



by
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Klaine // (NC-17) Dom/Sub AU

Everybody already knows what they are before their marking day. You're a Dom, or you're a Sub, and it's pretty easy to figure out which one you are once puberty hits and the hormones kick in.

But when Kurt Hummel is marked a Dom on his sixteenth birthday, nobody believes it. The jocks (all Doms themselves), irritated that they have no power over him, decide to make his life a living hell. But, Kurt figures, that's just high school. It doesn't change anything.

The only problem is, one of the jocks is a boy he doesn't know. A boy he never sees, shy and hidden behind the others in a sea of letterman jackets.

Blaine Anderson is a Sub, but nobody knows it.

And he was just fine keeping it that way, until he saw Kurt Hummel.

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No Envy, No Fear

CHAPTER ONE

Kurt smiled, tasting skin with parted lips, mouthing patterns against muscle. He pressed his tongue flat, paid attention, got lost in the warm salt taste of sweat and the noises coming from above.

"Shh," he said softly, trailing small kisses down the crevice of a thigh. "You're so good for me. Do you want to come, baby?"

There was another soft whine above him, and he felt the muscles under his fingers flutter and tremble.

"Please-"

Kurt pressed a wet, open-mouthed kiss against the soft curve of his belly, gently squeezing and stroking the heavy cock in his hand.

"I love you, you know," he whispered. "You're so beautiful. And you're mine."

"Yours," the voice agreed breathlessly. "Oh god- *Ku-*"

Kurt jolted awake in bed, torn from his dream and thrashing once against his sheets like he'd stepped off an invisible cliff.

He blinked at the plain white ceiling above, startled from the sudden rise to consciousness and the lingering heat in his veins. His hand flexed absently under the blankets, and he twitched at the sudden friction, realising he'd been palming himself through his pyjamas in his sleep.

With a groan, he rolled over and buried his face in his pillow, drawing it tight around his head with both arms as he fought to ignore the ache in his hips.

Every damn morning.

He resigned himself to the familiar unsatisfied feeling of being too hard and too shaky, coming off the scattered remains of the fantasy he kept tucked at the back of his mind. It's not like it didn't make sense. He was newly eighteen, his body had needs he wasn't fulfilling.

It didn't mean he had to like it.

Still, it was the same almost every day; the shudder-shock into consciousness, the lingering memories of someone who was his, someone he *owned*, open and pliant under his hands.

He was marked at sixteen, just like everybody got marked at sixteen, but he'd laughed it off the moment they'd finished the brand. It didn't matter what they said he was, what title or mark they gave him, he was still Kurt. He was still the same person, and a cuff around his wrist or the full dark star under the curve of his ear (proclaiming to the world that he was, in fact, Dominant) didn't change that.

It certainly hadn't stopped the jocks from throwing him into dumpsters or slamming him into lockers.

Still, he'd been relieved, to say the least, when they gave him his designation; being a Dom meant never falling under anyone's control. But it opened up a whole new world of worries and fears, a whole new world of expectations that he didn't ever want to have to meet.

He knew what he was *meant* to feel, what he was supposed to want, at his age. He should have been eagerly awaiting Alignment day, should have been aching for a Sub of his own. But the idea filled him with dread, more than anything else.

Kurt knew he didn't want a Sub. He wanted a *boyfriend*, not a living, breathing sex toy. He wanted someone to hold his hand, to curl up with in bed with and watch movies and eat popcorn, to hold on lonely nights. He wanted love.

His subconscious, however, seemed to have other ideas.

As he rolled over onto his back he sighed heavily, letting his head tilt against the pillow. Remnants of his dream scattered behind his eyelids with every blink, the memory of that taste on his tongue, the feeling of a warm, heavy cock in his hands, the beautiful sounds on the air. The feeling of control, of holding someone so close to the edge. *You're mine.*

His dick twitched in his pants, and he tensed slightly, throwing an exasperated look south.

"Are you done?"

You're talking to your penis, a voice in his head scolded him quietly.

With another groan, he dragged himself out of bed and padded quietly to the bathroom.

By the time he'd dressed and had breakfast, scooping up his keys and pushing through the front door, he knew he'd be early again. It didn't matter so much anymore; any fear of going back to McKinley High each day had ebbed away the moment he was marked.

The disbelief that had swept through the school at the revelation of his mark was fairly unsurprising; he knew everybody always made the same assumption the moment they met him. But the bullying had grown even worse after that - the jocks were exclusively Doms by nature, and they'd come to a consensus that Kurt's status was something of an insult.

You don't deserve to wear that mark, they'd said, so many times. *No weak-ass fag like you will ever get a Sub.*

He never quite had the nerve to turn and spit back that he didn't want one.

In truth, even after the brand, he'd never thought much about it. Consciously he didn't want to tie anybody down, control them and own them, just as much as he'd known pre-marking that he didn't *ever* want to be owned. The thought had made him shiver with discomfort every time it rose up in the back of his mind, the what-if, the fear of the chance they'd brand his neck with a hollow star.

But his was filled, coffee-stain brown and small, tucked behind his jawbone; the beautiful reminder that they could knock him down, or throw him around, but they could never own him. Now all they had were fists and words.

In the mornings, before the rush and the bell, the school was almost serene. The quiet halls, the bright posters and distant footfalls of the occasional early-comer betrayed the turbulence that came soon after the hour clicked over. He liked the buildings better this way, hollowed out and teeming with quiet ghosts; the bones of his so-far somewhat unpleasant adolescence stripped bare. He could almost forget the screech of running shoes on polished floors, the reason for the dent in the third locker from the left.

Almost.

He was curled up in a seat in the choir room, content to read his magazine and let the time slip by before school began, when he registered the faintest sense of being watched. His head jerked up, eyes darting around to try and catch whoever was there. The room was empty.

If he wasn't already looking, he wouldn't have caught it: a flash of red, a sleeve disappearing around the corner of the door. He straightened instantly and scooped up his bag, stuffing his magazine back in it and flipping the catch shut as he scrambled for the exit. The last thing he needed was for one of the neanderthals to find him on his own.

By the time the starting bell rang, his heartbeat had slowed, comforted by the sea of loud and chattering students

as they gathered and dispersed again to the morning classes.

Come lunch he filled his tray and found an empty chair near his fellow Glee club members, sliding into his seat gracefully and crossing his legs.

"- but that's why we have it all planned out," Rachel was saying, waving her fork purposefully. "Down to the letter. It's going to be beautiful."

"What's that?" Kurt asked absently, focused on his salad.

"Finn's presentation," Rachel said, turning back to Mercedes. "I want to make it very public, very clear, he-"

"Wait, what are you talking about?" Kurt cut her off, eyes narrowed. A tiny thrill of panic rode up his spine. "Presentation?"

"Next week," Tina said, glancing between Kurt and the two girls. "Alignment day?"

Kurt boggled. "That's next *week*?"

"It's going to be very classy," Rachel went on, irritated that the focus had been pulled from her plans. "He'll come to me in the morning, in the hallway outside of the choir room right before the bell. I'll be dressed in classical black, elegantly perched on one of the seats, and he'll drop to his knees and hold out his hands and oh," she pressed a hand to her chest. "The whole school will be able to see his love and devotion to me."

Kurt's fork was lingering in the air with lettuce skewered on the end, and he dropped it back to his plate with a dull thud. "There goes my appetite."

"Kurt, don't be like that," Tina pleaded gently. "Some of us just - want it to be special, you know?"

Kurt blinked at her before he glanced quickly to Mercedes and Rachel, both of whom were avoiding eye contact.

"I'm guessing all three of you have plans for next week, then?"

"Mike and I are going to be quiet," Tina reassured him. "No big display, just the two of us."

"Sam's presenting at Glee club," Mercedes offered with a shrug. "He wanted to sing first."

"Of course he did," Kurt sighed, pushing his salad around.

"You never know," Rachel said, leaning in. "You keep yourself available, you stay sitting down, someone could come."

"Right," Kurt drawled, rolling his eyes. "Because clearly, every boy in this school has eyes for me. I'm just fighting them off over here."

"It'll happen, Kurt," Mercedes insisted.

"I don't want it to," he said simply.

Rachel gripped his arm, surprised. "What do you mean you don't want it to?"

"I mean," Kurt said, brow lifting as he folded his arms on the table. "I don't want a Sub. I want to finish school, and get good grades, and get out of this place. Go to New York, like we planned. Have a boyfriend, some day, but a Sub? No."

"We're not that bad," Tina mumbled.

"Oh, no," Kurt turned to her, holding out a hand in apology. "It's not - I don't mean it like that. I just... it's not for

me."

"Kurt, I know how stubborn you can be," Mercedes began. "But there's someone out there who was meant for you. Who's yours. And when you find him, you'll change your mind. It might take awhile," she laughed, and the other girls chuckled with her, all too familiar with Kurt's stubborn streak. "But you will."

"We'll see about that."

The conversation was cut off by a sudden flash of red and yellow in his peripheral vision, and he flinched on instinct, drawing both hands up to cover his face and duck away from the impending wave of ice.

When it didn't come, he paused, blinking. He shifted in his seat and looked up at the boy in surprise.

Kurt hadn't seen him before, at least, he couldn't remember seeing him. He was medium height, with dark, gelled-down hair, and huge tea-coloured eyes that looked ... wait, was he *scared*?

Kurt likened him to a deer caught in headlights for a split second before he consciously registered the letterman jacket, and his expression dropped into a defensive glare.

"I hate to break it to you, but you walked all the way over here and forgot your slushie," he said, straightening in his seat defiantly.

The boy didn't move, wide-eyed and pinned to the spot. He swallowed audibly, and his lips parted for a moment before they slammed shut again.

"So the plan was to stare at me like some kind of stunned, oil slicked woodland animal?" Kurt asked, peering around to try and pinpoint the other jocks. They weren't there.

That's strange...

"N-no, I-"

"Spit it out," Kurt snapped, glaring.

The boy drew a sharp, ragged breath, pawing at his jacket helplessly for a moment as he backed up a step and his eyes fell. "I'm just, I wanted to -"

Kurt's brow lifted expectantly.

"I'm Blaine," he offered so quietly Kurt barely caught the words.

"Fascinating, but I'm fairly sure I won't be able to tell you apart from the other cavemen when you get together for your bi-weekly Kurt Hummel dumpster toss tomorrow."

"Th-that- no, I never," Blaine tried to offer up an explanation through staggered, nervous breaths, but Kurt cut him off.

"Do you actually have anything to throw at me today, or is this just checking in to make sure I'm in high spirits before the next round?"

"I should go," Blaine said softly, face screwing up as he stumbled backwards and took off across the cafeteria.

A few people stopped to watch him scurry away, glancing back to Kurt to see what all the fuss was about. Kurt simply turned back to the table, ignoring them.

He was two bites into his salad before he realised the others were staring. "What?" he said around a mouthful.

"I thought our periods were due at the end of the month," Mercedes teased.

"That was *mean*, Kurt," Tina scolded him quietly.

"He's a jock," Kurt said, exasperated. "He was probably one of the ones who tied me to the flag pole last week, you want me to make nice?"

"You didn't have to be so..." Tina's eyes fell to the table. "I mean, he just wanted to be friends, I think. He introduced himself."

"Blaine Anderson," Rachel said, nodding. "He transferred this year. He's on the swim team. Finn said he was nice."

"I don't care," Kurt said flatly. "At best, he was a diversion so the others could do something. None of them are here, and I personally do *not* want to know what they're up to."

