellow making him feel dizzy and drunk, but he couldn't bring himself to cry out.

*Help. Please help. Please see me.*

He considered his chances and the outlook seemed grim; it was dark and he was laying on the ground. Unless someone was actually looking for him, there was no possibility he'd be discovered accidentally by

passing cars. But the headlights grew closer still and for one terrifying moment Blaine was unable to tell if the ground beneath him was actually soft earth or if his attackers had left him in the middle of the street. The screeching of tires cut through the typical silence of the Ohio night, but he couldn't make out the car through the bright glow of the headlights. Rushed footsteps approached him, each thudding stride leaving him a little more disoriented as it sent shockwaves through his aching head.

"Hey, are you alright?" Blaine's heart seized up at the strangely familiar tone of voice. *Do I know you? Have we met?* "Kid, can you hear m—Blaine...?" Burt Hummel knelt down beside the boy that—despite knowing for at least a year by now—he could barely recognise through the bruises, blood, and dwindling will to survive.

At the mention of his name, Blaine sobbed in reply, a gut wrenchingly desperate, terrified broken sound that he'd grown accustomed to making—in solitude—in the weeks since his and Kurt's break-up. Whoever it was that was there beside him knew who he was. With trembling persistence, he tried to move his hands to his jeans to pull them up.

"No, no, no, don't move. Here, I've got it. It's okay, you'll be okay," Burt hurriedly—and carefully—worked Blaine's jeans up his slender waist. "Can you move? Is it okay if I move you?" He repositioned his hands from Blaine's jeans to his torso, then to his shoulders as though he was unable to decide the best way to go about helping him up. Blaine mouthed a silent reply and swallowed back another sob. As Burt slowly began to sit him up, Blaine couldn't hold back his scream, pure agony tearing right through him. Burt hugged Blaine close to his chest and whispered apologies that didn't belong to him.

"I know, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I've got you, it's going to be okay," Burt sat still with him for a moment, allowing Blaine a break before standing up, cradling the small boy in his arms. Blaine gritted his teeth, embarrassed by the painful noises he couldn't contain; even with the absence of physical pain he'd been so unable to maintain his composure lately. "Hang in there, buddy."

Blaine didn't want to listen anymore. With each careful stride Burt took back to the car Blaine clenched his teeth a little more, until the pain was so overwhelming it practically blinded him. By the time Burt had placed him in the backseat of his truck, consciousness had already slipped away from Blaine.

The last time Burt had been in the waiting room of a hospital Kurt had just turned eight. They'd been out to dinner as a family for the first time in months when Elizabeth Hummel excused herself from the table and collapsed on the way to the bathroom. Though Burt was alone now, and though it was many years later, he could still imagine Kurt beside him, his legs dangling off of the chair as he silently took in his surroundings.

Burt sat there now in his own silent debate; he knew that Kurt and Blaine had broken up, though Kurt still kept the reason a secret, but he couldn't picture his son just erasing Blaine from his life completely. He wanted to protect Kurt from more heartache, but Blaine had become like family... surely Kurt deserved to know what happened and Blaine deserved the all of the support he could get. Burt twirled his phone between his hands, chewing on his lip and trying to think of a reason not to call Kurt. He failed and put the phone to his ear.

"Dad, you know you don't have to call me to tell me 'goodnight' every night, right?" Kurt's voice resounded in his head, tired and stressed.

"It's not that, I need to talk to you about something," Burt knew that he would have to speak quickly if he wanted to get his point across without any of Kurt's usual interruptions.

"I'm fine, if that's what it is you want to talk about."

"No, but it is about Blaine—" he could actually feel Kurt tense up through the receiver at the mention of the name.

"I don't want to talk about Blaine, dad."

"Just... hear me out—"

"It's sweet that you're trying to 'fix us,' dad, but—"

"Kurt, stop it. Just stop it and listen to me," Burt spoke through his teeth, not really angry with Kurt, worry and impatience dripping off of his tongue. At Kurt's prolonged silence—a grand total of three seconds—he continued. "I found him while I was leaving the shop—"

"He was waiting for you outside of work?" Kurt blurted out, a touch of anger hanging onto his words.

"Kurt!"

"Fine, I'm sorry—wait... found? What do you mean you found him?"

"Somebody—he's—Kurt, he's in a really bad way right now. Someone beat the living hell out of the poor kid," there was silence followed by a clatter; Burt guessed Kurt must have dropped his phone. He waited a few seconds until he heard his son's voice again.

"W-what? He—oh god. Oh my god. How bad?" Kurt's voice traveled between registers, wobbly and high pitched.

"Kurt," Burt tried to redirect, softly.

"Dad, how bad?" Kurt sniffled loudly.

"He was unconscious when I found him." *He wouldn't stop crying and begging for help. I could barely recognise him.*

"He's not—I mean, he's okay, isn't he?" Burt lowered his head into his hand, covering his eyes. "Isn't he?" Kurt demanded.

"I don't know," Burt replied truthfully. "Look, I know that you boys have got your own... issues between each other right now, but I think he really needs us, Kurt. As friends, as family—whatever."

"I—no, yeah. Of course. I'm already looking up flights right now."

*"Someone beat the living hell out of the poor kid."*

The words echoed through Kurt's head on the duration of the flight, heavy and loud just far too *real*. Blaine, *his* Blaine—no, that wasn't quite right. Blaine wasn't *his* anymore. Blaine wasn't anyone's, and neither was Kurt. But the news still burned just the same. Sure, he felt angry, upset, betrayed—but he never wished harm on Blaine. While he agreed with his father, that Blaine would need them, it did nothing to untie the anxious knot in his stomach that only seemed to contort itself even further the more he tried

to will it away. He hadn't seen Blaine for weeks, had tried to push away all thoughts of him and busy himself with work and Rachel and Brody and Chase and his second audition at NYADA and—

*How is it going to feel to see him again?*

He couldn't let himself think of Blaine in the messy terms of "boyfriend" or "ex-boyfriend." Not now. Not anymore. Right now, he needed to remember "my friend Blaine."

*My friend Blaine, who's in the hospital after getting the shit kicked out of him. Again.*

He closed his eyes and swallowed hard at the memory of Blaine's pre-prom confession. Kurt knew that Blaine still had issues to sort through with the first attack, he was terrified to think of how a second one was going to effect him now. Especially in the midst of their break-up.

*Which was his fault. Don't feel sorry for him, don't let yourself get trapped like this.*

This was all too much for his fragile, confused heart to take.

He spotted Finn waiting for him at the terminal, expression serious and melancholy, and made his way over. They didn't exchange a word as they embraced each other, Kurt uncertain of what to say, Finn unwilling to upset Kurt further. Within the hour, they were at the hospital and Kurt was swept away in his father's arms before he had time to blink. They stood there for a few minutes, just drinking in each other's presence, before Burt pulled away and cleared his throat. "How was the flight?"

"Dad," Kurt's eyes softened to match his tone. "I can handle it, go ahead. You don't have to distract me."

Burt nodded once and took a seat where he proceeded to remove his baseball cap and twist it into knots in his hands. Kurt cringed as he watched his father work permanent crinkles into the material. "They uh—they said there's haemorrhaging in his brain."

Kurt took a step back as all of the air evacuated his lungs. He understood the situation was serious when Burt had told him about it, but he was still childish enough to overlook *this* type of serious.

"I don't—I don't understand," Kurt stammered and stared at his father. "I don't understand, what does that mean?" He looked between Burt and Finn, who both looked back at him with such great sadness in their eyes it was as though they'd already given up hope.

"It means... it means that he might not wake up, Kurt. They're trying to get swelling in his brain to go down, but..."

"Maybe I should make some calls?" Finn suggested in quiet resignation. "Get whoever I can to come down here to visit?"

"He's going to be fine," Kurt spun around to face him and snarled in response. "I can't believe you two, you're just so willing to say goodbye to him?"

And just like that, their entire relationship rushed past his eyes in a short, hazy summary:

*I'm never saying goodbye to you.*

*My missing puzzle piece.*

*Don't give up hope, ever.*

*This is a song I sang the first time I ever met the love of my life.*

*I was with someone.*

*It was just a hook up.*

*I didn't care about him.*

*Kurt.*

*Kurt, please.*

*Kurt, I need to talk to you.*

*I told you, I'm never saying goodbye to you.*

"Kurt, I'm just trying to—" Finn unknowingly cut through the whirlwind currently existing within Kurt.

"Finn," Burt shook his head.



"This isn't happening," Kurt blurted out, anger quickly deflating. "This isn't happening."

"I'm sorry, kiddo," Burt pulled Kurt into his arms. Kurt sank into the embrace, glistening eyes transfixed on a muddy footprint on the floor. Finn quietly slipped away and within the next two hours familiar faces began trickling in to offer their sincerest condolences. Kurt tuned out every one of them; the scene transported him back to his mother's funeral, he couldn't think about Blaine like that, not yet, not ever.

"I need a minute," he announced through the thick fog of growing numbness. Nobody questioned him as he stood up and walked outside. He shivered as a gust of wind blew through him and recoiled as an image of Blaine, freezing and begging for help, filled his head. Ex-boyfriend or not, he knew he couldn't stomach losing Blaine.

Three days crept by and more and more friends appeared whenever Kurt, Burt, Finn and Carole had visited. Rachel had flown in the day after Kurt, leaving his side only to stop off at home to pick up a change of clothes. Puck had burst in with Sam shortly after Rachel arrived, nearly hysterical. The rest was just a blur from then on for Kurt. Santana couldn't even bring herself to respond with her usual snark, which—to be honest—Kurt would have appreciated more than anything. Nothing felt *normal* anymore.

The hospital had finally allowed them into Blaine's room and Kurt sat, fists clenched, beside a bed that was much too big for Blaine. In the three days that passed, Kurt had seen every member of New Directions and a handful of the Warblers... but Blaine's parents still had yet to make an appearance. Kurt was able to get in touch with Cooper earlier in the morning at least, who assured Kurt that he was well on his way and would be there as soon as possible. But even the hospital couldn't seem to get in touch with Mr. and Mrs. Anderson. The more Kurt thought about it, the more his emotions shifted back and forth from anger to sorrow—he felt like a pendulum in motion, unable to control where it was he should settle. Even after knowing Blaine for over a year, the Andersons still felt like ghosts. He'd met them once in the infant days of his and Blaine's friendship, but they were rarely ever home.

"Still haven't come in?" Burt strode into the room with a takeout container. Kurt narrowed his eyes at the styrofoam in disgust, despite having no idea what was actually inside. "Relax, it's a salad. Figured you couldn't really stomach anything else right now."

"No, they haven't come in," Kurt's features relaxed, his scowl dissolving into apathy. "Thanks, I'll pick at it in a bit, probably."

Burt nodded over at Blaine, his face questioning and hopeful, but Kurt shook his head sadly in response. The doctors had cut away part of Blaine's skull to help the swelling in his brain to shrink, and it pained Kurt to see him so helpless and on display. Blaine hadn't moved a muscle since they'd been permitted to see him, adding more panic to Kurt's already flustered state. He could hardly remember what his cell phone did, much less remind himself to use it to keep Isabelle updated back in New York like she'd made him promise. Even amongst his and Blaine's shared friends in the room, he barely said a word to any of them. And they all watched him with apprehensive eyes, all unwilling to be the first to try to start a conversation that they knew would never last. They all left him to his miserable thoughts, except for Rachel who tried to engage him whenever she visited, but even she realised it was pointless after a few apathetic nods and blank stares from Kurt in response.

Another day snuck past him, a swirling vortex of whispered medical jargon and concerned pats on the shoulder, and Kurt was just about ready to scream at all of them.

*"We're doing what we can." There's more you can do. There has to be something more.*

*"Kurt, maybe you should eat something." You're thinking about food at a time like this?*

*"Go home, take a nap. We'll watch him and let you know if anything changes." Fall into nightmares and possibly miss however short a time he might wake up for? No, thank you.*

It continued like that for more than half of his fifth day there. Eventually, more and more people had trickled out of the room until only Kurt and Blaine were left. Kurt had thought to try something different today. And so he sat with a collection of letters he had intended to give to Blaine when they first became friends, full of both silly and serious topics, some with confessions that had been too heavy for his tongue to hold the weight of so he channeled them through ink instead.

*"I haven't been able to stop thinking about our conversation the other day,"* Kurt rattled off in a wavering voice, eyes flitting back and forth between Blaine and the paper in his hand with such speed that it began to make the room spin. *"I feel like I've been screaming out for someone to notice that everything's all wrong, and there you were. I don't think you even know what it meant to me, to sit across from someone with no judgment in their heart, willing to listen to a complete stranger. As cliché as it is to say, I think I fell in love*

*with you that day. I remember the exact moment too. You told me to be brave, not because it was easier said than done, but because you didn't want me to have the same regrets you had for running away. We had just met and already you cared only for my own peace of mind. You didn't need to listen to me, but you did."*

He paused, shuffling through the crinkled pages of loose leaf paper, and cast a few hopeful glances at Blaine, who was still merely organic decor for the room. Kurt scanned through the first few sentences of the next letter before settling on a line and started to read, his voice still shaky. *"Is this real? I've had very little luck in my life when it comes to making friends, but with you it's just... easy. With you, I don't feel left out anymore. Whenever I'm completely over the moon about something, you stop and listen like it's the most important thing in your life. I notice that. I notice you too, even when you try to hide yourself away."*

Kurt sifted through a few more pages, plucking out random lines and casting them into the air as if making some sort of verbal collage of secrets and affection.

*"Could you ever go for someone like me?"*

*"I wonder what it'd be like to kiss you."*

*"I've never been this scared before in my life—I just want to tell you everything. Courage, you told me. Have courage. I feel like a hypocrite for only applying it to scattered moments of my life."*

*"How can you be so wonderful and so frustrating all at once?"*

*"I must be out of my mind. What other explanation is there? Is it all in my head?"*

*"Kissing you was everything I thought it would be."*

*"It's so hard being away from you like this."*

*"I don't want to say goodbye to you. I won't say goodbye to you."*

*"You transferred schools for me? I'm terrified this will end in resentment."*

*"I didn't think it was possible to feel this much love for another human being. Not exclusively in a romantic sense. Even if this ends someday, I hope we're still best friends. Right up until the very end."*

He had to stop when he read the last passage, his voice suddenly too tight, his eyes too watery to even distinguish one word from another. Best friends. That's what they were. That's what he'd always hoped they'd be. Through love, through hatred—he hadn't imagined anything that could force them apart. They'd woven a part of themselves so deeply into the other that it seemed impossible. And he felt that connection still. Despite his anger, he still wanted to run to Blaine at the first signs of hardship and complete elation, wanted to share *everything* with him.

"You just—you have to wake up, okay?" Kurt brought his palms up to his eyes, pressing down until he saw spots. "Please, Blaine. I don't hate you, I've never hated you. Wake up so we can talk about what happened, I'll listen to everything you have to say."

He was just about ready to start bargaining with a force he didn't believe in when the door swung open and his father appeared with Cooper. Kurt didn't say a word to them as he stood up abruptly and all but raced out of the room to clean up his face. The back of his neck prickled as he felt their eyes bear into him, but he didn't dare turn around. The next ten minutes passed by in a blur as he splashed his face with cold water until all the warmth, rawness, and sadness had gone leaving only frozen apathy.

By the time the sixth day had rolled around, Burt had filled Cooper in on what had happened with Blaine. Kurt sat silently beside them, chewing on the insides of his cheeks, and couldn't help the feeling that his father wasn't telling them everything. Kurt noticed the distance in his father eyes as he parroted the same summarization for Cooper that he'd given Kurt the first night of the attack. It was that same expression that kept Kurt from asking more questions—he didn't *want* to know all of the brutal details if they could reduce his strong father to a smoldering pile of terrified ashes.

Like the previous day, Kurt had decided to try something different again today. Though he was sharing the room with Cooper and Burt today, it did nothing to hinder any of his boldness. Nobody was here to pass judgment anyways, he reminded himself as he scraped his chair closer to Blaine's bed and scooped his ex-boyfriend's hand into his own. An eery silence engulfed the room in the moments before Kurt decided to serenade Blaine, his soft warbling providing the perfect mask for his tumultuous mind. Cooper and Burt wouldn't understand the significance of the song and Kurt took comfort in that; even in a room full of friends and family, Kurt and Blaine could still cling to their secrets in plain sight.

*"Blackbird singing in the dead of night, take these broken wings and learn to fly. All your life, you were only waiting for this moment to arise..."*

Kurt hid his face away at the end of the last line, squeezing Blaine's hand tighter as another onslaught of tears fought too strongly against him and won. Every other presence that was and could have been in the room dissolved. For Kurt, there was only the two of them. Friend, lover, ex-boyfriend—none of the words mattered, he wasn't sure they would *ever* matter again. But as another sob clawed its way up his esophagus, as his lungs ached and overworked themselves, as he was beginning to cut the last remaining thread tethering his hope to ground level, the smallest of sounds invaded his ears and lead the cavalry straight to his heart where the words planted a familiar flag right beside the old tattered one he wouldn't have been able to ever forget about, even though—as of late—he'd been trying to.

"Oh there you are..."

Kurt's head snapped up, his neck cricking loudly, as his thumping—claimed, no matter who he was trying to kid that it wasn't—heart leapt up into his throat. He swallowed thickly, eyes trained on Blaine's lips for fear he had imagined the words. But he hadn't.

"I've been looking for you forever," Blaine continued in a just-barely-there whisper, cracking his eyes open with some effort. Once they were open though, they were immediately on Kurt who stared back with tears rushing down his face. Burt had run off to fetch a doctor and Cooper crowded around on the other side of the bed, but still Kurt and Blaine focused only on each other.

There would be time to sort out the messy details of their "relationship," Kurt thought. For now, he was content with sharing this moment of relief, this *miracle*—though he gave credit to no one in particular for it—under very simple terms with the boy laying before him. They had been lost and found their way to each other once, through all the possibilities and hardships, and they would continue to do it again and again. Whether it was as strangers with the same dependency for companionship, as friends who had connected through shared submergence into darkness, or as lovers who lit the candle together and lead each other into the light—Kurt knew they would figure it out. With time and with patience, they would figure it out.

## Chapter Two

The first uncertain moments were the hardest. Kurt and Blaine remained frozen, eyes locked, and silent as the world continued on like always. Kurt wasn't sure how long they had stayed that way; it couldn't have been more than a few seconds, but time stretched on and on and on until Cooper broke the silence with a teary, "Blaine, god, I'm so glad you're okay."

*Okay.*

Kurt thought of the word and all that it stood for and considered how rude it would be to scoff when Cooper was clearly in the middle of such a genuine wave of emotion.

*He's the farthest thing from okay.*

Blaine eyes were the only part of him to move as he looked between Kurt and Cooper with alarmed hesitation. Kurt could tell what that expression meant, though he wasn't sure exactly how to put it into words. And when Blaine tried to speak, both Cooper and Kurt rushed a, "Shhh, not now, later," into the unspoken conversation, hoping it would actually deter him from continuing. Burt returned with a doctor before Blaine could try to speak again and in a matter of seconds Kurt found himself on the other side of the door with Cooper and his father. He stared at the egress with dazed scorn as the doctor sealed him off from Blaine.

*I should be in there right now. We all should be in there right now.*

The sudden appearance of a hand on his shoulder roused Kurt from the intimidation tactics he'd been trying to apply to the door, and very soon afterwards he discovered himself being pulled—ever so gently—away, back into the waiting room. Sam sat there with Puck, grease stained wrappers in hand as they took breaks from their serious whispers to manage a nibble or two. The sight and smell of their food combined with the fact that his stomach had been clenched in unyielding knots for days was enough to make Kurt want to rush into the nearest bathroom and empty whatever foul, festering anxiety had refused to unhinge its claws from the lining of his belly. But he swallowed down the urge—thickly, with great effort—and chose to sit down a good three seats away from them. Cooper was immediately at his side and Kurt could tell he wanted to ask questions, wanted to talk and comment on what had just happened in the

room, based on the way he fidgeted with his hands, interlacing his fingers and grinding his knuckles together. Kurt still wasn't sure he'd properly be able to attach actual spoken words to his thoughts. So when Cooper squirmed in his seat for the fourth time in the last minute and opened his mouth, Kurt stood up and walked away, feigning interest in a community bulletin board across the room.

He was surrounded by nothing but support, and all he wanted was to be alone with his thoughts. *Needed* to, actually, because everyone's opinions, all of their input, would simply add more to his confusion. Blaine was awake—Kurt hadn't thought that far ahead. He'd promised Blaine, in his unconscious state, that they would talk if he woke up, that he would lend Blaine his ears and undivided attention if only he would just wake up. And Kurt Hummel was a man of his word. All he had to do was figure out the right time for a conversation like that to happen. Blaine was fragile now, and Kurt's emotions were strewn and stretched too far apart on the spectrum to actually allow him to rationally sit through anything involving their relationship. That could wait, that *would* wait. For now, Blaine's recovery was all that would have to take precedence.

They'd been forced to wait two hours before the same doctor that Burt had brought back to Blaine's room strode over to their ever-growing group. All of New Directions and most of the Warblers had joined Kurt, Burt, Cooper and Carole in the waiting room. Some of them had broken off into smaller groups, casting worried glances over at Kurt when they assumed he hadn't been looking, and spoke in whispers that Kurt wanted to inform them weren't as quiet as they seemed to believe. But at the appearance of a white coat and stethoscope, everyone fell silent.

The doctor approached Cooper, asking if he could step aside for a moment. Cooper turned to Kurt, who had taken to chewing on his nails in order to occupy his lips from quivering, and nodded in the direction of the doctor. Kurt stood up wordlessly and approached them while Cooper turned to Burt and Carole, "You too, come on." They briefly exchanged a look, as if bracing each other for whatever news may lie ahead, and walked over to Cooper, Kurt and the doctor. Doctor Sayers, as Kurt noticed on her nametag, started talking as they continued on towards Blaine's room.

"I'm sure you all have a lot of questions, and I'll try my best to explain everything clearly," she began, a practiced smile in place and Kurt immediately had trouble deciding if he was going to like her or not.

"What sort of lasting damage will there be?" Carole asked in a quiet voice. She had her arm hooked through Burt's and walked closely to him, their steps evenly matched.

*Rachel used to comment on that, about me and Blaine.*

Kurt left half of his attention to watching their strides, so perfectly in sync given their height difference, while Doctor Sayers took a deep breath and stopped walking. Kurt almost interrupted her, was about to demand to know why they were stopping, until he looked up and realized they had already reached Blaine's room. He peeked in through a small window on the door and a chill raced fervently down his spine, reminding him of the plummeting slope of a certain boasted roller coaster that added fame to their home state, as he took in Blaine's frail form.

"We're not exactly sure. With brain injuries, it's... tricky. We can't really know the full extent of the damage right away, and even with some time there are things that can go wrong. We're already looking at another surgery now that the swelling has finally started to go down, but we need to run some further tests to assess the neurological damage that might have been done, then there's physical therapy—it's going to be a long road of recovery for him."

Kurt felt like he'd been submerged underwater by the time she stopped talking. Everything was muffled and sluggish and the same childish denial sprang forth, repeatedly knocking against his brain as though the mantra would somehow become true if he said it enough.

*This isn't happening. This isn't happening. This. Isn't. Happening.*

"Kurt?" Cooper's voice managed to wade through the fog surrounding Kurt's brain. "You look like you're going to faint—"

"M'fine," Kurt rushed out a reply and looked into Blaine's room again. "I'm going to go sit with him while you all talk."

He didn't wait for affirmation of his actions, didn't wait to see if he was even allowed back in, as he pushed the door open, slipping in quietly. As the door swung closed behind him, Kurt couldn't help but notice the transition from one world into the other. Just outside the room was his life, with friends and family and New York, but on this side of the door there was only the fragile remnants of a boy who still had his calloused hands gripped tightly around Kurt's heart. He took a seat beside the bed and Blaine's eyes



fluttered open immediately. He turned to Kurt, the confusion etched clearly on his face, and Kurt's heart, his poor wounded heart, turned to lead and became lost in free fall.

"Shouldn't," Blaine began and closed his eyes again as though the pure idea of speaking took such a toll on his energy he couldn't even manage a simple question. "Shouldn't you—"

"Be in New York?" Kurt finished for him in a hurried whisper, wanting to put an end to the strain in Blaine's voice. "I came as soon as my dad called. I couldn't just—Blaine, I couldn't stay there and not have any idea if you were okay or not."

"Dad?" Blaine opened his eyes again, trying so hard to focus on Kurt and everything he needed to say, needed to ask. "Your dad?"

"Yeah, he—he's the one who found you. Don't you remember?" Kurt rested a hand over his heart, emotional pain discreetly blending into physical pain.

"Couldn't see. Blur," Blaine gritted his teeth and Kurt had to fight back tears.

"Don't talk anymore, just rest, okay?" He moved to sit on the edge of the bed and slid his hand into Blaine's, tracing a light blue vein on the back of his hand. But Blaine didn't listen.

"What... what did he... tell you?" Blaine slowed down and sped up so many times in the course of such a short question that it worried Kurt.

Rather than argue though, he decided it was probably a better idea to just answer whatever Blaine asked him as quickly as he could. "Not much, just that you... that you had gotten beaten up pretty bad." He hesitated, apprehending Blaine's reaction—he almost looked...

*Relieved? What doesn't he want me to know?*

"Blaine, do you know who attacked you?"

"Random," Blaine looked exhausted now. "Didn't know."

He shouldn't. He knew that he shouldn't. He should keep his mouth shut and let Blaine sleep. But the words came so quickly he couldn't snatch them up before they left. "What... happened, Blaine?"

Blaine's eyes slipped shut again and Kurt expected them to open after a few seconds like last time. But a few seconds had come and gone. Panic started to build up steadily until Kurt was inching closer to Blaine and squeezing his hand just a little tighter. "Blaine? Blaine," he cleared his throat and tried to stifle the anxiety attaching itself to each of his words.

"How long have I...?" Blaine said suddenly, fighting to keep his eyes open.

"About a week," Kurt laced his fingers with Blaine's. "You've been unconscious the whole time..."

"Head hurts," Blaine spoke through gritted teeth again. While Kurt was sure Blaine was tired and definitely in pain, he knew Blaine was also deflecting from having to explain who attacked him and what had happened.

"You should rest, okay?" Kurt whispered. Just as he was leaning over to kiss Blaine's cheek, Cooper, Carole, and Burt walked into the room. Kurt froze for only a second before straightening up, leaving Blaine's cheek bare except for a ghastly bruise distorting the colour. The expression on Blaine's face was almost unreadable, but if Kurt had to describe it he'd call it something close to "surprise." The intended kiss was purely habitual for Kurt, that's how he rationalized it. It had nothing to do with relationship status or the fact that he had no clue how to compartmentalize any of his feelings.

"Time to get going, Kurt," Burt's eyes were soft to match his tone. "Cooper and Blaine have some things they need to discuss with the doctor."