Mercedes leaned in slightly. "Did you stop to think that maybe he was coming to talk to you *because* the others aren't here?"

Kurt froze, mouth wrapped around his fork. He blinked, and drew the lettuce off the tines to chew it thoughtfully. "No, why would he?"

"He wasn't bad looking," Tina insisted. "And what if he's gay?"

"He did have a *lot* of product in that hair of his," Mercedes added.

Kurt huffed in annoyance. "Yes, when every gay teen comes out they send us a congratulatory gift basket stuffed with hair product, a subscription to Vogue and tickets to *Wicked*."

"You know what I mean," Mercedes said, rolling her eyes.

"It doesn't matter," Kurt insisted as he clipped the lid back on his lunch. "They can try whatever they want, but they can't touch me. This is senior year. Alignment day or not, I'm getting out of here."

"Of course you are," Rachel said. "We are."

"Then can we stop making out like Alignment day is the beginning and the end of the universe, please?" He pulled himself up out of his seat, gathering his bag. "It's just a day."

"Kurt, what happens if someone does present to you?" Rachel asked carefully.

Kurt stared at her, pressing a hand to his chest and tilting his head. "Then I will personally buy the devil some snow shovels."

Mercedes laughed into her chicken as Kurt turned on his heel and swept away, shaking his head at the lunacy of it all.

Alignment day.

It didn't mean anything. It was just for show, just pomp and presentation, just a way for Doms to feel important. Every year, the over-eighteens would sit around like a pride of lions, preening, waiting for an over-sixteen Sub to come and present.

And when one did, it was usually organised in advance - nobody wanted that kind of humiliation. Nobody wanted to be turned away.

Still, there was something about watching a Sub fall down to their knees in front of a Dom, hold out their palms and rest them there, open and waiting to be accepted, that was almost beautiful. Kurt had seen enough alignments to know it could be loving. It could be sweet, and simple, and unadorned. Or it could be sexual, and loud, and as showy as possible.

The only thing he was certain of was that it would never happen to him.

He stuffed his books in his locker when he reached it, sighing to himself. It was better that way, really. He didn't need a Sub. He had his NYADA application, he had New York on the horizon. The rest was all just stepping stones to get there.

"Well if it isn't my favourite lady boy."

Kurt tensed at the sound of the familiar voice, turning and throwing a disinterested glance at the pack of red-jacket-clad boys behind him.

"What do you want?"

"What we want is for you to stop parading your little lady face around our hallway," Carter said, tilting his head. "But we'll settle for rearranging it."

"Oh, you're so clever," Kurt shot back. "I bet you could even turn that into a haiku."

"I'll haiku *you*."

"Gesundheit," Kurt said lightly, finishing up with his locker.

"What did you just call me?"

With another sigh, Kurt let his locker flip shut, turning around to face the proverbial music. "Can we get this over with, please?"

"Never forget, princess," Carter growled, leaning in. "We're always watching you."

"And you think *I'm* gay-"

He didn't get to finish his retort before he hit the locker full force, crumpling to the floor from the impact of Carter's shoulder and the steel behind him.

Their laughter peeled down the corridor as they shuffled away like a lumbering herd, high-fiving and jeering, and Kurt blinked for a moment while he waited for the ringing in his ears to die down.

When red flashed in his vision again he jerked back, his suspender buckles rapping on the lockers jarringly.

"No, no! I won't - it's me!"

He blinked at the huge, terrified hazel eyes staring down at him from under gelled curls.

"You again?" he groaned, narrowing his eyes.

"Are you alright?" Blaine asked, hands lingering in the air frantically, like he didn't know where to put them.

Kurt's gaze blurred and grew clear again, landing on the line of Blaine's neck. There was a small tan star, filled and just darker than Blaine's skin, resting behind his jaw. But there was something strange about it, Kurt realised as he peered through semi-focused eyes.

It was two different colours.

"Kurt?"

"M'fine," Kurt grumbled, shifting to sit up and find his feet.

Blaine held out his hand, eyes huge and desperate, alight with something that Kurt couldn't name. He felt his

breath catch at that look; he'd never seen it before, on anyone. It was raw, and innocent, and slightly helpless in a way that left his chest hollow and aching.

He ignored the offered hand and pulled himself up to his feet, stubborn till the end.

"I'm fine," Kurt repeated, fixing Blaine with an impatient glare. "Well," he tilted his head, "go on then. Catch up to your friends, I know they've probably got a high five with your name on it."

Blaine shrank visibly, curling in on himself as his hand dropped limply to his side and flexed with a tremor. He stepped back, eyes darting down to the ground and up again one more time before he stumbled over his own feet and ran down the hall.

Kurt dusted himself off quickly, fighting down the prickles of doubt that had risen in his throat. *No*, he told himself. He was certain he was right.

The boy was a jock. He was on the swim team, he wore the jacket, it all meant the same thing.

But as he watched him disappear around the corner, Kurt couldn't shake the feeling that somehow, just for a split second and without so much as speaking a word, Blaine had almost begged to hold his hand.

CHAPTER TWO

The week leading up to Alignment day had become a torturous crawl of excited whispering and chattering in every hallway, of exchanged glances and flirty gestures on every corner. The sexual energy of the entire school usually ran at a steady medium as it was, but now everything had been amplified, turned up so loud it crackled unpleasantly and grated at his senses.

He saw Blaine again on the way out of his French class a few days later, and paused to watch, unseen, from a distance.

The boy at the end of the hall, chatting eagerly with Finn, seemed like a completely different person from the frightened, deer-like creature that had tried to approach him in the cafeteria. He was bright and animated, with an open, kind face, and his shoulders were straight and even, almost confident.

Kurt took a moment to study him thoughtfully; the way his face lit up as he spoke, the way he used his hands, the way he nodded as he listened to whatever it was Finn was saying.

*Oh come on, it's Finn. It can't be **that** interesting.*

Whenever Blaine laughed, he ducked his head a little, and his eyes would scrunch up slightly at the corners. It made something in Kurt's stomach twist.

He let his gaze fall to the letterman jacket draped over Blaine's shoulders, forcing himself to focus on it, finding the bitter taste at the back of his throat that came with the association.

He's one of them.

With that, Kurt turned on his heels and disappeared down the hall, pushing any thoughts of red and yellow from his mind.

The morning of Alignment day came around at last, and he staggered out of bed after yet another vivid sex dream; this time rocking on his knees on a mattress with a body coiled, warm and tight, around his hips, paying attention to all the parts of him that he'd neglected for so long in delicious, wet dips of lips and tongue.

He came as he woke, arching up and settling back down again with a moan that soon became a growl of frustration.

After his shower, he dressed and stripped his sheets from his bed, putting them on to wash before he went to make his breakfast.

It was just one day. He just had to get through this one day, and then it was downhill to graduation. No more expectations, no more dovey love-eyes in the corridors, or random horny teens grinding against the lockers. Well, a lot less of them, at least.

He didn't realise until he was halfway through his egg-white omelette that his father's eyes were trained on him, watching carefully over the top of his coffee mug.

"What?"

"Big day," Burt said simply, resting his drink beside his morning paper.

Kurt rolled his eyes, swallowing another piece of omelette. "Not for me, it's just another tuesday."

Burt nodded, pretending to read for a long pause before he asked; "So no plans then?"

"Dad-"

"It's alright," Burt held up a hand. "You know, I didn't take a Sub on A-day, you don't have to. You've got the rest of your life. Just - if you do. You know. Want to..."

"Dad."

"You should know you have my blessing," Burt finished genuinely with a tip of his head. "Your brother he's - he's going off with Rachel, now."

"You know about their plans?" Kurt asked, narrowing his eyes.

"Of course, we talked to Misters Berry," Carole said from behind him, coming up to plant a kiss on his cheek as she shifted past to get to the sink. "Finn's moving in over there tomorrow. Now that he's going to be Rachel's, it's only right."

"You sound positively heartbroken," Kurt teased, all too aware of the handful Finn could be.

Carole chuckled, despite her playful scowl. "I'll miss him very much, thank you."

"So." Kurt shifted against the bench and looked back to his father. "If he's going, what you're saying is...?"

"We have plenty of space here," Burt confirmed. "Not that - you know - I'm saying you have to. But, if you do-"

"I don't," Kurt grumbled, finishing his omelette and turning to hand the plate to his stepmother. "But I appreciate your blanket approval."

"I trust you, kid," Burt said with a shrug. "You know all these - hormonal teenagers running around, they don't know what they really want. Not really. But you're different, okay, you're smarter. And you know what you want. And if you find someone that you deem good enough to be yours, then who am I to say no?"

Kurt blinked at him, stunned. "You're serious about this?"

Burt's lips pulled into a thin smile and he shrugged in a way that simply said, *well, yeah*.

Considering for a moment, Kurt let his eyes drift down. "I don't... have anybody," he said. "But, thank you."

"All in time, kid," Burt said with a grunt as he shifted on his seat and flipped the page of his newspaper. "You never know. Chances are someone's gonna come out of nowhere. And when they do, you'll know if they're what you want - who you want. If they are, it's gonna hit you like a freight train."

Kurt laughed humourlessly as he slipped out of the kitchen. "I doubt that."

Burt and Carole exchanged a tiny glance in his wake, but said nothing.

He switched his sheets over to the dryer and brushed his teeth before he re-emerged, waving an absent goodbye as he slipped out the front door.

The day trickled by just as slowly as the week had, stuck in slow-motion. Finn's presentation had been easily avoidable, he knew the time and place, but that didn't stop him from enduring two others before lunch, and another one while he ate.

"Will this day *never* end?" he groaned.

"There hasn't been that many this year," Tina said. "Last year was huge."

"Thank god for small graces."

"Kurt."

He lifted his head to meet the doe-eyed gaze of their school counsellor.

"Legs out, please," she instructed.

He eyed her for a moment, unsure if it was worth an argument. He knew she meant well.

"Miss Pillsbury, it's really... not necessary."

"I know that not everybody has plans for Alignment day," she began, playing with the twined silver bracelet on her wrist, the one that neatly matched the cuff he'd seen on his dentist. "But you know that it's your responsibility as a Dom to maintain a position of availability."

"Trust me, it really doesn't matter if I do," he told her dryly.

She fixed him with a pleading look, and he wondered to himself if that was the Sub in her, or the school counsellor.

"If you don't keep yourself available, you're making it unfairly difficult for a Sub to approach you," she explained. "Kurt, it's already such a huge step for them - for us - to take. For a lot of Subs it's finding a strength we never knew we had, to put ourselves out there. A little help is always an act of great kindness."

Kurt rolled his eyes, twisting in his seat and raising an eyebrow at her to ask if she was satisfied.

"Thank you," she said softly, and added as an afterthought; "Congratulations, Mercedes, Sam told me about your plans this afternoon. I'm very happy for you both."

With a bright smile, Mercedes pushed her bangs away from her eyes and straightened in her seat. Kurt probably would have found her excitement irritating if it wasn't so damn cute.

Emma turned and glided away smoothly, only to stop again several tables down. "Santana, please, legs out!"

Leaning on his elbow, Kurt returned to his lunch as he heard her voice trail off across the cafeteria.

"Are we still going out this weekend?" Mercedes asked around a tater tot. "It's been far too long since I had a Kurt Hummel make-over."

"You won't be busy with *Sam*?" Kurt teased.

"I can always make time," she said with a smile.

"Woah," Tina interrupted. "Wh- what is he doing?"

Kurt glanced over his shoulder at her. "What?"