Kurt wanted to protest, but one glance at Cooper told him everything: *not in front of Blaine*. Kurt nodded and stood up, taking a step towards Cooper to hug him goodbye. As he slid his arms around the older of the Anderson brothers, Cooper spoke quietly in Kurt's ear, "I'll be in touch later, promise." Kurt gave Cooper a light pat on the back and nodded again as he pulled away. Burt draped an arm around his son's slumped shoulders and Kurt mumbled a meek, "See you tomorrow, Blaine," before allowing himself to be led out of the room.

"Do you want to say goodbye to all of your friends?" Carole placed a hand on Kurt's back and rubbed it slowly.

"Just want to go home," Kurt answered almost apathetically. He knew Carole and Burt had exchanged looks of concern based on the way both of their footsteps faltered for the slightest millisecond.

"Where do you want to stop for dinner on the way back, kiddo?" Burt asked.

"I'm not—dad, I'm going to be sick. Please, can we just—I just want—" Kurt wouldn't cry in front of them, nor the hospital staff or his friends, but it was getting harder and harder to keep it all at bay the longer he stayed there.

"Okay, buddy. We'll just head straight home," Burt conceded without posing further questioning.

Kurt was silent for the entire drive home, neither Burt, Carole, or Finn tried to elicit a single word from him. They kept the radio volume low; the spaces in the car not overtaken by the music were filled, instead, with the sound of four collective individuals breathing disquietude to each other. None of them needed words to portray this emotion.

As soon as Burt inched into the driveway Kurt was out of the car, walking quickly to the backyard. He heard three doors close quietly behind himself, but didn't turn to look back before disappearing around the corner of the house. It had been years since he scaled the tree house his father had built for him; he'd hidden in there for two days when his mother died, pushing plates of food Burt sent up to the ground for the animals to find, before his rumbling stomach had finally gotten the better of him and he dragged himself inside with puffy eyes and defeat scrawled all over his face. He knew that Burt wouldn't question his decision to hide there again now, knew that the process would probably repeat itself all over again except for one tiny detail: he'd be climbing down tomorrow to see Blaine.

Just to be safe he knocked his fist against the wooden floor three times, feeling very silly for giving in to the superstition of relying on wood to keep his loved one from further tragedy, and laid down flat on his back. In his pocket, his phone buzzed repeatedly—he hadn't even looked at it since he'd gotten home. He wrenched it out from between the tight denim to discover Isabelle was calling him. After a second's hesitation, he answered with an uncharacteristically apathetic, "Hello?"

"Oh thank—I've been so worried about you. I've been trying to get in touch with you for days... Is—are you alright, Kurt?" Just hearing her voice made Kurt wish he had bothered to touch base with her sooner.

"I—yeah, sorry, I've just been—it's been really..." Kurt slid his hand over his eyes. She couldn't see him crying, but he wouldn't doubt her ability to guess that it was exactly what he was doing now. "I'm so sorry, Isabelle. I haven't even looked at my phone since—I didn't mean to make you so worried."

"Kurt," she spoke soothingly. "Forget about me being worried. How's—is there any good news?"

He broke down as the question left her lips and traveled safely over the airwaves to reach his pounding ears. She was able to tell how bad things were just based on fifteen seconds of conversation with him, which just added even more to the reality of the situation for Kurt. He let out an ugly, guttural sound that passed as a sob and then the words came, rushed and hysterical, "Oh god, Isabelle, he's so—he looks so helpless. And until yesterday he was unconscious. I didn't think he'd—everyone was just giving up and I let myself believe he'd—that he'd—" He sobbed again, his consternation clamping itself onto his heart with such viciousness that he had to lay his hand over his chest. "And I don't know if I'm still mad at him, if I still should be, because this doesn't change what happened, but I feel so guilty and I don't know why. I shouldn't. I have nothing to feel guilty for, but just seeing him like that—knowing that someone was able to—" he gasped, choking out the words in choppy fragments; he had no idea how Isabelle was even keeping up, if she was. "To do that to him."

She hadn't interrupted him, not once. He rambled and rambled away, listing off every insecurity he'd been too afraid to admit aloud, every possibility he'd scolded himself for considering, and she listened without judgment and with ears wide open. Only when he finally ran out of breath and sat, panting into the phone, did she choose to open her mouth instead. "You still love him, sweetie."

The words hit him like a freight train and, rather than settle after the initial crash, every single car of that train piled up onto his entire body, crushing out any of the air he might have had left in his lungs. He was thankful to have been lying down, at least.

"That doesn't just... go away. No matter how much he hurt you. He made a mistake, he came to you and admitted to it, right?" She continued.

"Yeah," Kurt sniffled.

"He didn't have to. He could have kept it a secret. From what you've told me, he still cares deeply for you. You just... have to decide if you want to try to work through what happened between you two. And it

doesn't have to be now. Actually, it *shouldn't* be now... but I think you've already decided that you'd regret shutting him out of your life forever."

"So what should I do?" Kurt clung to her words, the trepidation rising once she had paused. He needed advice, needed someone else's opinion rather than the brutal debate constantly waging on inside of his head, despite how much he'd been avoiding talking to anyone for the past week. He didn't need to see Isabelle's face right now—it was easier to ask for help when he could hide away, leaving only his frightened words for her to sift through.

"He needs you as a friend right now, and you need him as one too. At least until you sort through the intensity you're feeling. Just... take this slow, okay? I know it might seem impossible, but you'd be surprised how easy things might seem if you just let go of that stigma of relationships for a little while and remember why the two of you became involved in each others' lives in the first place."

"And if that doesn't work out?" Kurt was almost afraid to ask.

"Then you'll still be able to say that you tried, right? Sometimes that's all the closure you need—one more attempt before you consider closing the book for good. You were... so happy when we first met, Kurt. You gushed about him when you didn't know I was listening, and I just don't want you to regret not ever having tried to work through this together."

"Does being an adult ever get any easier?"

"Sometimes," she let out a quiet laugh. "But would it really be worth it if it was so easy?"

"I'm just so... *tired* of having to work for everything."

"It's what I love about you, Kurt. What I'm sure all of your friends love about you and even Blaine—you never give up on what you want, no matter how difficult it is or how out of reach it seems. You're so... determined. It's inspiring."

He sniffled again, bringing his hand away from his chest to drag it across his eyes. "How have things been over there?"

"How about we let you focus on one thing at a time, okay?" Her tone reminded Kurt of his mother, long since passed and very sorely missed at moments such as these, and he was grateful for it. He filed away a mental note to thank Carole as well for all of the times she spoke to him with the same motherly affection.

"Deal," he whispered and pressed his sleeve to his eyes, dabbing carefully at the raw skin. "I'll try to keep you updated more frequently though, I promise."

"Okay, Kurt. I'll talk to you again soon, I hope. And remember, when you start to feel overwhelmed... just breathe."

"I swear, I thought you were going to tell me to just have a kiki," he snorted into the phone, feeling the tiniest sliver of himself glide back into his body.

"Whatever zens you out, baby."

"Thanks, Isabelle," he turned his attention to the small, square cutout meant to act as a window. "I forgot how many stars there are at night out here."

"You've got billions to make wishes on then," she supplemented, sensing his longing to stay on the phone for a little longer.

"Only the first one you see," he protested, sending his wish straight up to it.

"So blink. Every time you open your eyes there's a new first star to see."

"Goodnight, Isabelle."

"Goodnight, Kurt."

They disconnected and he spent the next chunk of unmeasured time blinking at stars until his eyes watered and his father approached the base of the tree, announcing that he'd brought some blankets and pillows. Kurt said nothing as he climbed down and slid his arms around his father's torso, burying his face in Burt's chest, and let a series of sobs overtake him until his body gave way and he had to be carried inside.

## Chapter Three

Cooper was asleep in a chair beside Blaine's bed when Kurt walked in on day number eleven. Kurt cringed at the sight of him—Cooper didn't look remotely comfortable with his head on his own shoulder, leaving Kurt's neck feeling stiff as he imagined how much pain Cooper was going to be in when he finally woke up. On the bed, Blaine was lying down and staring at his hand as he clenched and unclenched his fist. It took him a moment before he noticed that Kurt had walked in. Blaine seemed more lucid today, Kurt thought hopefully, but he wasn't sure by how much.

"Hey there," Kurt smiled weakly when Blaine looked up. "What're you doing?"

"Thinking," Blaine replied simply.

"Thinking about what?" Kurt took a seat on the edge of Blaine's bed.

"Remembering," Blaine moved a hand to his forehead, working his fingers into his temple. "Memory exercises."

"What sort of things? Maybe you should say them out loud. That way I can tell you if they're true or not," Kurt suggested against his better judgment.

"My name is Blaine Anderson," Blaine hadn't hesitated at Kurt's request.

"Correct," Kurt folded his hands on his lap.

"I'm eighteen years old."

"Right," Kurt smiled.

"I broke your heart," Blaine lowered his voice, staring at his hand again as he clenched his fist.

"...yeah, you did," Kurt watched him curiously, his tone soft. "What else can you remember, Blaine?"

"Why are you here, Kurt?" Blaine looked up at him again, his fist still balled up tightly, and Kurt could *see* all of the insecurities he hadn't been able to pick up on over the phone since they had stuck five hundred miles in between themselves.

"Because I was worried and wanted to see that you were alright," Kurt replied genuinely.

"What about work? Aren't you—"

"Isabelle understands. It's fine, Blaine."

Blaine mumbled something under his breath, probably more to himself, but Kurt questioned it anyways with a well placed, "Hmm?"

"Not worth missing work over," Blaine repeated and suddenly looked very puzzled. "Did I say that out loud?"

"You did. Did you not mean to...?" Kurt wasn't sure what constituted as an emergency, but his hand gravitated towards the call button regardless.

"Don't," Blaine raised his other hand, his slender fingers trembling as he failed to lift it up any higher than three inches away from his stomach. "Don't." Kurt lowered his hand into his lap again.

"Blaine, what else do you remember? Let's keep going," Kurt suggested after a few seconds of unbearable silence. "Where do you go to school?"

"Dal—McKinley. West McKinley high school," Blaine furrowed his brows.

"Right. What's your brother's name?"

"Cooper," Blaine passed a lazy glance in Cooper's direction and let his gaze linger. "It's nice that he's here. I'm glad that he's here."

"Where are your parents? Were you guys able to get in touch with them?" Kurt cleared his throat, sitting up straighter.



"No," Blaine sounded dazed as he kept staring at Cooper, his eyes mirroring the distance Kurt had always felt when he first moved to New York.

*When did I stop noticing that distance? He didn't have as many things to distract him from it like I did.*

"When's the last time you spoke to them?" Kurt stopped himself from reaching his hand out and placing it under Blaine's chin.

"I don't remember," Blaine replied in the same dazed tone of voice. "I think they were on a business trip out of the country. Or vacation." Kurt spent the entire uneasy attempt at recollection staring at Blaine, unable to hide the melancholy despair. Blaine turned his head just the slightest so that he could glance at Kurt, but kept his attention mainly on Cooper. "Don't look at me like that. Not you, don't look at me like that..."

"Like what, Blaine?" Kurt's voice cracked and he cleared his throat quietly.

"Like I'm some broken pathetic... thing. I'm not—I'm—I'm..."

"Oh, Blaine," was all Kurt could think to say. Any semblance of anger that Kurt should have still felt eluded him. "That's not what I think of you."

"You feel sorry for me. You should hate me, you shouldn't even be here, you should—"

"Do you not want me here?"

"Of course I want you here!" Blaine exclaimed and proceeded to lower his voice after noticing Cooper stir gently in the chair. "But what I want and what should be are two very different things."

"Let's not sit and worry about what should and shouldn't be, because if we start that it'll never end. I'm here and I'm staying," Kurt tentatively placed his hand on Blaine's, who returned the gesture with wide eyes, puzzled and hesitant.

"You should hate me... I do," Blaine blurted out, the words falling from the cloud of a whisper.

"I never hated you, I could never hate you," Kurt pressed his palm against Blaine's, cradling the calloused skin between his hands. The tail end of Blaine's confession still hung between them. "You shouldn't hate yourself, Blaine."

"I—"

"Excuse me?" They both turned their attention to the door where a young man occupied the entryway. "Blaine Anderson?" He continued and Blaine proceeded to gape at him.

"Yes," Kurt answered for him. "This is Blaine Anderson."

"If you're feeling up to it, I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions," he took off his hat, revealing an unruly mess of thick black hair, and tucked it under his arm before holding up a badge.

*I guess Harry Potter never became an Auror after all.*

Kurt surveyed the man for a few more seconds before turning his eyes to Blaine, who—sometime in the last minute—had adapted such a look of terror that it made Kurt's heart flutter madly in an attempt to escape his body, wanting to do all that it could to comfort Blaine and ease that horrible expression off of his face.

"About the attack," the officer continued when neither Kurt nor Blaine had said anything.

"Do you want me to stay?" Kurt gave Blaine's hand a gentle squeeze. Blaine shook his head and Kurt seemed a little taken aback, but shrugged it off before squeezing Blaine's hand again. "Okay. I'm going to take a walk, I'll be back soon." Blaine nodded, still not really offering much of his attention to Kurt as he proceeded to gawk at the officer.

*I'd give anything to know what he's thinking right now,* Kurt thought as he stood up and passed by the officer with a polite smile.

The door closed behind him as soon as he was clear of the entryway, the quiet clicking of the lock sent shock waves through Kurt's body that didn't quite match up to the docile manner with which the officer had shut the door with. As he was starting to walk away, he heard their voices from behind the door... not nearly as muffled as they should have been.

*I shouldn't eavesdrop.*

He remained frozen, the thumping in his chest nearly drowning out the sounds behind the door.

*He wouldn't want you to listen. Walk away, Kurt.*

He pressed an ear closer to the door, guilt flittering away to hide under a giant rug of his curiosities, and willed himself to breathe a little quieter.