She nodded, and he turned around to see what she was talking about.

It took him a second to recognise Blaine without the jacket; he looked so much smaller, despite the tight jeans and the red polo that clung to his chest, cutting off right at the most flattering point on his biceps to show off long, tan, well-muscled arms.

Kurt swallowed roughly, dropping his fork back onto his plate without meaning to.

He glanced back to the girls, brow furrowed in confusion, but they only shrugged at him, equally bewildered.

He didn't understand. It didn't make sense. Once you had the jacket, you didn't take it off lightly. Not unless you wanted to stand out.

When he turned around again Blaine was right in front of him, eyes huge and just as frightened as they had been

the first time.

"What are you doing?" Kurt asked quietly. "They'll see you, they-" his voice trailed off as he glanced over to the jocks' table just in time to catch the reaction.

It only took one to notice, to tug on the sleeve of another, and like a pack of hyenas suddenly they were all waiting, coiled and expressionless, to see what was going to happen.

But Blaine seemed oblivious, almost like he'd forgotten they were in a room full of people. His focus was only on Kurt as he drew a shaky breath, eyelashes fluttering wildly. Kurt noticed after a moment that he was trembling.

"What are you-?"

Kurt's heart stopped with his words when Blaine dropped to his knees.

"Oh my god," Kurt breathed, eyes wide in shock.

He heard Tina gasp when Blaine's hands raised to rest on Kurt's knees, palms up, in offer.

"Oh - I - oh my god," Kurt tipped back in his seat, lifting both hands in surprise before he realised the mistake he was making.

Like a gunshot, the echo of their D/S Ed lessons reached him just a moment too late; *to refuse a presentation, hold up both palms.*

He dropped his arms, but it was too late - a rumble tore through the cafeteria, gasps and quiet squeaks of shock riding on the air until they reached a breaking point and turned to laughter.

Blaine ripped away both hands as if he'd been burned.

"I'm s- sorry," Kurt said, at a loss for what else to say. *What just happened?!*

It had to be a trick. This was planned. This was *their* plan to humiliate him, to make him say yes to a Dom, and make him a laughing stock.

It had to be a trick.

Blaine met his eyes for a fraction of a second, just one tiny glance and Kurt felt his heart squeeze tight in his chest at the look of utter agony on his face.

He was too slow to stop Blaine from recoiling completely, head down and face drawn tight with humiliation as the laughter lifted in the room.

Kurt's entire body screamed at him to stand up, to say something, *reach out, take his hands*, but he couldn't move; still numb with shock and struggling to form a coherent sentence.

Blaine ran as fast as his feet would carry him, pushing past giggling and mortified bystanders alike to get to the hallway and escape.

Pale as a ghost and still reeling, Kurt rocked back and gripped the table, trying to breathe.

"*What just happened?*" he demanded of nobody in particular.

"Oh, *Kurt*," Mercedes breathed, hand pressed to her heart. "That poor boy."

"I didn't - I - he-" Kurt blinked rapidly, trying to process the events of last five minutes in more than just flickers of laughter and the repeating image of Blaine's heartbroken expression.

He heard a snuffle from Tina and looked up to find her crying, tucked against Mercedes' side while she rubbed at her shoulder comfortingly.

"I'm so sorry," Kurt said desperately. "I didn't mean to - it was just my first reaction, it wasn't even a conscious decision, I was surprised-"

"I know," Tina said. "I just, I can only imagine how - oh god, how that would *feel*."

"But - *why*?" Kurt asked, voice hissing and harsh on the air. "Why would he do that? It had to be a trick. He isn't even ... he's not..."

"It didn't look like a trick," Mercedes offered, meeting his eyes. "He might not have been out before, but he definitely is now. That's not something you'd do as a joke, not at this school. Kurt, I think he meant it."

"He doesn't know me!" Kurt insisted, still shocked and desperate for answers. "Why would he risk that?"

"Same reason he took of the j-jacket," Tina snuffled.

Kurt shook his head at her, asking for clarification.

"He saw how you reacted last time. He knows you hate it, what it means," she said.

"It's just a jacket, it's not worth having *them* against you," he said, glancing over to the table of jocks.

They were huddled together, deep in angry discussion and letting out far too many grunts of agreement for his liking.

"It *is* worth it," Tina insisted, drawing his attention back.

"What?"

"It is worth the risk. I know Doms don't always understand, but we ... we *know* when we want to belong with someone. *To* someone," she explained. "We'd do anything, risk anything. It's hard to find the strength to actually do it, but if that feeling is strong enough... we'd do anything."

"But he's not a Sub!" Kurt exclaimed in frustration. "At least... I think - I can't be sure. Even if he is, it can't be worth the humiliation."

"He's a Sub, trust me," Tina said. "And - it is. It's worth any price. When you know."

"He doesn't know anything!" he insisted. "He doesn't know me. It has to be something they planned. It *has* to be."

Tina fixed him with sad eyes. "Kurt, I know you don't want to hear it, but I'm telling you. No Sub would put themselves in that position if they didn't mean it."

With a frustrated sigh he pushed away his food, tugging his bag strap over his shoulder and rising from his seat. Heads turned in his direction, watching carefully, waiting for some sign that the drama was going to continue.

"Can I help you?" he spat, and watched a half a dozen of them turn away quickly.

"Kurt, calm down," Mercedes said.

He glanced back down at her. "I just - I need this day to be over, now more than ever. I'll see you at Glee."

Without waiting for a reply, he swept away from the table and out of the cafeteria quickly, managing to avoid any more unwanted attention until he reached the hallway. He tried his best to ignore the staring faces that met him around every corner, keeping his eyes locked forward and focused on his destination.

Just get through the rest of the day.

He sat through the next two classes under constant watch, feeling every set of eyes and every snicker. When he was excused from his last class of the day early, he turned in his assignment with a grateful glance at Mr Wilson - a sympathetic fellow Dom - and darted out into the hall. At the very least, he could escape to the choir room for some peace before the endless enquiries of his fellow Glee club members began.

When he rounded the corner, he stopped at the wet blue splatter on the floor, eyes following the trail of puddles to the door of the girls bathroom. He quickly side-stepped the mess, hurrying to help; he knew all too well who slushies at McKinley High were reserved for.

But instead of Rachel, Tina or Mercedes on the other side, he found broad shoulders plastered with a wet, purple-tinted shirt, hunched over a basin.

Oh.

"I'm sorry!" Blaine said, arm waving in the air as the water dribbled over his cheek. "I'm sorry, I know I'm not supposed to be here," his voice was distorted by the water, but Kurt could hear the rough edge in it still, "I'll- I just-"

"Blaine?"

Blaine froze, his entire body going rigid as he groped for the tap to shut off the water. He rose quickly, staggering back into the wall, eyes wide and red. "Kurt."

"Did *they* do this?" Kurt asked, surprised at the sudden edge to his own voice.

Blaine glanced around, but kept his gaze low, almost as if he couldn't look at Kurt directly. Kurt could feel the waves of tension radiating off him.

"Hey," Kurt said, stepping forward. "It's alright."

Blaine's face scrunched up tightly, and he pressed his body into the tile like he was trying to disappear into it, covering his eyes with his hands. "Please, just... don't look at me. Just..." he struggled to get the last word out, and until Kurt heard it, he didn't understand why.

"Go."

Kurt straightened at the command, feeling his skin prickle. His eyes trailed over the line of Blaine's neck, catching the half-filled star, now mostly a stain leaking down his skin.

He coloured it in.

He was a Sub - and with that sudden knowledge, Kurt realised the gravity of what he'd just said. Somehow, even in distress, he was strong enough to give a command to a Dom.

No wonder they'd believed him.

Backing up slowly, Kurt gave a short nod. "I'm sorry," he said hesitantly. "I'll... go."

He turned and slipped through the door, jerking to a stop at the echo of a pained sob on the other side as it slipped closed.

The sound hit him like an anvil; rushing in a sudden, screaming wave in his blood.

Frozen still, he blinked, and breathed, flexing both hands at his sides carefully and trying to understand what was happening to him. It felt familiar; instinctual and real, and *right* like nothing he'd ever felt his entire life.

It came at him like a freight train.

Protect.

His gaze flicked to his locker, and he made up his mind.

Hopping over blue puddles, he gathered what he needed and let his locker door flip shut before he made his way back to the bathroom. He paused in front of it, drawing a slow, steadying breath before he pushed through again.

Blaine jolted at the second intrusion, panicked and stumbling when he realised who it was. His hair was half-plastered to his head with water and globs of ice, his eyes and lips red from the cold.

"Shh, calm down," Kurt said softly. "I'm not going to-" his voice trailed off, unsure of what to say. *What am I doing?* "You... you're safe."

"I- I can't, I'm sorry," Blaine mumbled brokenly.

Kurt caught the fleeting memory of his old D/S Ed teacher's voice, lingering at the periphery of his thoughts; *a Sub is most at ease, most relaxed, when under the caring instruction of a Dom. Even if unclaimed.*

"Blaine," Kurt said firmly. "Look at me."

His gaze shot up instantly, meeting Kurt's eyes and holding them.

"Take these." Kurt held out the clothes he'd gathered. "They'll fit you."

With a quick glance to the maroon cardigan and striped shirt in Kurt's hand, Blaine shifted on the spot, pulling uncomfortably at the hem of his polo shirt, trying to resist.

"You should take that off," Kurt suggested, moving closer. "Or it'll wind up trickling down to your jeans. You don't want that, trust me. I've been there."

Blaine's eyes narrowed. "Wh- why are you ... helping me?"

"Nobody deserves this," Kurt said gently, looking him over to determine the extent of the damage.

"But... you..."

Blaine's voice was still too rough, too broken, and Kurt couldn't fight the sudden, overpowering instinct to reach out and touch him.

"Here," he said, dropping the clothes onto the dry end of the bench and tipping his bag off his shoulder. He closed the gap between them quickly, and Blaine stiffened in surprise for a brief moment before Kurt's hands found his shoulder and his neck.

Kurt felt the tension flood from Blaine's body instantly, muscles releasing under his fingertips as he visibly relaxed.

He let Kurt guide him down to the basin without complaint, staying still under gentle hands. Kurt waited until the water turned warm before he cupped small handfuls over Blaine's hair, running his fingers through to loosen the gel and wash away the flecks of blue.

Blaine's eyes had fallen closed, and his breathing slowed to a gentle, peaceful rise and fall as Kurt worked.

Watching closely, Kurt couldn't help but feel stupid at never having noticed him before. His dark eyelashes, fanning out over flushed skin, were stunningly long - and his hair clung to his temples in wet curls where the water had dripped away. He looked like he was sleeping, serene and utterly breathtaking even in the harsh neon glow of the bathroom lights.

Kurt felt a sudden, red-hot hollow feeling in his throat as he stared down at the boy under his fingertips. With a soft gasp he realised he'd stopped moving to stare, and resumed quickly, hoping that Blaine hadn't noticed.

When he finished, he wiped away the last of the blue stain from Blaine's neck, gathering his towel for him.

"There," he said, his voice a little too uneven as Blaine rose from the basin, eyes fixed on him from under wet lashes.

"Uh, you should - change your shirt." Kurt nodded to the small pile of clothes at the end of the bench. "The bell will ring soon, and then comes the post-class rush, you really don't wanna be in here for that."

A tiny smile flashed at the corner of Blaine's lips, and Kurt couldn't help but linger there, privately grateful for the tiny sign that he'd be okay.