"The hospital called us. It's standard procedure," the officer explained. "You have nothing to feel embarrassed about. Do you think you can tell me what happened?"

"I didn't know them, I can't help you," Blaine answered quickly, dismissively.

"Mr. Anderson, I'm trying to help *you*. Anything you can remember will be a great help. Anything at all."

"I left school late and my car broke down," Blaine began with hesitation. "I was—I couldn't call anyone, my phone was dead and so I just—I started walking. I ran into them on my way through the park."

"How many were there?"

"Three?" Though Kurt couldn't see him, he imagined Blaine was probably massaging his temples, his eyes fixed on the bed.

"Did they say anything to you?"

There was silence and for a fraction of a second, Kurt was afraid the entire interview had been too much for Blaine, that he'd slipped away into unconsciousness again simply to hide away from having to expose himself like this anymore.

"Blaine, did they say anything to you?" the officer repeated.

Blaine shut his eyes, the dull pounding in his head growing sharper and more persistent. "They... They were teasing me. One of them kept—kept—well, I mean, I guess you could say he was catcalling me?"

"And then what happened?"

"I ignored them. Kept walking and just ignored them. But they started following me. Called me a f—they knew that I was—that I'm... different," Blaine pressed his fingers into his forehead, hoping it would be enough of a sign that he didn't want to continue the conversation any longer. Clearly, he'd been unable to get his point across though, because the next few lines came without hesitation.

"I'm not here to pass judgment on your lifestyle, Blaine. I want to catch these guys and make them pay for what they did. Just be honest, you don't have to be afraid."

"Gay, they were able to tell that I'm gay. I can't remember their faces, but they must have known me," Blaine wanted to dig his nails into his forehead and drag out whatever little creature had nestled against his skull, using his brain as a gong.

"Is that when they—There's no gentle way to put this so I'm going to have to be blunt, I'm sorry. One of the main reasons we, specifically, were called is because of the signs of sexual assault you exhibited. I've already spoken to a Mr..... Burt Hummel, and he explained that when he found you your pants were down and you were bleeding a fair amount. Is that what happened next?" The officer took down notes, but Blaine could feel that the man's eyes definitely weren't on his notepad.

"You know, I never caught your name," Blaine whispered through a particularly painful thump against his temple.

"It's Carson. Detective Carson," he answered kindly.

"Well, that part came later, Detective Carson," Blaine returned his gentle tone with bitterness as a sudden flare up of pain further south reminded him of the detective's question. Not that he could really forget. "Are we—are we almost finished?"

"Almost. I can't imagine how difficult this is for you, Blaine. You're doing very well. Can you explain what happened? Had all three of them—"

"They used the bat they beat me with. None of them—I don't think they—that they, you know—it's all just jumbled, I can't—"

"S'going on?" Cooper's sleepy drawl cut through Blaine's oncoming panic attack and both Blaine and Detective Carson turned their attention to the older Anderson. Blaine had nearly forgotten he was still in the room.

"It's alright, we're finished for now, Blaine. I think maybe you should rest for a little while and then we'll pick this up again later, okay?" Detective Carson flipped his notebook closed. "I'll leave you and your brother to talk." He gave them both a polite smile before opening the door to find Kurt sitting against the wall opposite the door, his eyes fixed on the tiled floor with tears streaming down his cheeks. Kurt immediately brushed his thumbs under his eyes and looked up at the detective.

"Oh, are you finished?"

Blaine felt his terror only intensify as he heard Kurt's tone.

*Was he listening?*

Kurt walked in with red eyes and an unreadable expression—not a good sign, Blaine decided. As he watched Kurt, Blaine noticed a dull buzzing noise to his left and discovered Cooper had still been talking to him. His temple pulsed angrily and he slid his fingers over it. "What did you say, Coop?"

"What was that all about?" Cooper asked in a voice that suggested he must have asked the question at least a few times already.

"Officer just wanted to ask about the attack," Kurt filled in the gap of silence that Blaine had let linger. Cooper looked between the two of them before letting his eyes settle on Blaine in silent inquiry: *does he know?*

*Don't say a damn thing*, Blaine stared back at him warningly before succumbing to another surge of pain that almost made him sick.

"Coop, can I have a minute with him?" Kurt asked quietly.

"Sure, Kurt. I'm just going to grab a coffee," Cooper replied and all but sprinted out of the room to avoid further obligations to choose a side.

Rather than delve right into an interrogation—as Blaine assumed Kurt would do—he simply stared at Blaine as his eyes continued to well up and spill over the useless little dams that never really kept any tears at bay. This was worse, Blaine thought. This was way worse.

"You're doing it again," Blaine felt uncomfortable under Kurt's melancholy doe eyes.

"Why wouldn't you tell me something like that? I don't deserve to know?" Kurt disregarded Blaine's statement.

"Kurt, you sent me a text telling me to leave you alone. That you didn't want to hear from me anymore," Blaine explained, slightly surprised that he even needed to.

"That was before—"

"Before what? Before you decided that you're just going to feel sorry for me and talk to me again out of pity?" Blaine knew he wasn't being fair, knew that he was coming off as snarky, but he figured he could at least partially blame his mood on the fact that his brain was being cleaved into separate hemispheres.

"...I'm sorry, Kurt. I—"

"You always try to scare me off like this when you're upset and afraid," Kurt wiped away his tears and actually smiled. "Has it ever worked?"

"I just... didn't picture us talking again because of something like this. Because I was... I was..."

"Raped," Kurt supplied in a barely-there whisper. Blaine flinched at the word as another eruption of pain pulsed through him, starting from the over-sensitive ring of muscles that had been stretched too wide and too quickly all the way up to his head.

"Kurt, I think I'm going to be sick," Blaine whimpered, his eyes falling shut as he gave up on forcing them to stay open. He heard the quick shuffling of footsteps and felt the uncomfortable mattress sink down before Kurt's hand was on Blaine's stomach, rubbing careful, gentle circles. The gesture was meant to be more soothing than actually helpful, they both knew that. So when Blaine's eyes snapped open in frenzied fretfulness, his face so pale it put the walls to shame, and he lurched forward, gagging over a trash bin Kurt had set beside the bed, Kurt didn't take it too personally that his actions of affection had possessed no real medical benefit.

"It's okay, you're okay."

There was that word again; he'd managed to let it slip when he knew things were the farthest they could ever be from okay.

Kurt was wary of where to put his hands on Blaine, the thin gown doing very little in providing warmth for Blaine but doing a very good job at covering up the numerous bruises Kurt guessed were scattered underneath. He sent a silent prayer out and hoped that Blaine's lower back was safe as he slid his palm over it. Blaine's body shook as he gagged again, but he hadn't reacted to Kurt's touch—a hopeful sign for Kurt as he began massaging the area, keeping his radius small. Cooper waltzed in, took one glance at the two of them, and strolled right back out.

Blaine kept his eyes to the ground as the gagging subsided, his nerves still stumbling over themselves, as Kurt continued trying to redirect them back to where they belonged and will them to settle down. "I know what you're thinking, stop it," Kurt whispered suddenly. "I've seen you get sick before, it's not a big deal."

Blaine almost wanted to laugh. Almost.

"Is it because you're thinking about what happened?"

"That, and my head has been splitting itself in two ever since I woke up," Blaine grimaced, nausea becoming a friend he no longer wanted to be so well acquainted with anymore.

"Why didn't you say anything?" Kurt scolded him, torn between leaving to find a doctor and staying with Blaine.

"This? It's nothing. I've had headaches worse than these before. Can't think of any times right now..." Blaine rattled off as colour briefly made an appearance on his face again before fading away once more.

Kurt laughed unexpectedly, breathy and familiar and though it sent another lightning bolt of pain into Blaine's brain, he was elated that things felt normal, even if only for a fleeting millisecond. "Okay, John Smith," Kurt replied, catching the reference Blaine had made. "Do you want me to get someone in here though?"

"Just stay here with me," Blaine murmured, closing his eyes again.

"Okay," Kurt whispered back, tearing his eyes away only when Cooper returned with a doctor. Blaine had already slipped away into unconsciousness though. "It's fine, he felt a little sick but he's just fallen asleep n—"

Beside him, Blaine's body began to shake and a series of rushed beeps from the machines attached to him sounded off in a discordant symphony. Kurt watched, in shock, as Blaine's body continued to lose control of itself. But when Cooper's hand firmly grasped his shoulder, Kurt's brain began working again and he managed a meek, "What's happening?" as he was pulled off of the bed.

"I—I don't know, Kurt," Cooper kept his hand on Kurt's shoulder as he peered over at the bed, where the doctor was now leaning down over Blaine and calling out orders as fellow members of the hospital staff herded into the room.

"He was fine!" Kurt exclaimed to the growing general audience, "What's happening to him? He was just fine a minute ago!"

"Get them out of here," the doctor whom Cooper had returned with ordered with urgency. "Push 5cc of Ativan."

And, once again, Kurt found himself on the other side of a closed door, staring it down with scorn and confusion as he went over the last few seconds in his head again, wondering what could have possibly gone wrong.



## **Chapter Four**

"Coop, what—what do we do?" Kurt tore his eyes away from the door, his voice so small and distant that he could hardly recognise it as his own.

"Let's go see who's in the waiting room today," Cooper cast a solemn glance towards the door as he draped an arm carefully around Kurt's shoulders.

"Mr. Anderson?"

Both Kurt and Cooper snapped their heads in the direction of the mystery voice, where a young pale woman with bright blue eyes stood. She clutched a clipboard in her hand, and Kurt took note of how still those hands were, how collected she was in comparison to them. She pushed a strand of black hair out of her eyes, tucking it behind her ear, before continuing.

"I need you to sign some things for me, since your parents are still absent."

All of the colour instantly drained from Cooper's face as she held out the clipboard. She hadn't even begun to explain what each form was for, but Kurt could see how terrified Cooper already was.

"What," Cooper cleared his throat loudly, the single word had come out scathed and uncertain, "What are they?"

"The top form is for brain surgery, the one below is—in case anything goes wrong—your decision to keep your brother on life support or not."

Kurt had to grab onto Cooper's shirt to keep him from toppling over. In one second everything had changed; Kurt had allowed himself to get too comfortable with the idea of calmness that he had forgotten all about the true calamity that occurred during the storm. He counted seconds in his head to attribute to Cooper's silence.

One.

*Okay, he's in shock.*

Two.

*Still in shock.*

Three.

*This is urgent Cooper, tell her you'll keep him on life support and sign the damn things.*

Four.

*I know this is hard for you, it's hard for me too.*

Five—

"I—we never talked about anything like this. I don't—I have no idea if it's what he would want."

It was Kurt's turn for all of the air to evacuate his lungs now, leaving him disoriented and weak at the knees. A strong, irritatingly familiar flapping of wings stirred violently in his chest, panic surging through him as his brain processed and translated what Cooper was saying into simpler terms: *he's talking about letting him die*. Any previous notions anyone might have had about Kurt's brilliant ability to remain cool and collected under stress were laid to rest right then and there.

"Are you talking about killing him?" He blurted out, unable to keep the tension from distorting every syllable into a symphony of terrified sound. "You wouldn't even give him a chance? He already wasn't supposed to wake up; I don't believe in miracles, but—fuck. Give him a goddamn chance at least."

Cooper didn't need to hear anymore. He swiped the clipboard away, a new triumphant air of "big brother" pushing through to the surface of the frightened child he'd currently been hiding himself away under, and scrawled his name sloppily onto the dotted lines. A hint of shame glistened in his uncharacteristically dull eyes, as if he was embarrassed for even considering the thought to not keep Blaine on life support. The moment he and Kurt entered the waiting room though, his newfound strength had quickly petered away, leaving him slumped in a chair as he used whatever remaining energy was left in his muscles to cover his eyes with his hand. His head thumped back against the wall, loudly, as Kurt sank into a seat beside him and—after a few seconds of hesitation—gently placed his hand on Cooper's knee.

"Just once," Cooper began, a tremble in his voice; Kurt had grown so accustomed to Cooper's dramatics that these new reactions were beginning to throw him off. "I wish he could catch a break. It's been one thing after the other."

Kurt silently considered the words, rolled and re-rolled them over in his head. It was true—he couldn't deny it. As confused as he was about his feelings for his ex-boyfriend, as defensive as he might get when it came to the topic of their break-up... it was true—Blaine hadn't been able to relax since the first time a group of boys had ganged up on him and beaten him senseless. But he'd been Kurt's rock, through everything. Blaine had scrambled past his demons in a rush to smother Kurt's, but he hadn't vanquished his own and now they had finally caught up to him again to torment him even more.

"Shit, I'm sorry. I know that—he told me about the break-up—I know that things have been hard for you too," Cooper breached Kurt's contemplation.

"That doesn't matter right now," though he hadn't been able to keep himself from believing so at times. "Let's just... I want to focus on him getting better. That's it. There aren't any sides for anyone to take when it comes to that."

Cooper nodded his agreement, but his mind was already jumping to another thought that he apparently couldn't hold down any longer. "I just can't believe that this happened to him. I don't know what it's going to do to him."

"I've been wondering the same thing..." Kurt chewed on his lip, something he'd taken up quite recently, and folded his arms across his chest. "I don't think he ever fully recovered from the first attack."

The admission still felt heavy on his chest as the words came tumbling out. He hadn't been able to discuss it with anyone, Blaine always deflected and—aside from Cooper, his father, and Mr. and Mrs. Anderson—nobody else knew about the source of Blaine's anger, or the nightmares and flashbacks that sometimes wrapped their fingers so tightly around his neck that he could barely recognise his surroundings without Kurt there to guide him back to the present. Kurt could remember one night that was particularly worse than all of the others.

It had been their second official sleepover, after eight months of dating and recently discovering the joys of each other beneath the sheets, but the first at Kurt's house. Burt had been away for the weekend with Carole and hadn't even bothered to mention "Blaine can't stay over." He knew something had happened

between them, that some tiny factor had changed and introduced the spring in his son's step that he hadn't seen for so long. While he didn't like to think about it, he had a fairly decent understanding of what was going on between the two teenage boys and he had placed enough trust in Kurt's judgement to know that his son was being safe.

And so they were snuggled up in Kurt's bed, taking up far too little space considering the actual size of it—queen—while Blaine was already falling asleep halfway through *La Vie En Rose*. Kurt could tell that something had upset Blaine before his visit, but his boyfriend had refused to talk about it. So when Blaine's eyes slipped shut just as Kurt's favourite scene was coming up, he attributed it to whatever might have happened instead of assuming Blaine had just been too bored to stay awake for the film. As Kurt clicked the television off, Blaine's eyes fluttered open and he drew in a few quick, panicked breaths. Kurt jumped and squeaked loudly, resting a hand over his chest and informed Blaine that he'd almost been scared to death.

But Blaine wasn't listening. His eyes darted around the room with such speed that Kurt feared they would roll right back into his head and a fierce shiver struck him like lightning. Kurt reached a hand out and rested it on Blaine's shoulder, immediately discovering a tense knot of muscles. Blaine jerked himself away and burst into tears, choking out an anguished, "No! No, no stop! Please—" Kurt tried everything to calm him down, helplessly pleading and trying to remind Blaine that they were alone and no one could hurt them. It was only when Blaine jerked away again and accidentally smacked his hand against Kurt's face that he finally snapped out of it. Blood trickled from Kurt's nose before surging out in a steady stream, but he remained planted in the bed with his hand cupped under his nose; Blaine ushered a thousand and one apologies in a matter of seconds, his throat tight, upon noticing the sticky red mess coating his boyfriend's hand before pulling Kurt into the bathroom to clean him up. They spent the next ten minutes waiting for the blood to stop in silent conversation, Kurt's eyes posing innocent, curious questions and Blaine's portraying nothing but his humiliation. They never spoke about it, despite Kurt's insistence that they did, and so it was swept away into the little cupboard in the back of Kurt's mind where he kept all of his inconvertible inquiries regarding Blaine Devon Anderson.

"Our parents basically chose to pretend that it never happened once Blaine was physically healed. I'll never forget seeing him in the hospital that first night," Cooper combed his fingers through slightly greasy hair and Kurt felt the smallest hint of a connection with the older Anderson and a glimmer of reprieve in the knowledge that he wasn't the only one who wasn't exactly taking care of himself lately. "He was so out of it, whatever medication they had him on, and he kept asking me if they hated him. If our parents hated him. Can you believe that? He's laying there in a hospital bed and all he can think about is—"

Cooper shook his head, cutting himself off, and clenched both fists until the skin stretched itself pale over his knuckles. Kurt watched him in misplaced wonder, never having seen this side of Cooper before. "I was the one who suggested he take up boxing, you know? I could see how angry he was—I thought it would be good for him. Teach him how to defend himself. Look how well that worked out."

"There were three guys and they jumped him, Coop," Kurt argued quietly. "We both know if it was only one that Blaine would have murdered him."

"Yeah," Cooper replied with a hint of bitterness on the tip of his tongue. "I need a coffee. Can I get you anything?"

*My ex-boyfriend.*

"No, thanks," Kurt folded his arms across his chest and leaned back in the chair, slumping down into an angle which could only be described as "uncomfortable." Cooper didn't question him further before standing up and walking away, leaving Kurt alone with his thoughts. He kept replaying the last half hour in his head, every bit of conversation overlapped and clashed in discordance until one line stuck out.

*I have no idea if it's what he would want.*

Despite what Cooper was debating, despite the weight of such a decision and its permanent side effects, he was taking Blaine's possible desires into consideration. Based on what little knowledge Kurt had of the Anderson brothers' parents, he assumed they never even bothered to ask what it was that their son wanted. And the more Kurt thought about it, the more he realised that very few people ever did. From the Warblers to New Directions, everyone had just expected things from Blaine. And Kurt could tell it all added weight to the world that Blaine was already carrying on his shoulders, even though Blaine would never admit to it or let his ear-to-ear grin falter.

*I did it to him too.*

The thought came quickly and almost felt like a slap in the face. And suddenly little flashes of conversation between them assaulted his brain in quick successions: Blaine being indecisive about leaving Dalton, Blaine explaining why he transferred to McKinley.

*No. I didn't really expect all that from him, did I? I didn't pressure him into coming to McKinley, he wanted to. He said he wanted to. Who am I kidding? Of course he said that, he doesn't want to disappoint anyone that he cares about.*

And then there was Blaine wanting to discuss their long distance relationship before graduation.

*But I just kept putting it off. I didn't think about how much he needed to talk about it, I just didn't want to discuss it. But that doesn't mean I didn't care, that doesn't mean I didn't stop to consider what he wanted. Of course I did.*

Blaine trying so very hard to talk about himself over Skype and being drowned out by Kurt's NYC adventures.

*I listened to him, I was happy for him. He's the one that cheated, he's the one that screwed up.*

He immediately hunched over and cradled his head in his hands. These were the types of thoughts that he had been trying to avoid and their appearance now only made him feel angry with himself.

"You okay?" Cooper sank down beside him again, his voice gravelly and weak in a way Kurt had become very familiarised with. One tiny peek to his left and Kurt could see the splotchy red outlines of Cooper's eyes—he'd stepped away to cry in peace. As Cooper tipped a small styrofoam cup against his lips Kurt entered into another silent debate with himself: should I or shouldn't I ask him if he wants to talk about it more? Cooper lowered the cup from his mouth and Kurt sat up straighter, realizing he hadn't even answered Cooper's question. While he knew he wouldn't have the strength to have to sit and reassure Cooper, he also knew that he couldn't just leave him to wander alone in the dark.

"Are you?"

Cooper crinkled his nose as though he was considering what the right answer to Kurt's question should be. It reminded Kurt of Blaine in his rare moments of indecisiveness.

"Yeah," Cooper grasped his cup between both hands. "Yeah, I'm okay."

"So, uh, did he... tell you about what happened?" Kurt twisted his fingers together and interlocked them.

"About the—what they..."

"Yeah," Cooper set the cup down in th floor and closed his eyes. "Yesterday. He just broke down and told me everything. I could fucking kill them. The police had better catch the sons of bitches before I do."

"I'm sure Blaine needs you here, not in prison," Kurt commented but he wouldn't mind being able to wrap his own fingers around the necks of those boys.

"Yeah, yeah..." Cooper grunted and pulled his phone out of his pocket. He glanced at it and sighed heavily before setting it facedown on his lap.

"Have your parents always been like this? Too... busy? Too unavailable?"

"Not always. Not from what I remember, anyways. And when Blaine was younger... my dad was great with him, with both of us. I could always tell my baby brother liked boys though, I think it took our parents by surprise when it wasn't 'just a phase.' When Blaine announced he wanted to marry Prince Aladdin when he was eight things were never the same. And when he was attacked... I hate them for what they did to him. He'd been through enough with those kids at school, he didn't need to be bullied at home too," Cooper glanced at his phone again out of habit and another loud, disappointed, sigh breached his lips. "They both started working later and later after that, or just disappearing and leaving Blaine with our neighbor to babysit him whenever I couldn't."

"He never talks about them," Kurt's heart felt so heavy he wasn't sure of how it was even keeping itself suspended in his chest. "I've met them maybe once or twice."

"They went on vacation, last I spoke with them. Sometimes I feel so... guilty for moving away," Cooper slid his hand through his hair, leaving even more oil from his fingers in it. Both of them were in desperate need for a shower and a good night's sleep. "You know?" he added, nervously, as though he was afraid Kurt would confirm his fears and mention something Blaine might have said about resenting Cooper for it.

"Blaine's really happy that you're out doing something that you love. It really gives him hope, I think, that he can do the same someday. Get the hell out of this state."

"He's too big for these small towns," Cooper laughed airily.

"He really is," Kurt agreed, his mind beginning to travel lightyears away.

They passed the time exchanging stories about the east and west coast, occasionally throwing in little tidbits about Blaine into the mix, until Burt and Carole walked into the waiting room with matching deep frown lines.

"Why are you boys sitting out here?" Carole gave Kurt an affectionate pat on the head, ruffling his hair.

"And how long?" Burt added.

Cooper and Kurt exchanged lost-boy looks with each other—they hadn't been keeping track of the time. In fact, they had been doing everything they could to avoid measuring it and their plan appeared to have worked.

"Blaine had a seizure, maybe a few hours ago? We're not really sure, I don't think either of us know how long we've been sitting out here. They took him away for surgery right after," Cooper sat up in his chair, stretching slowly. If their sore backs could be used as any indication of time passed, Kurt had to guess it had been at least three hours since Blaine's seizure. Burt Hummel's frown lines only grew deeper as he watched his son while Cooper delivered the news; Kurt knew the expression very well.

"No, I don't want to talk about it, dad," he mumbled quietly before his father could even get a word out.

"It's not good for you to keep everything bottled up like this..." Burt offered helplessly.

"Dad, please," Kurt pleaded, subtle desperation leaking through. "*Please* just drop it."

Burt nodded, obviously willing to respect his son's wishes, but the frown lines never faded—Kurt feared they might actually begin to become permanent, not just for Burt but for all of them. His mind flew to their friends in Glee club, friends who had visited night and day since the attack to offer all of the support that they could. He thought of Sam and Puck, both of whom had managed to cry harder than Rachel had the first night, and wondered if Blaine knew that so many people cared for his well being and were there to aid him throughout his recovery. And, as if by magic, Puck and Sam strolled in through the front door and right over to them.

"What's everyone doing out here?" Sam tilted his head.

"Oh no, did something else happen?" Puck interjected and looked to Kurt with wide eyes.



"Yeah," Kurt's voice became trapped in his throat, sounding mangled as he spoke. "Seizure."

"Is he okay? When?" Puck looked between Kurt and Cooper.

"Puck, maybe now isn't the time to—" Sam touched Puck's elbow gently to match his tone.

"It was a few hours ago," Cooper answered. "We don't know anything else."

"Fucking," Puck started off angrily, but quickly deflated, "Dammit. Fucking goddamnit."

"Took the words out of my mouth," Kurt's quiet voice joined him. "I'm going to step outside for a minute. It's too hot in here."

He stood up quickly and trailed out the front door just as the words "But it's raining!" reached his ears. He didn't care, he needed the scenery change, needed to look at something other than his own depression reflected back to him on every single person's face he had come into contact with the past eleven days. Outside of the hospital there was a small awning offering protection from the heavy downfall that must have started up recently. Kurt leaned his back against the wall, closed his eyes, sliding down it, and tried to sink into a world of simpler times.

"Want some company?"

Kurt didn't have to open his eyes to know that it was Noah Puckerman who had followed him out. The edge in his voice left Kurt's skin crawling.

"Sure, Noah," Kurt reluctantly forced his eyes open again and studied the rain battering the pavement. Puck took a seat beside Kurt and leaned his head back against the wall.

"How are you doing with all of this?" he asked hesitantly, carefully, and Kurt had the sudden image of himself sliding his fingers around Puck's neck and crushing out all of the air so there would be one less person asking him some form of *Are you okay?* He shook his head, erasing it away like an Etch-A-Sketch, and shrugged his shoulders. "Can I ask you something?"

"I'm sure you will anyways," Kurt replied with light hostility. If Puck picked up on it, he wasn't discouraged in any way.

"Why did you guys break up?"

There were more than a few ways to handle this, but Kurt chose the most direct approach with the least amount of tact. "He cheated on me."

"No," Puck stated, dumbly. "He—"

"Cheated on me," Kurt finished, knowing that his frustration really had nothing to do specifically with Puck and his curiosity. He was beginning to understand Blaine's mood swings better and why his ex-boyfriend chose to take his anger out on punching bags so often—it was exhausting trying to constantly feign a smile for the sake of others and maintain civility when all he wanted to do was scream and claw out the eyes of the boys who had caused such damage.

"No wonder he's been dodging my calls for weeks," Puck followed up, as if the new piece of information filled in every missing gap of the giant puzzle that was Blaine Anderson.

"I wasn't aware that you guys kept in touch."

"Of course we did," Puck tilted his head curiously, his eyes doing all of the talking for him: *Why does that surprise you?*

Kurt shrugged again and stood up, brushing his hands over his jeans to wipe away any residual dirt from the pavement. "Why do you care so much about our breaking up?"

"Well," Puck sucked in his lower lip and concentrated. Kurt had never seen him with such a focused look on his face before. "I mean, you guys were sort of the couple to look up to."

Kurt couldn't hold back the snort that should have taken away from Puck's heartfelt confession, but somehow didn't. He never viewed himself and Blaine as the "it couple," nor did he ever imagine they would be the description of Noah Puckerman's ideal couple. The entire conversation left him feeling as though he must have fallen asleep and was trapped in some silly dream where the part of his brain still branded with everything Blaine Anderson related controlled everything.

"I'm serious," Puck defended himself politely. "At least for me. I loved what you guys had, I wanted it, I—seeing you guys look at each other like that everyday—if you two could find each other the way you had, then maybe I could find someone too."

"Noah Puckerman, one woman guy? Doesn't have quite the ring to it out loud as it did in my head," Kurt let a small smile run free to collapse unsteadily upon his tense features; the result was a crooked smile he had actually meant to be genuine, but probably came off as more condescending instead.