He wet his own lips and studied Blaine for a moment, eyes landing on the now hollow star on his neck.

"Get changed," he instructed, voice even and strong. "I'll wait for you just outside. Then we... we should talk."

Blaine nodded his understanding, and watched as Kurt slipped out the door.

On the other side, Kurt waited, eyeing the hall clock. They had five minutes until the bell. He could be late to Glee - even if they noticed, Rachel would surely pull the focus back to herself and her newly claimed Sub. And, with any luck, he'd miss Sam's presentation as a bonus.

He could handle being late, just this once. He needed to fix this, and for that, he needed time.

Blaine emerged with two minutes to spare, looking sheepish but bright eyed, stunning in Kurt's cardigan and shirt. It was yet another side to him, Kurt realised as he raked his eyes over Blaine's frame. In just three tiny encounters he'd gone from terrified deer to confident athlete to sweet, shy gay teenager.

The silence seemed to set him on edge, however, and Kurt noticed him fiddling with the hem of the cardigan absently, gaze dropping down in doubt the same way it had before.

"It suits you," Kurt said quickly, trying for a reassuring smile.

The grin that flashed over Blaine's features was instantaneous and bright, and Kurt felt like he was seeing him for the first time.

"We got off on the wrong foot, before. I know it's a bit late, but," he held out his hand, "I'm Kurt Hummel."

Reaching out, Blaine drew a deep breath and held Kurt's eyes.

"Blaine Anderson."

CHAPTER THREE

The Lima Bean was Kurt's favourite café, quiet and tucked away from the world, and relatively unknown to the other students just yet. It was his refuge on weary mornings when he needed some place to linger before school, where nobody looked at him twice and the coffee was always good.

A part of him balked at the idea of revealing it to any of his fellow classmates, of letting go of something that felt solely his, but when their exit from the hallway was met with the bell and an endless stream of judging, snickering faces, he knew he had to get them both away from McKinley.

He'd sent off a quick text message to Mercedes before they'd left, letting her know he wouldn't make it to Glee club. By the time they pulled into the parking lot at the Lima Bean, she'd sent back her overly mothering reply, assuring him it wasn't that bad and he'd be okay, and to call her later.

Rolling his eyes, he pocketed his phone and pushed through the door, aware of Blaine's presence right behind him. The trip had been silent, but not uncomfortable; easy like silence had never really been for him before. Something told it him it *should* have been the most awkward experience in the world: the boy who'd presented to him today, who he'd refused, was now sitting down with him for coffee. Was wearing his clothes. Was smiling at him, watching him with shy eyes, almost like he couldn't believe this was actually happening.

Kurt studied him in return, stirring his latte and taking in the mess of wild curls that fell at Blaine's temples, the shape of his jaw now that it wasn't rigid and clenched anymore, the strange quirk at the edge of his mouth where his lips seemed to dip and rise again. His eyes landed on the hollow star on his neck, and Kurt felt a strange pooling warmth in his throat and his heart at the sight of it.

"Why do you gel your hair?" he asked, sipping his drink and smiling.

Blaine blinked in surprise at the topic, brow lifting slightly, but he didn't recoil even a little.

Kurt found it odd that he was impressed by that; he was waiting for Blaine to panic, or run. But he realised when he caught the amused expression on his face that *this* Blaine was the same one he'd seen at the end of the hall, talking to Finn. The startled deer was gone from his eyes now, they were intense and stunningly brown-hazel under the cafe lights. Kurt tried to put a proper name to the colour, but couldn't.

"The curls are a mess," Blaine admitted with a soft laugh, eyes dipping down to his medium drip. "They ... stand out."

Kurt cocked his head. "You don't like to be noticed, at all?"

Blaine's eyes stayed down, and his smile fell a little. "No."

"Why did you transfer?" Kurt asked, curiosity getting the better of him.

Blaine met his gaze hesitantly, but when Kurt smiled, he smiled in return and seemed to relax again.

"This past year, I ... was being home-schooled," Blaine admitted slowly. "I was-... there was an accident. I was in hospital for awhile, and right after... I was marked."

"I'm so sorry," Kurt managed to say, ignoring the strange ache in his chest. "But you're alright now?"

"I am." Blaine wet his lips before he went on. "My family thought it was best if I stayed out of school, just ... for awhile."

Kurt shifted in his seat, unable to hold the burning questions back any longer. "Blaine, I need to ask."

Blaine sat up taller, giving Kurt his full attention.

"Why did you..." Kurt searched his face, "present to *me*, today?"

Swallowing roughly, Blaine focused on the lid of his coffee cup, turning it in circles on the table. He waited, mouth opening and closing again before he found the courage to speak. "I had to."

Kurt narrowed his eyes at him, but Blaine didn't look up.

"I mean, I couldn't stop it, it's just. I'm not very good at..." He struggled for words for a moment.

"You're gay," Kurt offered.

"Yes," Blaine breathed, eyes falling closed like a weight had been lifted off of him after far too long carrying it alone.

"But you weren't out before?"

"No," Blaine shook his head, body tensing. "At least... not at this school. I wasn't ready, I had to - I mean- I- I-"

"Shh, hey," Kurt reached his hand out on instinct, finding Blaine's. "It's alright."

The contact swept through him instantly, and Kurt watched the now-familiar release in Blaine's shoulders as he stroked a thumb over the back of his hand.

Settling again, Blaine met him with a grateful expression. "Thank you."

Kurt nodded. "Did you maybe..." He tried to find the right way to phrase it without causing any more upset. "Did you present - to me - because I'm the only other gay student?"

"No," Blaine insisted immediately, voice stronger than before. "And you're... not. But, no."

"I'm not?" Kurt sat back, bewildered, and Blaine's hand groped in the air in the wake of his retreating fingers.

He sighed softly. "No, you're not. There are a few of us, at McKinley, but most of us aren't ready. Not with the football team and the hockey team and... all of them. We're not strong, like you."

Kurt smiled, bowing his head and trying to will away the blush in his cheeks.

He thought back over the fleeting memories of lunch in the cafeteria.

"You are strong, though," he offered, looking up. "You outed yourself, today, by presenting - you had to know what it would do. That - there was a chance that I... wouldn't..."

"I knew," Blaine told him. Instead of the sadness or the fear he'd expected, Blaine's voice was smooth and even, almost resigned. "I didn't want to think about it. I just - tunnel vision. I focused and I just *did*. On instinct. I knew you'd probably say no, but I just-"

Kurt watched him carefully.

"I felt like..." He searched the tabletop, drawing a steadying breath. "Like I couldn't live with myself, if I didn't at least try."

Sipping his coffee, Kurt considered Blaine's confession for a moment, remembering what Tina had told him. *If that feeling is strong enough, we'd do anything.*

He tried to ignore how fast his heart was beating.

"You don't know me, Blaine," he said earnestly. "You're sweet. But-"

Blaine's face fell.

"You don't want me, I promise," Kurt told him genuinely.

Rocking back in his chair, Blaine's expression seemed to cloud over with doubt and sadness, followed by a flash of frustration. Kurt watched him, stunned, and his eyes widened when Blaine straightened in his seat again to meet his gaze.

"You don't know much about Subs, do you?" he asked. There was no anger in his tone, or condescension. It was just a question.

Kurt shook his head.

"The worst thing," Blaine said, swallowing and trying to control his breathing, "that you can do to a Sub, is tell them they don't want what they want. Because we... we *feel* things," he managed to get out, "in our blood. We feel that need, just like you feel the need to protect. But for us, doubt is... it's a part of us like water. Feed it, and we drown."

"I'm so sorry," Kurt rushed out on a breath. "I keep screwing up, and I don't even know that I'm doing it until it's too late. I'm new to this. I don't mean it, I'm-"

"It's okay," Blaine said softly. "I know."

Kurt paused, heartsore and hesitant, afraid he'd do something else hurtful without meaning to.

"I like you," he said suddenly, unsure of where it came from.

Blaine's eyes grew wide, and his mouth fell open slightly.

"And I don't know," Kurt rushed on, spurred by the adrenaline that rose with the confession, "what I really would have done today, if I had time to actually make a decision. If I hadn't just reacted because I was shocked. I keep thinking about it and... I still don't know. Please believe me, the idea of hurting you is..." his voice trailed off before the words could get from his heart to his mouth. *I can't bear it.*

"You're protective, by nature," Blaine said evenly.

"You know a lot about this stuff?"

Blaine gave him a gentle smile. "I was home-schooled for a year, Google and I have a very close relationship."

With a soft laugh, Kurt sat back in his seat.

"I know now, that it wasn't fair," Blaine went on. "And I'm sorry that I put you in that position, I shouldn't have - but I did try to come talk to you before, to tell you-"

"Last week," Kurt acknowledged. "In the cafeteria."

"And before that, in the mornings. When you'd sit in the choir room and read," Blaine told him.

"I'm so sorry," Kurt insisted. "It was the jacket, I ... have blinders on. When I see it."

"I know." Blaine smiled openly this time. "It's just ... it's armour. For me."

At that, Kurt's face opened in surprise. So many things Blaine had said were so personal, so intimate, and the fact that he kept admitting them freely made Kurt's chest warm with something he couldn't put a name to.

"You wear the jacket, keep your hair gelled, fill in the star," Kurt summarised. "All to stay invisible."

Blaine nodded.

Kurt paused for a moment before he asked, amused. "Do you even *like* swimming?"

Laughing aloud, Blaine sat forward and ducked his head slightly. Kurt watched him, grinning at the way his eyes scrunched up.

"I do, yes," he said.

"At least there's that." Kurt laughed softly before his expression turned to one of astonishment. "I can't - god, I can't imagine what it would be like to have to hide everything like that."

Blaine shrugged, shifting uncomfortably for a moment. "I got used to it."

"That's the good thing about today," Kurt offered, and when Blaine fixed him with a questioning look, he clarified; "You don't have to hide anymore."

When Blaine's eyes grew wide again, Kurt felt a rush of affection at the hopefulness he found in them, so bright and almost innocent, suddenly awake to new possibilities.

He hadn't realised that he didn't have to hide now, not behind a jacket, or a fake brand. He didn't have to stay quiet, and fade into the background. People knew the truth, all the damage was done. If nothing else, it gave him the freedom to be himself.

Kurt should have known it wouldn't be that easy.

He'd dropped Blaine off after their coffee, smiling as he pulled away from the Andersons' two storey house and headed back home, singing along to the radio.

Everything felt so serene, like his messed up, patchwork world was slowly sewing itself together. Somehow, even after the unexpected humiliation and shock of Alignment day, he'd found an ally in in the rubble, of all places, in the halls of McKinley High.

Blaine was there for lunch each day after that, always in the seat beside him, chatting animatedly about some magazine or TV show they both enjoyed. The world dripped away, when Blaine started talking, the sound and the blur of everybody else became the background. The shy, frightened Sub side to him only ever came out when doubt crept in, but it fled again in an instant when Kurt would reach out and graze his hand, or brush a curl back over his ear absently, like it was something they'd always done.

Somehow the jarring misstep of Alignment day had pulled the covers off of him, and now more than ever he seemed so real; just a flawed and sweet boy who was trying to be okay with being himself. He smiled more, something that made Kurt stare at him in wonder, amazed as to how someone could smile so often after everything that had been thrown at him.

After a few days he'd wound up resting his hand on the back of Blaine's neck every other time they were together, stroking at his hair without consciously realising it. It was something he'd seen others do before, a gesture of friendship from a Dom to a Sub. The times he'd watched Puckerman stroking fondly at Sam's hair in Glee club had left him smiling to himself so often. From what he'd seen, depending on the situation, it could be as simple as a *hello* or as complex as a caring embrace for a Sub in pain. It was, at the very core, an act of familiarity and comfort.