"Go on, make fun of me all you want," Puck confirmed Kurt's suspicions and rolled his eyes. "But you guys had something... real, and I want a taste of it someday."

"Sorry, we're not into—"

"Not with you two!" Puck interrupted him, his voice raising quickly in volume.

Kurt smiled again, small and unforced—it felt good to be able to laugh with an old friend—before taking the conversation down a more serious route once more. "I really don't know where we stand now. It's—it's very complicated."

Puck didn't interrupt so Kurt started walking in circles as he continued. "I don't know if I can trust him again. And now isn't the time to bring any of this up. He's a mess, I'm a mess—and all he needs right now are his friends and family, nice and simple. No... relationship problems to worry about. No complications."

"Do you still love him?"

It was such an elementary question, one that required a mere "yes" or "no," but Puck might as well have asked him what the exact distance from their current location to the sun was—he couldn't answer it. He wanted to, but he was afraid. The pitter patter of rain was all that filled the distance between the silence and Kurt let each drop resonate against his eardrums until they reaembled a discordant timpani solo.

"I," *bom bom bom! Thump thump thump!* "I don't—I don't know," he slumped his shoulders in defeat.

"I didn't ask if you've forgiven him, I asked if you still loved him. You're thinking too much," Puck got to his feet as well and rested his hand on Kurt's shoulder. "What's the first thing you think of when I say his name?"

"Lilacs," Kurt responded without missing a beat.

"Lilacs?"

"And how we found out that he was allergic to them," Kurt laughed a little guiltily at the memory. "It was our first Valentine's Day together, and I wanted to surprise him with something other than roses. The poor thing, he couldn't stop sneezing for our entire date." He laughed a little more and then his expression grew serious, a new weight settling onto his chest.

"What's wrong?"

"I just... want him to be okay, I want *us* to be okay," Kurt's heart fluttered and he had to struggle to keep himself grounded.

"I think you have your answer then, don't you?" Puck said.

"When did you get so profound?" Kurt reached his hand out into the rain and let icy drops coat it until he felt more awake.

"Come on," Puck rolled his eyes and smiled. "Let's head back in."

Kurt let his chin drop to his chest, exhaustion forcing him to nod once, and Puck hooked their arms together before leading him back inside. Under different circumstances, Kurt could envision them walking through the mall like this on a Saturday night, people-watching and passing judgement—his heart panged with guilt as he suddenly remembered, *'That's my and Blaine's thing to do.'*

He let Puck guide him back to the group and proceeded to collapse into a chair in between Cooper and Burt that might as well have had his name written on it with the amount of time he'd spent occupying it. Upon their arrival, Sam glanced between them with curious eyes, but neither boys chose to share anything. After a few minutes and a number of texts exchanged with Isabelle Kurt dragged his knuckles against sore eyes, finding it much more difficult to stay awake now. To his left, Cooper also seemed to be having trouble keeping his head upright and Kurt watched it repeatedly fall against his own shoulder, followed by a jolt that travelled through his entire body.

"You boys look exhausted," Burt peered over at Kurt from underneath the rim of his baseball cap. Rather than reply, Kurt leaned his head onto his father's shoulder and simply let himself drift away—he couldn't fight it anymore, not did he want to. He only hoped there would be good news waiting for him when he woke up.

## **Chapter Five**

"Kurt. Kurt, wake up."

He rubbed his eyes and tried to focus on whom the voice belonged to, still far too tired to differentiate between everyone. Maybe his father, it seemed to sound like him.

"Kurt, they're letting us see him."

His eyes fluttered open immediately; his heart pounded adrenaline into his veins so quickly that it left him feeling not only wide-awake but also slightly disoriented. Cooper. It was Cooper's voice. He dedicated a millisecond of his time to trying to fathom how he could have confused Cooper's voice for his father's.

"Same room?" Kurt quickly abandoned the thought, his words carrying the thick scent of a yawn begging to escape.

"Yeah, come on. Only two of us at a time though—everyone says we should go first."

Kurt didn't need to be told twice. He rubbed his eyes again and glanced around; Santana and Tina had managed to appear while he was asleep; Sam and Puck were rubbing their eyes and yawning to the left of him; and his father and Carole were not anywhere in sight. He waited for Cooper to hastily stretch his arms and legs before they both set off at a brisk pace down the maze of hallways leading to Blaine's room. The journey was becoming too familiar for Kurt's liking, and a pound of salt settled itself uncomfortably in the pit of his stomach every time he passed patients' rooms that he could easily recognize by now. When they finally reached the door to Blaine's room he blinked and kept his eyes closed just a little longer than necessary, taking whatever amount of time allowed to him to compose himself; Cooper's hand found its way to his back and he offered Kurt a gentle, uncertain smile that didn't quite reach his eyes.

"Ready?" he asked, breathy and afraid.

Kurt nodded once and let out a shallow sigh. "As I'll ever be."

Cooper gave the door a light push and it opened easily. Kurt trailed in after him with eyes to the floor to delay having to see Blaine in his further fragile state. Eventually, though, he lifted his head to discover him—half-awake and sporting a crooked smile—propped upright against six pillows. Kurt breathed in the initial sight of him in one short gulp of air, claiming that smile as a keepsake, before his eyes settled on the bandages wrapped around his head. Without further time to linger on the impending avalanche of emotions he gravitated towards the right side of the bed where he took one of Blaine's hands between his own. Through the sedation, Blaine seemed to be partially aware of his surroundings and he turned to Kurt and offered a toothy grin. Aside from the setting, aside from the reasoning behind being there, Kurt wouldn't have minded being able to stay just like this for as long as possible. Things felt simple, for the teeniest fragment of time, with Blaine's hand—calloused and familiar—between his own and that old schoolboy smile that had vanished from both of their lives. The state of simplicity was rather short-lived and by the time Blaine's doctor—or Neil Patrick Harris' older brother, as Kurt instantly thought to call him—walked in it was gone completely.

"A word, Mr. Anderson?"

*He even sounds like Neil Patrick Harris,* Kurt's mind unconsciously tried to grant him some temporary reprieve from all of the seriousness and sorrow surrounding him with the thought, but like the nanosecond of tranquility he had experienced with Blaine it was over too soon.

Cooper remained where he stood and raised an expectant eyebrow, urging the doctor to continue. After six long seconds—Kurt counted them in increments of '1 handsome Anderson... 2 handsome Andersons...'—he finally cleared his throat and spoke again. "The surgery appears to have gone well—"

"I'm still not even entirely sure what that surgery was for, by the way. Or what the aftercare will be like. Or any side effects," Cooper interrupted, folding his arms across his chest. Seeing Blaine in his current state must have flipped some switch in him, because Kurt couldn't recall ever seeing the usually calm and collected Cooper Anderson act so snarky in all the time they'd been spending together.

"It was all outlined in the paperwork you signed. You should have been given a copy."

"Well, I wasn't. And I can't understand any of this medical shit anyways," Cooper shot back, just barely able to keep his hysteria at bay.

"Coop," Kurt tentatively took a seat on the very edge of the bed, Blaine's hand still safely between his, "He's not the one to be mad at, okay?"

Cooper held Kurt's gaze for another three increments of "handsome Andersons" before he sighed and filled the spaces between his fingers with thick brown hair. "I'm sorry. It's just been very—"

"No need to apologise," the young doctor smiled politely. "I've heard much worse before."

In the small gap of silence that followed, Blaine—blissfully unaware of the conversation buzzing around just above his head—hummed quite loudly. The doctor cleared his throat as Cooper gave Blaine a solemn glance; all of the pent up, unspoken inadequacies he was feeling as a simple human being incapable of offering his brother any real comfort were evident in his dull pupils. "We'll be monitoring him over the next few days to try to understand the extent of the damage done. He might be very frustrated, as he may have forgotten some basic motor skills; he'll probably need help with some things for a while—bathing, using the bathroom, eating. You don't want to leave him on his own."

Kurt unconsciously gave Blaine's hand a gentle squeeze and was absolutely certain that he somehow developed an arrhythmia in the time it took the doctor to take a breath to continue.

"We're expecting that migraines may become something of a norm for him, and along with those he may experience something called vertigo. As I've said, we'll be monitoring him, but it *is* something we that are expecting. After that, you'll most likely be able to take him home, but he'll need to come back to begin physical therapy for his knee."

"Is that all?" Cooper expelled the question with the breath he'd been holding ever since the doctor started talking.

"The police officer from earlier will probably be back again sometime soon to talk to him and he'll need to talk to a psychiatrist before he's discharged."

"Okay," Cooper stated mechanically. "Okay," he nodded and Kurt realized that Cooper was repeating the word to try to reassure himself that things would, in fact, be okay. The doctor offered them a sympathetic smile.

"If there's anything you need, any other questions that you might think to ask, don't hesitate. My name's Doctor Stoker, I should have started with that, I'm sorry—but ask for me at the reception desk and I'll come as soon as I can. We'll get through this, okay?"

"Yes," Cooper whispered and cleared his throat. "Yes, thank you."

Doctor Stoker left and Cooper crumbled completely; he combed his fingers through his hair again—frantically and erratically this time—and looked to Kurt. "I still haven't been able to get in touch with our parents. I'm worried something might have happened to them."

Kurt was silent in regards to the comment, closing his lips tight and throwing away the key. He had nothing positive to say when it came to Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, so he decided to follow the old adage: *If you have nothing nice to say, then don't say anything at all.*

"Whatever you guys need," Puck's head materialized through the open doorway, earning glares and gasps from both Kurt and Cooper. "I'll help however I can. Coast is clear, come on." He flipped his cell phone closed and pocketed it as he walked into the room.

"Your dad's on board too," he rushed out before either of them could get a word in and took a seat beside Kurt while Cooper walked over to the window to begin pacing back and forth. Sam, Tina and Santana marched into the room soon after.

"You talked to my dad about taking care of him?" Kurt allowed himself one quick glance at Cooper, feeling his own anxieties rack up with each quiet stride.

"I overheard him and Carole talking about it last night. After you fell asleep. Saying that if you guys still couldn't reach his parents then they can watch him at home. If Cooper's okay with it," Puck looked over at him. Cooper continued pacing, having heard nothing.

"Coop?" Kurt asked tentatively and bleary eyes turned to face him.

"Huh?"

"Did you hear what Puck said?"

"No. What did he say?" Cooper looked to the window again and began chewing on his fingernails.



"That we'll watch Blaine at our house if you need any help. If you can't reach your parents." Burt answered for him and strode in with Carole and Finn.

"Oh," Cooper appeared to be a ghost of himself, but the weight of their offer finally seemed to have made an impression. "Oh, thank you. That's—thank you. So much. I just—I need to make some arrangements so that I can stay out here longer. I appreciate your help."

"Anything we can do too," Santana chimed in, quite unlike herself; Tina and Sam nodded their eager agreement.

"I want to stay too."

Kurt felt the burn of seven pairs of eyes turn to stare at him.

"I want to stay too," he repeated and swallowed hard. "I know what that means, but I just—I can't just..."

*No NYADA audition. I'll have to take a leave of absence from Vogue—will Isabelle understand? I think she'll understand. Maybe Brody can move in and help Rachel with my half of the rent. Is that what I really want though? Am I making a mistake?*

To his right he heard a soft snore; Blaine had fallen asleep during the conversation.

*He's not going to like this. He'll argue with me, he'll try to push me away.*

If there were any protestations or questions from anyone else, Kurt didn't hear them.

*But I can't just leave him. Not like this. Not now.*

The next few days passed by in a blur of MRIs, cat scans, x-rays, tests, questions, tests, frustration, and more tests. Whenever they finally made it through another day, Kurt imagined giant red X's on the little boxes of his mental calendar. It had been five days since Blaine's surgery. Five long days that forced Kurt to bounce back and forth between doubt and determination in his decision to stay behind and help. Today, he was determined; Blaine's mood was pleasant and he had actually allowed Kurt to help him spoon

oatmeal into his mouth for breakfast. They sat quietly, alone and together all at once, until Blaine dredged up the inevitable conversation topic.

"You don't have to do this, you know."

"We've been over this, Blaine," Kurt sighed.

"Refresh my memory," he balled up a fist—a habit that Kurt noticed he had taken up since he first woke up—and unclenched it after a moment.

"You refresh mine; you know the answer, Blaine."

"You're really just going to keep pretending that everything is okay between us now? I know you, Kurt."

"If you know me so well, then you know there's no point to this conversation carrying on," he said matter-of-factly and opened up a copy of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* he'd been reading aloud to Blaine the past few days. And with that, he expected it to be over; conversations such as this one had been occurring rather frequently lately and Kurt normally squashed the life out of them before they'd even had a chance to breathe.

"I just... don't want you to regret it. Don't want you to feel obligated to do this and then—and then end up hating me for it later," Blaine spoke his way through tears coated each individual word and layers upon layers of insecurities. *How ironic*, Kurt thought, *that he's beginning to share more of himself now that we've broken up.*

Kurt swallowed down the bile creeping up his throat; there had been something so natural in the way that Blaine assumed how easily hatred could be thrown his way that it twisted a series of knots deep within Kurt's stomach, leaving him feeling nauseous. "Blaine, I could never hate you." And he meant it.

"Okay," Blaine whispered and allowed his inner artist to creep through to the surface and colour him composed. "What are we up to?"

"Huh?"

"The—um, the book. What are we—"

"Oh!" Kurt flipped it open to the bookmarked page. "Dementors at the Quidditch match."

"Can we skip to Patronus lessons with Lupin?"

Kurt didn't ask questions or comment as he thumbed through the pages until he found it. He scooted his chair closer to the bed and began reading out loud. By the time he reached the end of the chapter Blaine was already asleep; he leaned over and traced a prominent vein on the back of Blaine's left hand. It was something he had done at least a hundred times by now; a simple, self-soothing habit he had developed in the early stages of their relationship whenever he needed to make sure Blaine was something tangible, something close and heavy enough to anchor him down should he start to float too high above himself on thoughts of *'why?'* Even under the title of "ex-boyfriend," Kurt couldn't stop himself from using Blaine again as that anchor.

"I'm trying so hard to stay unbiased, Blaine. I'm trying *so* hard."

Blaine snored softly in response.

"I still love you," the words came out strangled, dying on arrival. "Sometimes I trick myself into thinking nothing happened; it's so... easy to forget when I see you like this and I know that you need me. Need us all."

Blaine's hand twitched as Kurt brushed his fingers over the same vein.

"I hope this gets easier. I hope I can forgive you," he closed the book, set it on his knee and pressed his palms into his eyes.

As Blaine snored quietly again, as he lay motionless and none-the-wiser to the whirlwind of fear and disillusion surrounding him, Kurt submitted himself to another afternoon of watching him—and the monitors he was attached to—a little too closely.

The next day started off just as the previous five had; Kurt had just begun to nestle himself into a chair when Detective Carson rapped a gentle fist upon the open door and tentatively asked, "Hey, remember me, Blaine?"

Blaine's eyes went hazy and distant for a fraction of a second, searching, before he responded. "Yes. Yes, of course. How are you?"

Kurt's heart gave a sudden jolt. *Lying in a hospital bed and still so polite—god, do I love him.*

"I'm... well," he seemed taken aback by Blaine's response. "Can I come in?" He walked in after Blaine's subtle nod. "I was hoping we might be able to talk again."

"I told you everything that I remember..." Blaine planted both palms on the mattress, but Kurt leaped out of the chair and helped him sit upright before he could attempt to do it himself, earning him a half-hearted glare in the process. Detective Carson cleared his throat quietly to interrupt their little stare-down.

"Is there anything else that you can remember about them?"

"Like what?" Blaine watched Kurt until he had settled himself back into the chair beside the bed before directing his attention to the detective.

"Were they taller than you?"

"Mostly everyone I meet is taller than me," Blaine couldn't stop the overwhelming snark from contaminating his response. "I'm... sorry. I've had a few problems with—I didn't mean to say that... out loud..."

"It's alright," Detective Carson gave him an understanding smile. "So they were?" Blaine nodded. "About how much taller, would you say?"

"Maybe around Kurt's height?"

"Okay. What else?"

"I don't—I don't know," he pressed his thumb into his right temple and stretched his index and middle fingers across his forehead. "They were wearing, um—" he used both of his hands to mime putting up a hood. "Um..."

"Hooded coats?"

"Not coats—sweatshirts."

"Okay, okay, good, Blaine," Detective Carson jotted everything down into a small, leather bound notebook.

"How is that good? It's practically nothing to go on," Blaine furrowed his brows in bewilderment. Beside him, Kurt was trying his best to keep his hands to himself.

"Hooded sweatshirts in the winter, but no coats? Makes me think these were kids closer to your age."

"Rebellious teenagers?" Kurt joked, but there was no laughter or playful air to his back up his words.

"Something like that," Detective Carson smiled sympathetically and Kurt couldn't help but notice how often he smiled to try to ease the tension in the room. "Anything else, Blaine? Did you see their hair at all? Their eyes?"

"I think one of them had black hair. Or—or maybe it was brown? I—it was so dark—I can't—"

"It's okay, it's alright. Possibly dark haired, I'll leave it at that. Can you remember if there was anything on their clothing? Sports logo? If it was an unusual colour?"

"There was... something. In the middle of all of them. Words, maybe? Or—I mean, they looked like... like the kind you wear to show school pride? I don't know why I thought of schools, I can't remember what it was exactly, but it felt like a—like a school sweatshirt," he cradled his head in both hands. "Oh, that doesn't make any sense, does it?"

"Shh," Kurt cooed softly and slid his hand over Blaine's back. "You're doing great, Blaine."

"You are. It doesn't have to make sense, just tell me anything that comes to mind. It might seem like it doesn't make sense now, but you never know—something could turn up and explain it," Detective Carson encouraged.

"I think that's everything," Blaine slowly lifted his head. "Yeah, I think that's it."

"Okay, Blaine. I'm going to do everything I can to catch these guys, understand? I refuse to let them get away with this."

Blaine nodded his acknowledgment of the statement, but showed no other emotion past basic understanding. He'd gone from polite to virtually robotic in his persona, something that deeply worried Kurt as he witness the gradual transition.

"They tell me you might get out of here today?" Detective Carson slid the small notebook into his coat pocket.

"Yeah," Kurt replied when Blaine didn't.

"That's great news. You must be excited to head home." Small talk. They had arrived at small talk.

"Uh, yeah," Blaine replied hesitantly, his words tangible and close but his mind could not have been farther away. "I'm—yeah..."

Detective Carson looked to Kurt uneasily, who responded with furrowed brows and sad eyes shimmering dimly under the unflattering fluorescent lighting. "Is it okay if I leave my card for you, Blaine?"

But Blaine had mentally checked out for the remainder of the conversation. He seemed to have developed a particularly strong interest in the wall to his right and kept his fists balled up tightly, clenching sections of the bed sheet between them. Kurt extended his hand for the card and thanked the detective; they exchanged one more mutual look of disquietude and then Detective Carson was out the door.

"What home?" Blaine suddenly mumbled, almost inaudibly.

Kurt crammed the card into his pocket and worked his fingers into the backs of Blaine's hands, trying to ease him into loosening his grip on the sheet. He knew he should say something to reassure Blaine, something along the lines of, *'Your home with me and my family, of course,'* or anything at all, but he remained quiet. An uncertain promise was the same as an empty one, in his opinion, and he couldn't bring himself to guarantee comfort for Blaine when he didn't know if it was something he—or anyone—could actually offer. The future, distant and near, was so unbearably unclear for them and in that moment Kurt would have given anything to be able to bless Blaine with just one certainty; one thing for him to be able to cling to and know, beyond any shadow of a doubt, to be undeniably true. But he couldn't. And so unbearable silence overtook the unbearable uncertainty and they were left to feel irreparably broken once again.

When Kurt didn't reply Blaine simply believed he hadn't actually expressed his sentiment aloud—the silence had betrayed and misled him. And as the muscles in his hands were forced to submit themselves to Kurt's superior, skilled fingers Blaine carried on in hurried, breathy whispers, not once questioning whether or not his thoughts belonged only to him. "Nobody's there, no one that cares; I'm going to be by myself if they send me home. I can't do this, I can't fucking do this. What am I going to do? They're going to leave me all alone?"

Kurt became paralyzed as he listened; his motionless hands still covered Blaine's.

"I can't be alone with these thoughts again. What's going to happen?"

"Blaine?" Kurt's scratchy voice soared along a sharp whisper, slicing through Blaine's panic and permeating the air around them. In return, two miniature galaxies—perfect replicas both in colour and the unfathomable secrets they held—aligned themselves up with the endless oceans that were Kurt's eyes. "You're not alone."

## Chapter Six

Another gentle rapping against the door interrupted their intimacy. Blaine made no effort to avert his eyes to the entryway; whoever it was that requested his attention would just have to wait because right now the only thing rushing through his jumbled mess of a brain was, *'Oh god, how much of that did he hear?'* It was enough to elicit a solemn tear at first and then his anxieties kicked in at full steam ahead, demanding waterworks to accompany the series of fireworks exploding spontaneously across the scarred terrain that he could just barely refer to anymore as his "head." Kurt held his gaze, with glassy eyes that appeared to have aged far beyond his years, for a few more seconds until the sound of someone clearing his or her throat had made him falter. Kurt swallowed thickly and still felt an insoluble lump at the back of his throat; he looked towards the door to see a lanky, very tall—possibly 6' tall, to be precise—pale woman with emerald cat-like eyes shining brightly behind a pair of oversized, thick, black rimmed, plastic framed glasses. Her entire appearance screamed, *"Psychiatrist! I'm a psychiatrist!"* as loudly as it possibly could; Blaine and Kurt received the message with absolutely no chance of miscommunication. She gave them both a gentle smile—with thin lips coated in a red far too intense for her complexion, Kurt thought—and introduced herself as Doctor MacManus; her name was irrelevant to Blaine, he knew exactly what she was and what it was that she wanted—what use was a name to him when this was surely going to be a one time thing, a formality before he was cleared to go home.

"Stupid," he thought aloud. "So stupid."

"Blaine," Kurt reprimanded him with quiet concern, but he knew it wasn't actually Blaine's fault.

"Stupid," Blaine repeated for good measure. "Do we really have to do this? I'm fine."

"Then it shouldn't be a problem and we'll be finished in no time," she walked in, clutching a wooden clipboard to her flat chest. "Kurt, right?" She turned to Kurt as his expression took sharp turn towards incredulous in response to Blaine's brunt attitude.

"Uh, yeah?"

"Would you mind stepping out for a few minutes while I talk to Blaine?" She asked with a sort of feigned politeness that Kurt picked up on immediately, but there was nothing he could do. He took Blaine's right



hand into his own and rubbed the back of it with his thumb before looking at Doctor MacManus. The emeralds seemed to have been serpents in disguise, and they slithered maliciously before him now, flicking their tongues and revealing poisonous fangs.

"Um," Kurt said quietly and looked to Blaine. "Uh yeah, of course."

Blaine's eyebrows drooped sadly; every time they thought they would get more than a few minutes with each other someone else kept coming along to squelch the possibility. Doctors, friends, police officers, nurses... and now this. Kurt furrowed his own eyebrows and pressed his thumb into the back of Blaine's hand again. "I'll see you soon, okay? You're almost out of here, it'll get better from here on out."

"Will it?" Blaine had meant to keep the question to himself. *'What the hell is wrong with me? Did I say that out loud? Am I saying this aloud right now? He isn't looking at me like I am.'*

Kurt gave him a weary smile. "Of course it will." He leaned over and carefully wrapped his arms around Blaine, intending to keep the hug brief and gentle—Blaine, on the other hand, had other plans; he drew Kurt in close, gritting his teeth past the pain, and gave his best effort in tightly securing him there. He wasn't trying to keep Kurt there as if it would deter Doctor MacManus from picking apart his brain until later; the proximity between them—or rather, lack thereof—made his actions almost involuntary. He just needed Kurt there, needed to feel at home for however long he could before he was going to have to be subjected to this woman's interrogation. When Kurt's body went limp at first, Blaine feared he may have taken things a step too far, may have just pushed Kurt a little too much with this.

"Blaine," Kurt breathed into his ear. "I don't want to—"

And as Blaine started to let his own limbs become lifeless... "I can't see where you're bruised—I don't want to hurt you," Kurt rushed out in a hurried whisper upon noticing Blaine's disappointment.

"It's okay," Blaine closed his eyes and put his last surge of strength into squeezing Kurt tightly again, heart flutter with a tamed hope. "See you soon."

Kurt nodded and straightened up, casting daggers at Doctor MacManus that only conveyed one clear meaning: *I swear to god, if you upset him you'll have to deal with me.* She smiled politely again, tight-lipped and so vomit-inducingly fake that Kurt would have preferred it if Coach Sylvester—a master herself in the art of feigned kindness—had a degree in psychology and was the one analyzing Blaine; while the same

dangerous snakes appeared in her eyes as well, at least Sue Sylvester had had lapses of true human emotion. Either Kurt was being paranoid now or he really had seen the devil in this woman's eyes; leaving Blaine alone with her was the absolute last thing that he wanted to do, but he kept reminding himself, *'One more hurdle. After this we can take him home. After this things will start to look up again.'* He smiled reassuringly at Blaine once more and then he was out the door on his way back to the waiting room where a solitary soul awaited him.

Sam was currently in school, as was Tina, Britney and the rest of Blaine's friends; Kurt's parents were more than likely at work; Finn was still filling in for Mr. Schuester at McKinley as fearless leader of Glee club; and Cooper had decided to pay a visit to his old residence, having volunteered to gather some of Blaine's things to bring over to the Hummel residence; Puck... Kurt wasn't entirely sure where Puck may have disappeared to; which left Santana Lopez—dressed to the nines, compared to the state of the other inhabitants surrounding her, in skintight blue denim jeans, a cream-coloured camisole, and a silver-studded leather jacket—sitting before him, her legs crossed and a nervous, but genuine, half-smile screwed onto her face. Her presence was actually a breath of fresh air for Kurt; at least she would let him rant and rave all he wanted about Doctor MacManus.

"How long have you been sitting out here?" He took a seat beside her and buried his hands within the front pocket of one of his old pullover hoodies, one that he hadn't worn since he left for New York.

"I lost track; long enough to snoop through five different patients' rooms without anyone noticing and to steal a lab coat from one of the doctor's lockers."

Kurt blinked slowly, not really certain if she was being serious or not, but the flaw in his logic was realised rather quickly—it was Santana, of course she was being serious. As if he was reciting his thoughts aloud like Blaine, Santana—noting his initial doubt—pulled out some of the white fabric from her bag for Kurt to see. It was definitely a lab coat. She stuffed it back in and shrugged, "I had to do something to keep myself occupied while you and hobbit kissed and made up."

"We didn't," Kurt stated flatly and she shrugged again.

"Not yet, huh?"

"Not yet," he repeated quietly.

"From what Britney's told me he's been beating himself up ever since this whole mess started," she stretched her legs out in front of herself and tapped her heels against the floor a few times.