Blaine hadn't jerked away once, hadn't frozen under his touch, only ever leaned into it like he'd felt it coming. He never questioned it, never asked for or expected any more than just that tiny act.

Kurt wondered if this is what it felt like to have a best friend.

As the week passed into the next, they made plans for the weekend, tickets to a play and movie plans for the weekend after that. He was in the middle of wondering to himself how one horrible day could have turned into the

best week of his life when he realised what was missing.

The jocks had left him alone since A-day. There hadn't been so much as a shoulder-check in the hallway.

He tried to shrug it off, ignore it and let it slide. They were probably just bored of him by now, nothing more.

But when Blaine didn't show up for school on Friday, he couldn't help the fear that crawled into his chest and settled over his heart, coiled around his lungs and clinging tight.

He called over and over through the morning and sent text messages intermittently as the day tumbled on far too slowly. By lunch he felt strangely numb, tight and ready for a fight without knowing why. When he reached his table and caught the sea of letterman jackets and smirking faces staring at him from across the room, he felt like he couldn't breathe.

What have they done?

He tried Blaine's cell again, listening to the soft tones of his voice on his answering message.

"Blaine, are you okay? You're scaring me," he said, barely registering the words were leaving his mouth.

In a sudden surge of panic, he hung up quickly, pushing his phone back into his pocket and abandoning his tray in favour of running to the parking lot and finding his car.

He didn't care if he got in trouble, he didn't bother leaving a message. By the time he reached the Andersons' door, he already knew he was right.

The man who opened to his frantic knocking was taller than him, stunningly handsome, and visibly exhausted. His bright blue eyes were half-lidded, and his brown hair was mussed.

"I'm - I -"

"You're Kurt," the man said, nodding at him and turning to let him through. "Come in."

"Is he alright?"

"They roughed him up. Smashed his phone, and took his bag," he said. "But no serious injuries. He got away. He's fast, and small, so he's hard to catch. Christ, he's so fucking small."

Kurt felt suddenly lost as the man (*Brother? Had to be.*) rested back against a hall table and buried his face in his hands, rubbing them roughly over his tired features.

He spotted the hollow star on his neck and felt a stab of sympathy. He couldn't fathom what it would be like, to feel that helpless.

How can you protect your little brother if you're a Sub, too?

"I'm so sorry," Kurt uttered brokenly, trying to fight the heat building behind his eyes. "Can I - can I please see him?"

The brother tilted his head in invitation. "Up the stairs. Second door on the left. Knock first."

Kurt was half way up the staircase before he heard his voice again.

"Wait -"

Kurt turned.

He'd moved to the bottom of the stairs, looking up. "What ... what has he told you? About his old school?"

Kurt searched the banister for a moment, trying to remember everything. "He said there was an accident, that he was home-schooled."

The man laughed, but it was sad and humourless. "The *accident*," he enunciated carefully, "was a group of assholes beating him into the ground because he tried to take another boy to a dance."

Kurt felt the breath rush into his lungs, sharp and so fast it was almost painful.

"He got marked right after that," he said. "A Sub."

"That's why your parents didn't send him back to school," Kurt mumbled, eyes focusing and unfocusing too quickly against the threat of tears. "Oh god."

"He's stronger than he should be," the brother said seriously. "He's stronger than any Sub I know, because he survived that, and he - god, he fucking *asked me* if I could help him go back to school. I did. And he did. And he's survived, he's been just fine, until *you*."

Kurt flinched.

"This thing with you two. He can't help it," he said. "But you can."

Meeting those exhausted blue eyes, Kurt squared his shoulders. "I won't hurt him. I couldn't - ever - hurt him."

"Don't make promises you can't keep."

Kurt wanted to shout, wanted to scream that he was wrong, that he didn't know them. But the rational voice at the back of his mind rose up too loud and too clear; *You've known Blaine three weeks. This man is his brother.*

"I'm so sorry," Kurt said. "Please. Please, let me see him, I just need to know he's okay."

"You want to protect him?" he asked accusingly.

Kurt stuttered, unsure of what to say. "I - do. But - he's... he's not *mine*."

"Who's fault is that?"

It felt like a slap to the face.

"I'm sorry," the brother recoiled, hands up in apology. "I'm angry, and I can't... I can't *fix* this. Maybe you can."

Kurt watched him rest against the wall, eyes falling shut again as he tried to compose himself.

"I'm Cooper, by the way," he offered quietly.

Nodding, Kurt eyed him carefully, waiting for permission.

"You can go see him. I won't stop you."

Turning on the stairs, Kurt shot him a grateful look before he climbed the rest of them quickly.

When he got to Blaine's door, he lifted his hand and let it hover in the air in a moment of indecision. Who was he to come and barge in like this? He was right in what he'd said to Cooper; Blaine wasn't his. So why was he even here?

Because he's Blaine.

He knocked on the door, and listened to Blaine's muffled voice asking Cooper to leave him be.

"It's Kurt," he said softly.

"C-come in."

When he pushed through the door he was met with the sudden, incredibly powerful sense of *wrong* to the entire room. It was dark, and muted, and so overwhelmingly unlike his Blaine, he almost choked.

Blaine was lying on the bed, propped up and half-tangled, liked he'd shuffled up into a sitting position too quickly.

"Hey," Kurt said softly, body tensing when he caught sight of the line of red that divided Blaine's bottom lip.

"Hey," Blaine said in reply, offering a weak smile. "You came."

"Of course I did," he said in a rush to the side of the bed, reaching out to inspect the injury. "What did they do?"

Blaine tried to wave him off, but his hand dropped limply to the mattress the moment Kurt's fingers brushed over his face. "I - they - it's nothing. They tried. I got away."

"I'm sorry," Kurt said, cradling his head in both hands briefly. "I should've been there, we - we were supposed to go for coffee, weren't we?"

"That was today," Blaine corrected him. "You didn't know, you couldn't have- you don't have to-"

"Shh," Kurt cut him off, sitting down on the bed.

Blaine smiled and swayed into his side. "I'm glad you're here. But- aren't you missing school?"

"Mmm," Kurt answered, side-eyeing him and searching for other scrapes or bruises, his shoulders still tensed with anger.

"Kurt?"

"I didn't know," he said, shifting on the bed and meeting Blaine's eyes at last. "You said it was an accident, at your last school. Not that you were attacked."

Blaine swallowed audibly, eyes dropping. "Cooper told you."

"He did," Kurt nodded, resting his hands on both arms. "Blaine, you could have told me-"

"We've known each other less than three weeks," he insisted. "We've been friends for ten days. I didn't want to... I didn't want you to know I'm so..."

Damaged.

Kurt felt the word coming and squeezed, willing it away, curls of refusal ricocheting off his skull like a machine gun of no, not, don't.

He stiffened in surprise with the afterthought; had really only been ten days?

"You don't have to do this," Blaine whispered.

"I do," Kurt said, dropping to his side again and nudging him with a playful shoulder. "It's my nature, remember?"

Blaine laughed softly, shoulders curling in and lifting up to his ears. When he winced, Kurt's hand reached out to cup his jaw on instinct, checking him over again before he even realised what he was doing.

When he did come to his senses, he caught the flash of Blaine's throat as he swallowed, and it struck Kurt that he was simply sitting there, patiently, letting him manhandle him like some fussy school nurse. His eyes were dark,

calm and peaceful, and he had a soft smile on his bruised lips as he watched with fond amusement.

Kurt couldn't help but wonder if it was meant to feel this easy. He'd never truly touched anybody before, not really, so why was it couldn't stop with Blaine?

"Come with me, on Monday," he insisted, slipping his fingers across the back of Blaine's neck to stroke at his hair in a familiar pattern. "We can go in together, I can bring you home."

"I'm not going back," Blaine said gravely, eyes wide. "I - Kurt, I know you're strong and you face things like this, but *I can't*."

"You can," he said. "You just don't believe you can, yet."

Blaine met his eyes, trembling. "Please."

"Do you trust me?" Kurt asked seriously.

Wetting his lips, Blaine nodded slowly.

"It's going to be alright," he said. "Please, come back."

After a moment, the fear faded from his eyes, replaced with the same sense of calm from before. "I will."

At Kurt's gentle nod of approval, Blaine twisted his head back and forth, relaxing and revelling in the comfort of the hand in his hair.

With his lips curling into a tiny, fond smile, Kurt settled down against him, pulling his head down onto his shoulder and resuming little patterns through curls with his fingers. "You want to watch a movie?"

Blaine hummed in quiet confirmation, eyes slipping closed as his breathing slowed and his body went lax.

"Wh-" he tried to speak, sleepy and sedated by the warmth flooding his body from the caring attention of a Dom. "Kurt?"

"Mm?"

"Why do you ... care? About me?" he asked softly.

Kurt rested his cheek against Blaine's forehead as he found the remote and flicked on the TV, settling back against the headboard. "I've never had a best friend before."

Blaine sighed sleepily as the faint opening sounds of *Brigadoon* trickled across the room.

"Me neither."

CHAPTER FOUR

Kurt remembered his marking day right down to the weather.

It was raining that day, just lightly, and he'd sat through the process of the painless chemical brand without saying a word. He figured if he did speak, he wouldn't be able to control his voice or keep the sheer force of his relief from showing all over his face.

Dom. I'm a Dom. Everything is perfect. Everything is going to be okay.

He couldn't stop himself from pausing at every mirror for the rest of the day to stare at the full dark star behind his jawbone. Any pretence of calm went out the window when his father threw him the car keys and told him to go buy the cuff that he knew he'd always secretly wanted.

Kurt's cuff was perfect.

It was always going to be something simple, that much he'd planned years in advance, even if he never truly told anybody but his father. Simple was the plan, the elaborate would be saved for his some-day Sub. A notion that - back then - left him blushing and smiling dopily at the very thought.

But his cuff was elegant, designed to match any outfit. It had the perfect combination of masculine and feminine; the black leather of the cuff itself paired with the multitude bangle cut, trimmed with silver. Just complicated enough to meet Kurt Hummel's fashion requirements, and just simple enough not to be gaudy.

Instead of wearing his matching Sub's bracelet over his cuff, as most young Doms did, he'd put it into a box and clipped it shut. He kept the box high on his shelf, on display; a quiet reminder that someday, he would have somebody to give it to.

As the years passed, slowly the box began to pave its own little path through his room with every re-adjustment of the decor. First down to a bookcase, then behind his magazines, and finally into the cupboard. Out of sight, out of mind.

When he woke on Monday morning, he climbed out of bed with a sleepy smile and went about his routine, pulling on the outfit he'd laid out the night before. He admired his ensemble in the mirror, reaching up to carefully pluck at the swoop of his hair when a glint of light off his cuff made him blink.

He paused, eyes wandering to his cupboard doors.

Sometimes - very rarely, but just sometimes - he would get out the bracelet and look at it. He'd chosen it so carefully, had known it was the right one the instant he saw it and fell in love with the little meanings he'd found in the design.

It was the perfect opposite to his. Small, where his was large, and detailed where his cuff was simple. More silver than black, the tiny engraved swirl that made up the pattern was intertwined in twos; just like he'd always dreamed he'd be, someday, with someone.

When he pulled the box down from the wardrobe shelf this time and flicked the clasp, he felt a strange sense of peace at the sight of it. Still there, still as stunning as he remembered.