"And it took someone else beating him up for me to come see him and decide to give him a chance to explain," Kurt continued in the same flat tone of voice. "I don't really know how I feel about... anything involving *that* right now. I don't really want to talk about it, Santana. I just want to focus on his recov—"

"Bullshit," she tapped her heels against the floor again and repeated the word slowly, in time with each loud *click!* "Bull-Shit. You're trying to numb yourself out and pretend you don't know how to feel about it. Because it's easier than realizing, 'Maybe he isn't the only one who fucked up in this relationship.' It's a goddamn copout, Hummel. And you know it."

"As much as I would love to hear you go on and on about my shortcomings—" Kurt began with over-the-top flair and feigned appreciation for her pointing them out. "Oh wait, that's right— I fucking wouldn't. So, can you please just... stop? Just... not now, Santana. Not right now. I'm stressed as it is with everything else. The last thing I need is—"

"I think this is the first thing you need," she interrupted and sat up so abruptly that her back cracked loudly in the process. This didn't seem to faze her at all though. "I know you're living with Berry now, but that's no excuse for letting her rub off on you."

"Excuse me?" Kurt blinked and replied breathlessly. "What the hell are you even talking about?"

"Saint Berry, who thinks she can do no wrong. Has she been telling you to just move on and forget about him too?"

"I am not like Rachel—"

"Do you think you did anything wrong in your relationship?" She folded her arms over her chest.

"No," Kurt said, unable to keep his moodiness from infecting his reply. "Yeah, things were hard for us, but I never cheated on him."

"I didn't ask you if you cheated on him, Kurt," she shook her head, disappointed.

*'As if she has any right to be disappointed in me,'* Kurt thought bitterly and gritted his teeth.

"I asked you if you think you did anything wrong—at any point—in your relationship."

*'Ignored some of his calls and texts.'* Kurt bit his lip; when he thought about how guilty the action must have been making him seem he quickly corrected himself and jutted his lower lip out again. *'I didn't really listen when he wanted to talk about how hard a long distance relationship was going to be. I just brushed off things that I didn't want to talk about. I put my work first a few times. Missed a few Skype dates...'* He cleared his throat quietly and stared directly at her face, "I said no."

She shook her head again and he couldn't take it anymore. "What the fuck? Don't give me that look. Why are you even here? You don't care about anyone—you can't care about anyone—so what the hell is this even about?"

"You guys are my friends," she replied simply, as though she had anticipated exactly what Kurt's reaction was going to be and none of it surprised her in the slightest. "And my family."

"Since... when?" Kurt was starting to get plain angry at this point; tragedy really did seem to bring out the "best" in people, with their sudden concerns and claims to having cared all along. All of it made him sick.

"I have a fucked up way of caring about people, I know. I don't need to explain it. I really do... you know... love you two. Even Berry and all of the other dweebs—you repeat any of this to anyone though and I'll—"

"Yeah, I know," Kurt rolled his eyes, still doubtful.

"I know you don't believe that you didn't screw up too, you're not that naïve or stupid. I'm not trying to say it's more your fault or more his—but you have to take a step back and realise he must have been in a pretty bad place to do what he did. I know that pretty much every single one of us has cheated or been cheated on, but you two were different, you know?"

"Maybe it's Glee club that corrupted him then," Kurt snorted, trying to find some miniscule form of humour to lighten the discussion.

"Yeah, maybe," she laughed lightly and looked at her knees. There was something vulnerable and unrecognisable in the way she presented herself, something that raised too many questions in Kurt's already crowded mind. She rested her palms on the chair and slid her hands under her thighs. "He's not the same anymore, Kurt. From what everyone tells me. And I'm not saying it's up to you to piece him back

together, or whatever, but something's going on with him. Britney says no one else has really noticed it though—"

"Yeah well, I mean, it's Britney. She has a tendency to say..." Santana lifted her head and gave him a warning look. "Some pretty weird things out of the blue."

"She knows about these sort of things, Kurt. It's like her superpower. Think what you will of her, but she can tell when people are hurting. And she's noticed it from way before Blaine stuck his dick in someone else's—"

"I think I'm starting to get an idea of what it is, to be honest." He cut her off before he had to hear the rest and she tilted her head quizzically. Kurt took it as his cue to continue. "Well," he rubbed the back of his neck, "His parents haven't shown up yet. Not once. He never really spoke about them much and I've really only ever seen them maybe once or twice, I think he's just been miserable at home. And probably really lonely since I left, we used to hang out all the time but he was always out of the house."

"I figured he was 'Mr. Perfect' to mom and dad just like he is at school," she seemed very taken aback by Kurt's information. He shrugged nonchalantly, trying to quell the anger he was always beginning to feel whenever anyone mentioned them nowadays. "So, you're not just going to jerk him around and fuck with his head, are you?"

"Jesus, Santana," Kurt's voice rose about three octaves, attracting the attention of an elderly woman across the room.

"Lack of tact, yeah, I know what you're going to say," Santana carried on while Kurt gave his best apologetic expression to the woman. "But like I said, I care about both of you—I don't want to see him hurting and I don't want to see you hurting either. So if you're doing this because you feel guilty, because you think you need to... don't. You won't be doing him or any of us any favours."

"I had no idea it was about the rest of you too," Kurt said coolly. "I'm here as his friend, okay? That's it. Not as his ex, not as his boyfriend—his friend. So I'd appreciate it if you kept your nose out of our business, because even if we were getting back together that's between me and Blaine. It doesn't involve you, or Britney, or my parents or anyone else. Christ," he exhaled angrily. "Why the hell are we the goddamn poster couple for everyone?"

At that, Santana smiled—pathetic and smug all at once—and stretched her legs out in front of her again. "You just don't get it, lady Hummel."

"Get what?" he clenched his teeth, extremely annoyed with how she acted like she knew everything about them. Rather than answer she started whistling the first verse of Come What May; Kurt's heart sank straight to his stomach and they spent the remainder of their time together without uttering a single word.

"So, Blaine," Doctor MacManus took a seat beside the bed and rested the clipboard on her knee. Blaine let his eyes linger on the array of black and white that he could see before tilting his head back slightly to look at her. "From what I understand, this isn't the first time that you've been attacked."

"No," he breathed out quietly and even the solitary word sounded achy and old.

"I'd like to talk about that," she touched the end of her pen to her lips and thoughtfully studied the information before her.

"No," Blaine repeated.

"Then let's talk about this attack," she kept her eyes on the paper.

"I don't want to talk about any of them. I don't want to be here anymore," he said, stubbornly.

"Don't want to be here anymore?" she asked with such feigned, sweet innocence that piranhas stirred wildly in Blaine's belly and began wildly snapping their teeth into every inch of his stomach lining.

"You're twisting my words—"

"So you aren't, nor have you ever felt, suicidal?" She lowered the pen and watched him with challenging eyes, begging him to say no, *hoping* he was going to try to contradict her.

"No," Blaine fell into her trap anyways.

"I have a note here in your file about a drug overdose when you were..." she flipped the page with such sadistic satisfaction; she knew exactly what it said without needing to reference it, this was almost like a cruel game for her to play. "Fourteen."

*"Blainey, I was going to head to the mall, do you want to take a ride with me?"*

"I..." Blaine whispered.

"And your brother found you?" She continued, replacing the pen cap to her lips.

*"Blainey? Are you in—Blaine? Blaine! Oh god, wake up. What did you do? Blaine, what did you do...?"*

Blaine closed his eyes and tried to squelch the memory. He had just transferred to Dalton, but nothing had really changed: the bullying, the teasing, the cliques and cruelty—it was all the same. Cooper had flown home to visit directly after the Sadie Hawkins incident had occurred and kept coming up with excuses to stick around for *"Just a little longer."* It had been a particularly rough day for Blaine about a two weeks after he had started at Dalton and before he knew it he was in his bedroom after school with a handful of his mother's Xanax travelling down his throat; if Cooper hadn't still been home...

He gulped loudly and shook his head, keeping his eyes closed. "Look," he said softly, "I'm angry, but I'm not going to kill myself."

"Go on," she encouraged when he stopped talking. "You need my seal of approval before you can leave, Blaine. I suggest you work with me."

Her voice was suddenly gentle and, for the first time since she had entered the room, Blaine considered the fact that he and Kurt may have demonized her before actually giving her a real chance. It was as if they had imagined all of that maliciousness in the first place. She sounded genuine and when he opened his eyes there was a sort of tranquility evaporating off her skin that spread like a cancer throughout the room.

"That was—it was a mistake," Blaine resigned to her suggestion. "I didn't mean—I want to be alive."

"We'll start with that then, Blaine."

As Santana continued to tap her heels against the linoleum—while Kurt's eyebrows twitched with annoyance—Puck finally made his grand re-entrance into the waiting room, shouldering a hard-shell guitar case. Both of them watched as he walked over, grinning ear-to-ear, and placed a hand on his hip.

"What's going on? Where is everyone?"

"Dunno," Kurt answered and looked at Santana, wondering if she had run into anyone while she was waiting.

"Most of them are at school. Dunno about Kurt's parents, and I think Blaine's brother stopped by their house to pick up some stuff."

"What are you guys doing out here?" Puck asked and Kurt could already see permanent worry lines starting to form in his forehead.

"He's talking to a psychiatrist and then we find out if he can go home or not," Kurt answered and crossed his legs underneath himself, squirming around in the hard, plastic chair.

Santana nodded towards Puck's guitar questioningly before he could react to Kurt's news. "What's with the guitar?"

"Oh," he said with a hint of surprise, as though just realizing he was lugging around a very heavy guitar case. "Well, Blaine plays sometimes, doesn't he? I thought it might help. Plus it's easier than trying to get a keyboard in here."

The gesture was definitely beyond sweet, but it caused something rotten to settle in Kurt's stomach as a thought danced across his mind: *'Why didn't I think of something like that?'*

"Hey, maybe we should get everyone down here to come sing for him," Santana suggested and Kurt immediately shook his head. He knew Blaine well enough to know that the more people present to stare at him in his state of vulnerability the more miserable he would become.

"I think we should wait until he's out of here to do that. He's most likely getting out today anyways, but I don't think he's going to want a crowd of people seeing him in the shape he's in right now. Might make him feel really... embarrassed, you know?" Kurt explained.



"That makes sense, I guess," Puck agreed and set the guitar on the ground before taking a seat beside Kurt. "So what's he got to talk to a shrink for anyways?"

Though Kurt shrugged his shoulders and feigned obliviousness, he knew why; she would want to talk to him about the repeat attack, about the sexual assault, about his family, about all of the little things that set Blaine off behind closed doors and away from prying eyes. And maybe she would get a glimpse at that anger that still tormented Blaine underneath a practiced smile, or maybe he would be aware enough to conceal it the way he always had—Kurt didn't have a clue what was going to come of their meeting. It seemed easier to breach the wall that Blaine had surrounded himself with, once fortified and resilient but now flimsy and dilapidated to the point of no repair. Before this, Kurt believed he had been given access to Blaine's vulnerability before, but not like this; the more that details involving this recent attack came to light, the more he watched the life skitter away from Blaine's once animated eyes.

How could Puck and Santana understand? How could anyone? Even Kurt had to admit that he couldn't identify with Blaine's pain, as much as he wanted to heal the wounds and make the scars disintegrate. The thought of having to say goodbye to the Blaine Anderson he once knew is what made Kurt feel like his heart was trapped between a vice, tightening itself around it still—despite his screams and pleas—and injecting fear straight into his aorta. Even the Blaine that had cheated on him, Kurt could remotely recognise. Kurt didn't want to lose him, any of him: the good, the bad, the lover, the deceiver, the performer, the best friend, the fighter, the leader, the pleaser—Kurt was beginning to realise that he still wanted them. All of them. Despite the heartache that some of them had brought, they all were what created the man he was still very much in love with.

"How long have you two been waiting?"

"About an hour and a half?" Santana guessed.

"What does it matter?" Kurt finally left his thoughts to join their conversation. "God, I am just so sick of waiting around like this."

"We *could* just crash their little therapy session, you know," Santana suggested and shrugged nonchalantly.

"I don't want to do anything to jeopardize his getting out sooner," Kurt groaned. "I just..." He groaned again and leaned his head back, throwing his arm across his eyes.

"Me too," Puck lamented in agreement.

They spent the next thirty minutes or so listening to Puck pluck out soothing melodies on his guitar until more and more people began to show up. First it was Finn and the rest of the Glee club, followed by Burt, Carole, and Cooper about twenty minutes after. Even Trent, Nick, Jeff and Sebastian had made an appearance once they had heard the news that today was potentially the day of Blaine's release. Kurt stood off to the side and watched the strange ensemble of friends, all of whom were here for Blaine in ways that he probably did not even fully realize, with a mixture between wonderment and disbelief. Eventually Burt, Carole and Cooper approached him.

"Hey, kiddo. Hanging in there?" Burt patted Kurt's shoulder gently.

"Yeah. Were you two at work?" Kurt tore his eyes away from Sebastian and Puck—chatting like they were the oldest of friends—and looked up at his father.

"No. Actually," Burt began but Carole rushed to finish for him.

"We were putting together the guest room for Blaine and Cooper to use."

"I talked to my roommate back in Cali," Cooper continued. "He's going to be sending some of my things over so I don't have to fly back and forth."

In another moment of surrealism, Kurt felt himself begin to hover above his own body and wondered how on earth this could possibly be his life.

"Kurt?" Burt rubbed Kurt's shoulder reassuringly. "Are you alright?"

"Dad, I'm so scared," Kurt redirected his gaze to the assortment of Blaine's visitors and whispered, unwilling to hide behind a mask of strength.

"He's surrounded by people who love him," Burt replied quietly with softened eyes. "That's all we can really offer right now."

"I just hope it's enough, you know?" Kurt pulled his shirtsleeve over his hand and touched it to his watering eyes. "I just really hope it's enough."