He didn't know what possessed him to take it out, to brush his fingers over it carefully and secure it around his cuff - where it belonged - for the first time. He shrugged it off as indulging a random flight of fancy before he snapped the box shut, and tossed it onto his bed.

By the time he found his way out and made breakfast, his Dad had already left for an early shift at the shop, and Carole was watching him with an amused smile.

He blinked at her when he noticed.

"What?"

"Someone's in dreamland," she mused. "Strange how I don't hear the washing machine going this morning."

Kurt's mouth fell open to defend himself, but no words came past the mortification and the blush creeping right to the roots of his hair.

"Oh, calm down. I raised *Finn*," she said fondly. "You have nothing be embarrassed about."

He decided focusing on his cereal was an excellent plan. Wow, bran was fascinating. Were those raisins? *Wow*.

"So who is he?" She prodded at Kurt's side playfully as she passed him to put her bowl in the sink.

Shifting on his feet, he dodged her hand and laughed, unable to tame the beet-red flush to his features. "No - nobody. There's nobody!"

"Uhuh," she said knowingly.

"I ..." His voice trailed off and he pushed a spoonful around in the bowl.

He always liked Carole. Something about her sweet and playful Sub nature was unique, utterly genuine and completely endearing.

"I may have..." he rolled his eyes to the ceiling, "made a new friend."

"I knew it!" she said. "Sub?"

"Yes, but-" he stuttered, embarrassed again. "Just a friend. Just - we're friends."

"Wait, is this the boy who presented?" She gasped in delight. "*Kurt!*"

"No, no, no!" he said, spinning to face her and taking both her hands where they were raised excitedly in the air. "It's not like that. Friends. We - we're just friends!"

She beamed at him, settling and letting her shoulders drop. "If you say so," she said with mock gravity.

He shot her a playful glare, letting go of her wrists and twisting his cuff around absently.

The realisation that it had been over a week since his last uncomfortable, sexually charged dream hit him all at once, and he stepped back to lean against the kitchen counter, stunned.

She eyed him for a moment. "It's normal."

Kurt fixed her with a questioning look.

"Your Sub friend, you touch him a lot - interact, I mean?"

He nodded carefully.

"It's completely normal," she assured him gently. "Your body's just - it's finally getting something it needed very badly. So everything is balancing out."

Considering for a moment, he turned and scooped up his bowl, moving to wash up.

He wondered to himself, if that was true, had Blaine facing the same sudden rush of relief since they became friends? Had he been dealing with the same problems before this? Had he been writhing in bed every morning, lost in fantasy and sweat-soaked sheets, aching for someone under his body, someone to taste and worship and-

Kurt froze, letting his eyes fall shut as he braced himself against the sink. *Don't.*

"You okay, sweetie?"

"Fine," he said lightly, smiling at Carole over his shoulder. "I have to go pick Blaine up, I'm giving him a lift to school."

"His name is Blaine?" she asked with a teasing smile.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Yes, his name is Blaine."

"Alright, be safe," she said, patting him on the shoulder as she passed. "Have a good day!"

"I will," he said. "You too."

He'd found driving to the Andersons' house to be a strange and calming experience now. It became a new routine, the drive there and back to McKinley, the radio playing in the car while they sat peacefully and let the morning sunshine wash over them. They'd go for coffee, meet again for lunch, and drive home together at the end of each day.

Without realising it, Kurt began to track his school days by the three times he knew he'd see him again.

But the absence of Blaine became a slow and painful crawl of hours, especially when the old familiar punishments resumed. He was riddled with bruises from locker-slams and random dumpster throws by the end of the next week, but privately grateful for it. A few scrapes didn't matter, and the fact that their focus was back on him was almost a comfort.

It was a Tuesday morning, on the roads between the Lima Bean and McKinley, when the radio changed songs and Kurt started singing along. He sang most mornings after the caffeine had kicked in, and the words and lyrics swam around in his head easily with the relaxation of the drive.

Blaine settled back into his seat with a sleepy smile and listened for awhile. His eyes unfocused after the first verse, trailing over the dash, and he didn't seem to register until Kurt was staring at him that he'd been singing along quietly to the chorus.

"What?" Blaine asked, stunned.

"You-" Kurt glanced back to the road, and to Blaine again, and returned his focus to driving. "You were singing."

Blaine smiled. "I like the song."

"You - can sing?"

He shrugged. "I ... guess. I just sing at home, mostly."

Kurt wet his lips, still stunned at what he'd just heard. How did he not know Blaine could sing?

"But... you sounded. Really good, Blaine, you ... you ..." He let out a tiny noise as he tried to get out the words. "You're *really* good," he insisted breathlessly.

Blaine rocked in his seat, eyelashes fluttering and mouth twitching around a delighted grin. Kurt could feel the strange prickle of a change on the air, the way Blaine seemed to completely open up under the praise; legs shifting, shoulders pressing back, eyes bright and bubbling with something akin to bliss.

His brow lifted. "I ... thank you."

"Have you ever thought about joining Glee club?" Kurt asked.

Shaking his head, Blaine laughed. "Oh, no. No. I just sing in the shower, I'm not-"

"Keep going?"

Blaine stared at him. "What?"

They pulled to a stop at a red light, and Kurt's huge blue eyes locked on him, eager and illuminated with a strange sense of comfortable power. "Sing for me."

Straightening in his seat, Blaine seized a sharp breath, shivering under the command. He listened at the pause, waiting for the next song and smiling when the soft prickle of the guitar came through the car speakers. His gaze drifted out to the passing sidewalk as the car rolled on again at the change of lights.

Kurt listened, using any stretch of straight road to look at Blaine while he sang.

*Love me tender, love me sweet,
Never let me go.*

It was a cover version; some gentle female tone that didn't matter at all, lost under the steady, warm current of Blaine's voice. He was stronger this time, deliberate and sure of himself like Kurt had never seen him before. The song seemed to sink into him, to light him up from the inside, and the love of it resonated in every note.

They stopped in the McKinley car park as the song faded out, and Kurt cut the engine, drawing a deep breath.

"That was -"

Blaine was silent in the passenger seat, watching him carefully.

"You have a wonderful voice," Kurt said, shifting to face him and reaching out to hold his shoulder. "You should."

"Should?"

"Join Glee."

"I- couldn't, I mean," Blaine shook his head, "I don't have the kind of ... I mean-"

"You can see it, when you sing," Kurt told him. "How much you love it."

Blaine laughed softly, ducking his head. "I do."

"Why are you swimming, Blaine? Why aren't you pursuing this?" Kurt asked.

"I just feel... like I'm *me*. When I sing. Not ... a Sub. Or a jock. Or another ... scared gay teenager. I'm just," he shrugged, "me."

Kurt rubbed at his shoulder affectionately before sliding a hand up to his hair, threading fingers through the curls at the back of his neck. He leaned in with a smile.

"Join Glee, then," he insisted. "People like you are why we even have Glee club."

Blaine smiled weakly, swaying against Kurt's hand for more contact.

"I can't." He sighed, "I wish I could. But you know I have swim practice Tuesdays - today - same time as Glee. And it would mean... It'd mean putting myself out there. Even more than I already have."

Trying not to let his disappointment show on his features, Kurt nodded in understanding.

"I want to," Blaine insisted, meeting his gaze with bright, sincere eyes. "I'm just not ready yet."

"That's okay, too," Kurt told him, nodding to the school before he rocked back and reached for his door handle. "Come on."

It didn't take long for the day to wind down to the usual pitiful crawl, one class after another leaving Kurt staring at the clock, waiting for lunch. Even when it finally came around it felt too short, seemingly lasting mere moments before Blaine was squeezing his arm goodbye and disappearing again.

At least they'd have the afternoon, after practice and Glee club. He'd convinced Blaine to come over for dinner, something he'd been looking forward to since the weekend.

He loved Glee, he always had, but Blaine's admission from the morning was still lingering in his thoughts. With the awareness of the strength it took for them to stand up and be seen, he'd found a renewed respect for the Subs of New Directions, and all they went through just to do what they loved.

So when Mr Schuester scribbled "strong" on the board and began waxing poetic about fortitude, Kurt couldn't help but bristle in irritation.

"You guys need to be able to feel like you can be yourselves out there, but take it to the next level! Tina, Sam, Quinn," he waved an arm at them expectantly, "guys, you've gotta step up. As much as Rachel does for all of us, I need you to stop hiding behind her and come out into the spotlight."

"Said the Dom," Kurt muttered to himself bitterly, and earned a tiny appreciative look from Tina for it.

By the time the meeting had ended, he'd spent half of it leaning against his hand, elbow perched on the back of his seat, trying not to openly glare. At their dismissal he gathered his bag quickly, darting out the door and making his way through the halls to the pool.

The reflection of lights off the water sent glowing patterns dancing across the concrete walls, and he watched them flicker past as he wandered down to the locker room where he usually found Blaine after practice.

When he was met with an empty change room, he stopped in his tracks, glancing around in confusion.

"Blaine?"

The showers weren't running, there was no lingering steam.

It wasn't like him to be late.

"Blaine?" he called again, poking his head around each corner as he searched.

Panic seized his lungs when he caught sight of Blaine's bag, slumped on the floor by his locker.

"Blaine?" This time he heard the unmistakable fear in his own voice.

There was a peal of heavy, distant laughter, followed by a chorus of voices jeering. The sound sent red hot sparks of anger up his spine, coiling and fusing somewhere in his chest.

He snatched up the bag quickly, pulling it over his shoulder and racing out the side door towards the bleachers.

No. NO.

"Come on, now, be a good little doggy and *come here*."

Kurt's jaw locked. That was Carter's voice.

They waited for this. They waited to get him alone.

When he reached the sidelines he caught the outline of Blaine past the clump of red and yellow. He was on his

hands and knees, hair still wet from the pool, and his jacket was half-off his shoulders as he trembled on the ground.

"Come HERE!" Carter demanded again as the others laughed.

"Get away from him!" Kurt shouted angrily, casting his bags to the ground.

They turned as a pack at the sound of his voice, and Carter smirked, throwing his hands up. "Looks like we've got a party now!"

Kurt ignored him, pushing in and trying to get to Blaine, only to be shoved backwards. He stumbled, barely keeping his balance as he shifted and craned his neck to see past them.

Blaine's head was bowed, his expression set and unreadable as he blinked down at the grass. His body was locked and rigid, like he was fighting a heavier force pressing down on him, and Kurt realised what it was as Carter's words finally made sense; the repeated instruction of *come here*.

They were giving him orders. And he was using every ounce of strength in his body to resist.

"We've been having fun with the doggy," Carter said, reaching out and pushing at Blaine with his foot, trying to tip him over.

Blaine's muscles locked down again as he rocked with the force, but kept himself upright.

"He's been a bad dog, haven't you boy? Going around wearing a jacket that doesn't belong to you."

Blaine flinched bodily, mouth twisting at the words.

Kurt felt his stomach curl with nausea when he realised they probably made him put himself in that position.

"Blaine," he called out.

Blaine's gaze flicked up at the sound of his voice.

When he met those huge, terrified eyes, it only took a moment for Kurt to feel it tearing through his chest, coiling tight in his veins; pure, unfiltered rage, and power.

Protect.

"Get away from him," Kurt told them calmly.

He was met with a round of laughter and a few exchanged glances, but it barely registered past the demands that burned in his blood. *Claim. Defend. Protect.*

"Or what, fag?" another one of them asked.

Kurt fixed him with a cold stare.

"What exactly are you all accomplishing? You're so strong, beating down a *Sub*," he said darkly, and privately enjoyed the ripple of shame that showed on at least two or three of them when the words landed.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Carter said lightly, stepping around Blaine. "We were just having fun, weren't we doggy?"

Blaine seized a breath, shoulders rising defiantly. "*Fuck you*," he said, and spat onto the grass.

A proud smile lit up Kurt's features at the display of strength, and he focused on Carter.

"I promise you," he said, "that if you touch him again, I will make sure everybody hears about it. I will make *sure* that everybody knows exactly what you are."

There was a murmur of shock amongst the pack, and a few worried glances flickered between them.

Everybody knew what it meant, if you were outed as a violent Dom. Schoolyard bullying was one thing, but to be labelled a Sub-beater meant the end of every relationship for the rest of your life. The accusation was huge - and in this case, just big enough to make them move away slowly.

"You wouldn't," Carter said as he stepped back, but Kurt caught the exquisite note of doubt in his tone.

"You can't even begin to imagine what I'm capable of right now," he insisted, reaching out both hands.

He let his eyes drop to Blaine for a moment, and nodded at him once.

Blaine pushed up onto his feet with a pained grunt, stumbling into Kurt's arms and slipping behind him, shielded by his body. He buried his face against Kurt's shoulder, clinging to his waist as he tried to breathe.

"You can call it whatever you want," Carter shot back. "You're gonna threaten me? We'll see about that."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You can't watch your little bitch forever," he sneered. "You've got no hold on him. He owes us for every day he wears that jacket - his ass is *ours*, the second you're not looking."

Kurt stiffened at the threat, chest swelling. "I'll-"

"And you can't prove a thing," Carter cut him off. "You want to call me a beater? We'll see how fast that turns on you. Then you'll just look like a faggy little liar."

His heart was pounding too loudly in his ears, hot and painful, drowning everything out. Carter was right. Even if Kurt did label him or call him out, nobody would believe him - Carter had an endless supply of red-jacket jocks to back him up.

When the idea finally struck him, it swept through his body like a flood, like nothing he'd ever felt before. The decision was already made, really. He twisted the bracelet on his cuff with absent fingers.

After a moment, he tilted his head back.

"Blaine?" he whispered.

"Hmh?" Blaine grunted in reply.

"I need you to trust me."

"I do," he said instantly, voice still cracked and shaking.

It happened too fast for him to second guess himself, to reconsider. He turned and caught both of Blaine's wrists, pulling him down to his knees as he dropped onto the sidelines bench.

Kurt locked eyes with him quickly, pleading, hoping he understood.

Blaine held his breath, numb and reeling as his hands lifted to rest open on Kurt's knees.

His body coiled tight and froze as Kurt slipped both hands into his.

To accept a presentation, take both hands of your Sub.

Kurt shivered at the surge of electricity that rode up his spine on contact.

It was done. Blaine was his. And there was nothing they could do about it.

Carter's mouth was hanging open, but it soon snapped shut as his brow dropped into an angry sneer. "What the--"

"Now you don't get to touch him," Kurt said evenly, meeting Carter's stare. "Ever."

Blaine finally let his breath punch out after holding it too long, and he dropped his head onto Kurt's legs, arms folding around them protectively. "*Kurt*."

He was silenced by a gentle hand in his still-damp hair.

"You know the law, you know the penalties for touching another Dom's Sub." Kurt lifted his chin at them defiantly. "You want to test me again?"

Speechless and grinding on barely-checked anger, Carter lashed out, kicking at the bench and making it shudder with a loud *crack!* before he turned and pushed past his startled peers. "This isn't over, Hummel!"

He waited for the last of them to stumble after their leader, practically limping away like bruised sheep.

With an uneven breath, Kurt let his shoulders relax, let his eyes fall closed and tried to rein in the rush of emotions he'd forced down to maintain his calm exterior.

"*Kurt*," Blaine mumbled against his thigh.

"Are you alright? Let me see you," Kurt instructed quickly, fingers sliding over Blaine's jaw to lift his head.

There was a tell-tale swell at the corner of his eye that would bloom into purple by the morning, and Kurt traced soothing fingers around it, worrying his lower lip absently. "I'm so sorry, Blaine- I should've been--"

"Kurt," Blaine cut him off. His eyes were so dark, and so warm it made Kurt's stomach flip violently. "You- wh--"

Kurt's gaze fell to his wrist, and he unclipped the bracelet quickly, reaching out for Blaine's hand and pressing the metal to skin.

"Here," he said softly, "Please-just--"

He clipped the metal together.

It felt like the hanging pause before an explosion, the pull of silence before the deafening boom. Everything drowned out under the wave of it, crashing like a tidal, lighting up every nerve in his body.

Blaine shuddered against him, eyes rolling back into his head for a split second before they flickered closed. He swayed on his knees with the force, and Kurt moved into the motion, cradling Blaine's head gently to his chest as he curled around his body, keeping him steady and safe.

He'd heard about how intense it could be to be claimed, to claim someone, but he never could have imagined how it would *feel*.

"I'm so sorry, Blaine, I had to," he whispered, pressing his lips to dark curls. "If there had been any other way--"

Blaine sobbed softly against him, and Kurt felt his heart clench tightly in his chest.

"Shh, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry."

But Blaine just kept saying his name, kept whispering *Kurt*, over and over again like it was the only word he knew.

"Shh," Kurt hushed him again, stroking his back soothingly, rocking him gently in his arms.

After everything, after fighting so hard against their commands, shaking under all that fear and adrenaline, the intensity of being claimed must have all but ripped him apart.

"It's over. They're gone. They can't touch you, they can't make you do anything," Kurt said in a rush, clutching Blaine tighter to his chest. "Never again. I promise."

It took a few moments for Blaine to fall silent, for his body to loosen and rest against Kurt's chest, head still tucked under his chin.

"You didn't want- you-" he tried to get out, wetting dry lips between words. "Kurt, I'm-"

"I know," Kurt said softly, brushing his thumb over Blaine's jaw and kissing his hair. "It's okay."

"You're mine."

CHAPTER FIVE

When they pulled up the driveway, Kurt cut the engine and slipped from his seat in silence. He wandered around the front of the Navigator and stopped by the headlight, waiting for Blaine's door to close before he held out his hand.

It was taken without hesitation. But Blaine didn't look up at him.

He hadn't looked at him since before.

When they pushed through the door and made their way into the living room, Burt turned in his seat.

"Hey, how was-..." His voice trailed off at the sight of the two boys in front of him.

After a moment he rose from his chair, measuring them with careful eyes.

Kurt kept his face impassive, but couldn't fight the instinct to slide an arm around Blaine, to pull him closer.

Blaine simply let him, and stayed there, warm and solid against his side.

His father's reaction was unreadable as he glanced between them, but recognition soon flashed across his face. He sighed softly.

"Carole," he called, looking over his shoulder to the opposite doorway.

Kurt swallowed, hand rubbing soothing circles into Blaine's back absently.

He knew it wasn't the fact that he'd claimed Blaine that worried his dad. It was the fact he didn't tell him first.

When Carole came into the room with a bright smile, Kurt felt his breath catch, waiting for the ball to drop again.

She met Burt's eyes, and followed as he pointed to the boys with a nod in their direction.

The look on her face almost made Kurt smile, even after everything that had happened that night. It was sweet and knowing; just a soft curl at the edge of her mouth and an tilt of her head. Like finally being met with something she'd been waiting for.

"Was this planned?" Burt asked suddenly.

"No," Kurt answered. "But it's done."

Burt nodded, letting his gaze drop.

"Oh, sweetheart," Carole said suddenly, moving forward. "Your eye."

Blaine flinched, but kept his head bowed.

"The neanderthals at school attacked him, they were-" Kurt choked quietly at the memory of Blaine on his hands and knees. He regained his composure quickly, fixing Carole with a pleading look.

She nodded in understanding, reaching out and rubbing at Blaine's shoulder comfortingly, guiding him away.

"Come on, sweetheart, let me have a look. I'm a nurse."

He moved hesitantly with her, reluctant to be pulled away from Kurt.

"I'm Carole," she said as they made their way to the door. "I just need to make sure nothing's broken."

Once they were out of earshot, Kurt let his body slump and his eyes fall shut. A shuddering breath fell away from him, carrying too much of the night's pent up emotion.

Burt was already shifting towards him worriedly. "Kid, what the hell happened?"

"Dad-" He sobbed quietly, and buried his face in his father's shoulder as soon as he was close enough.

He felt strong hands on his arms, patting lightly. "Hey."

"They were hurting him," Kurt managed through tears. "I felt it, I could *feel it*. I- oh my god."

"Shh, hey, it's like that, I know. Trust me, I know," he said quickly. "When you feel helpless? When they need you and you can't do anything? Trust me, I know. It's the worst feeling in the whole damn world."

"I had to do it, Dad, he's my friend," he uttered softly.

"Wait." Burt pulled him back to look at his face. "You ... claimed him *after* that?"

Kurt nodded weakly.

"You... felt it. And *then* you claimed him?" Burt asked carefully.

Blinking at him, Kurt nodded again with a sniffle. "Yes."

Burt seemed to study his face for a moment, eyes narrowed and unsure.

"What is it?"

"Nothing," he said. "Look, Kurt, I know you felt like you had to. But did you want to?"

"I had to-"

"But did you *want* to?" Burt asked again, lifting his brow.

"I-"

"He should be alright," Carole interrupted as she lead Blaine back into the room. "It'll swell, and bruise, but his cheekbone isn't broken."

Kurt nodded at her with a grateful, sad smile.

"I want to - talk to Blaine. Alone. In my room," Kurt said gently, looking back to his father. "If that's okay?"

"Hey, he's your Sub." Burt shrugged. "It's both your room now."

Kurt glanced over quickly to Blaine to gauge his reaction, but he was still staring at the floor, clutching the ice pack to his swollen face.

"Blaine?" Kurt asked softly, reaching out a hand.

It was accepted again without a word, and Kurt gave his father a parting look of gratitude as he lead Blaine upstairs to his bedroom.

Once inside, he let the door slip shut and turned to face his Sub.

"Blaine?"

Nothing.

"Blaine, please." Kurt could taste bile in his throat, could feel the panic flashing in his chest, hot and hollow.
"Please look at me."

It wasn't a command, but Blaine looked up anyway, fixing him with sad, empty eyes.

"Talk to me."

Blaine's gaze drifted over the room for a moment as he wet his lips. "You-"

Kurt drew a sharp breath at the word, grateful for anything at this point.

"You shouldn't have done it."

He tried not to let the flash of hurt register on his face. "Why not?"

"You didn't want me, Kurt," Blaine said, voice barely controlled. "What am I supposed to think? I don't need your pity."

"It wasn't about that, Blaine, please-" He moved in, only to have Blaine step back and nearly trip over an ottoman.

"Please," He begged again quietly. *"Please understand, I had to. I have to keep you safe."*

"Why? What - what did it matter to you?"

"Because I lo-" He choked on the words as they caught in his throat.

He's your best friend. Don't do this. Don't scare him away.

"Blaine-"

Don't you dare lose him.

"Here," Blaine dropped the ice pack onto the shelf, "you should - take this." His fingers were prying at the metal clasp on his wrist.

Kurt's eyes widened.

To break a claim, remove the Sub bracelet and return it to the Dominant party.

"No!" he said suddenly, hands darting out to wrap around Blaine's fingers and stop them. "Please, no, don't," he begged, "please don't. Please, Blaine."

His voice was frantic and unrecognisable, and he looked up to find Blaine staring at him, stunned.

"Pl-"

"I won't," Blaine cut him off.

"You have to understand," Kurt told him. "I can't - you - I can't ever see them hurt you again. It's not about pity, it could never be about pity. I care about you. You- you're my best friend."

It felt like gravity, when Blaine swayed towards him. He tried to step into it, but Blaine pulled back too fast, like he'd caught himself threatening to fall.

"This isn't how it's meant to work," Blaine insisted. "Best friends aren't supposed to-"

"I don't care," Kurt said. "All I know is that you're safe. And you're *here*, Blaine. You're here. And I can't feel like that's anything but how it's supposed to be."

Blaine was trembling lightly, and Kurt wondered just how much he was fighting the need to touch, to hold on.

He reached out to him, in offer.

Blaine shook his head once, and the trembling grew visibly worse.

"No, if we - if we're going to do this. If we're going to be... this. Whatever it is. Claimed and *friends*?" Blaine said. "Then we need to just be friends."

"Then *be* my friend," Kurt begged brokenly, "and let me fucking hold you."

It was all it took. There was a soft *thump* as their bodies met, and Blaine's arms coiled tight around Kurt's waist as he buried his face in his neck. Kurt wrapped both arms around his shoulders instantly, fisting handfuls of his jacket.

Contact was the strangest kind of relief; like the sudden ability to move freely after too long trying to run underwater. Blaine sank into his arms, soft and warm and perfectly heavy, melding to Kurt's body like it was made for him.

With his eyes closed, Kurt rested his cheek against Blaine's crown, squeezing his arms tighter just to prove to himself that Blaine was real.

"It's not fair," Blaine mumbled into his collar, voice suddenly calm and even.

"What's not?"

Blaine sighed, but it was a peaceful sound. "That you can fix me. Just by doing this."

Kurt could have cried at that. "Ohh, then I'm so glad life is unfair."

He felt a soft vibration as Blaine chuckled against his throat.

"Please understand, I did it because - I had to," Kurt said seriously, voice threatening to break again. "You're the best thing that ever happened to me."

Blaine squeezed his waist in reply.

"I couldn't just sit there and *not* do something, I have to keep you safe, it's-"

"In your nature," Blaine finished for him softly. brushing his lips over Kurt's throat in a tiny, friendly peck before he settled his head on his shoulder. "I know."

It's more than that, Kurt thought. *God, it's so much more than that.*

Blaine nuzzled into his neck, humming contentedly, and Kurt felt a new ache settle inside.

I can feel you in my blood.

"Will you stay?" Kurt asked carefully, holding his breath for a reply.

After a moment, Blaine pried himself away, blinking at his Dom with sweet and tired eyes.

"I have to ... talk to my parents," he said, face falling. "But... yes."

Kurt beamed at him. "Thank you." He pulled Blaine back into his arms excitedly, quietly thrilling at the soft sound of his laugh. "Oh, thank you."

When they made their way downstairs again, Burt was doing a terrible job of waiting patiently.

"So," he said, eyes still on the TV, playing nonchalant but fidgeting restlessly with the remote. "How's... everything?"

Kurt smiled at him gently. "Blaine is staying."

"So you two are-?"

"Friends," Blaine clarified. "Who ... we're..."

"You okay, kid?"

"Yes, sir," Blaine said firmly, eyes down.

After he exchanged a look with Kurt, Burt studied the Sub carefully, trying to understand. Even in his most introverted moments, Finn had never been so withdrawn.

"We're friends, who happened to be claimed," Kurt explained. "We'll make it work."

There was something about his father's face, the way it was almost expressionless but held something back, something small behind his eyes - Kurt had unsettling sense he knew something he wasn't telling them.

Burt nodded at Blaine. "You can have Finn's old room."

No. Wait. Mine. Kurt pushed the private demands back down and tried to ignore them. It was just the freshly claimed Dom talking. That's all.

"That okay?" Burt asked.

"That's ... sure," Kurt said, trying to keep his voice even. "Blaine?"

Blaine smiled timidly. "Thank you, sir."

"You're family now, kid," he said. "Call me Burt."

With a slight bow of his head, Blaine pressed his lips together tightly.

"We're going over to his place, to get his things. And tell his parents."

"Get it over and done with," Blaine added bitterly.

"They're not going to be happy for you?" Carole asked, barely hiding her worry.

Blaine let out a soft laugh, but it was humourless. Kurt blinked in surprise when he caught the sudden resemblance to Cooper in Blaine's features.

"No, they won't," Blaine mumbled.

Burt wanted to ask, and went as far as opening his mouth to before a quick warning glance from Kurt made him close it again.

"We'll be back in an hour," Kurt said, squeezing Blaine's hand.

With another nod of acknowledgement, Burt watched them turn and gather their bags from the stoop before they disappeared out the door.

The drive over was quiet, but comfortable like it'd always been. Kurt wondered at the note in Blaine's voice when he'd mentioned his parents, the undercurrent of emptiness in his tone. He'd never spoken about them, that Kurt could remember. In fact, he'd never so much as mentioned their names.

They made their way up the Andersons' front path when they arrived, and Blaine fumbled for his keys briefly before Kurt reached out and steadied his hands.

With a grateful glance at his Dom, Blaine turned the key and let the door sweep open.

The entry way was exactly the same as Kurt remembered it, still pristine and giving off the impression of undisguised wealth and a permanent maid service.

"Mom? Dad?"

"In here, dear," a woman's voice came from the next room over, and Blaine stiffened at the sound.

Pressing a hand to his back, Kurt leaned in closer. "We don't have to-"

"Please," Blaine whispered. "Let's just - get it done."

Kurt followed him through the tall arched doorway into the living room.

She was a tiny thing, draped in a long flowing summer dress and heels that clicked on the marble tile as she shifted and plucked at random plants by the fireplace.

"They keep drooping, why are they always *drooping*? It's so depressing in here," she muttered.

Kurt wanted to point out that the plants she was fussing over were probably drooping because, well, *fireplace*, but he held his tongue.

"Mom?"

She glanced up quickly, but barely saw them. "Hello, dear, I thought your brother said you were going to a friend's house for dinner?"

"Mom, can we please talk?"

The tone of his voice made her stop this time, and she eyed him over carefully for a moment before casting a shrewd look at Kurt.

He held up his chin under her silent interrogation to disguise his train of thought; the sharp, angry, coiled-up part of him that was still waiting for her to at least register that her son was injured.

"You have a boyfriend?"

Kurt heard the sharp hiss of breath as Blaine drew it, and it took everything he had not to reach out again and draw him into his arms. *Not now.*

Blaine lifted his wrist with a weak smile.

His mother cocked an eyebrow at the bracelet, unimpressed, and returned to her plants. "I thought Cooper said the boy turned you down?"

Blaine's mouth fell open around a word he couldn't get out, until Kurt's hand rested softly on the small of his back.

"He did, but-"

"Now he's taken you on?"

With a nervous shake to his voice, Blaine answered. "Yes."

"Oh, Blaine." She let out an amused sigh. "Only you could go and get yourself claimed by someone who didn't want you in the first place."

Kurt couldn't help the bright flash of anger that sparked in his features, but managed to control it quickly enough.

"That was a mistake," he informed her calmly.

She turned to peer at him again, pursing her lips.

"Kurt Hummel," he said cordially. "Pleased to meet you, Mrs Anderson."

Blaine shifted beside him, and Kurt could feel the relief emanating from his body.

"You're tall," she said.

Kurt blinked at her, unsure as to how to reply.

"He is," Blaine confirmed, as if it were something he expected her to say. "Mom, I'm claimed now. I'm - Kurt's invited me to stay-"

"Go," she said dismissively, running light fingers over the fronds of a fern. "You should, it's your responsibility."

He nodded. "Will you ... tell father?"

"I can't see why it'd come up," she said.

Blaine nodded again, eyes falling.

Kurt was almost shaking with anger, throat flashing in the light as his jaw clenched and his teeth ground together quietly.

But then Blaine's hand slipped into his, palm to palm, and suddenly the anger ebbed away.

"Come on," he whispered. "I should - get my things."

Kurt glanced over his shoulder at the tiny woman as he was lead out of the room, blinking in disbelief as she didn't glance up even once while her son quietly walked out of her life.

By the time Blaine's door closed behind them, Kurt couldn't bear it anymore.

"Oof!" Blaine grunted as he found himself tangled up in Kurt's arms again, trying to talk with a mouthful of shirt. "Krrpht."

"Sorry - I'm sorry-" Kurt said, leaning back. "I just - god, Blaine, I'm so sorry."

Blaine blinked at him, shocked. "I- I thought we were okay? Unless, you ... don't want-"

"No! God, no. Not us. Your *mother*, Blaine, wh-" he turned in a bewildered circle, "what was that?"

"What?"

"She just... she-"

Blaine smiled at him, eyes sad but still fond and warm under the yellow lamps of his bedroom. "It's normal."

"It's not," Kurt insisted, waving an arm. "How can she treat you like that?"

Blaine shrugged, shifting to pull a long canvas bag out from under his desk. "It's how she is. You get used to it."

Kurt stared at him, open-mouthed and disbelieving.

"I mean, that went a lot better than I thought it would," he added, pulling armfuls of clothes from his drawers and tucking them into the bag.

Still stunned, Kurt pushed a hand through his own hair, blinking and trying to comprehend it all.

"Which one is she?" he asked carefully.

Blaine met his eyes. "Sub."

"Huh," Kurt honked softly. Nope. That didn't help him make any more sense of it.

"Father is..." Blaine narrowed his eyes at the wall while he shifted his belongings around, making more space. "He's very focused. On one thing at a time."

Kurt's brow furrowed in confusion.

"That one thing was his wife," Blaine explained. "Until it wasn't."

"Oh," Kurt's eyes widened.

"Cooper," Blaine confirmed. "The second he came along, he was all Father cared about."

Kurt rocked back on his heels, folding his arms over his chest as he listened.

"Cooper was everything," Blaine went on. "Father's never been an emotional man. His first wife - she didn't matter anymore. Only Cooper mattered, the moment he was born. Father wanted a Dom for a son, so he put ... everything, all his attention, into Cooper. His first wife left him, after a few years, and he found another Sub."

"Your mother."

Blaine nodded. "She was happy, at first. She had me. And I ... think she was happy."

Kurt cocked his head in sympathy at the doubt in Blaine's voice.

"But she realised too late that she'd never matter more than Cooper. Nothing did. Father wanted a Dom, just like him. I wasn't - part of his original plan. I think I was just to keep her happy. Keep her busy. But none of it mattered, in the end."

He caught Kurt's questioning look, and smiled sadly.

"You can't fight genetics."

"Oh my god," Kurt whispered softly, remembering the hollow star on Cooper's neck.

"He was kicked out the moment he got marked," Blaine mumbled, face drawing tight with emotion. "I was eight."

Kurt's mouth fell open, heart clenching too tight in his chest. He couldn't imagine what it would have been like. To be Cooper, and to suddenly have nothing, just because of a designation. To be Blaine; a child, growing into a Sub, who had the only good thing in his life - the one person that truly loved him - torn away for no reason.

"But he came back?" Kurt ventured softly, swallowing against the hot sting that threatened to reach his eyes.

Blaine nodded. "He never really left, he always found a way to come see me. And he came back for me. After... the dance. But his guardianship application was denied."

Unable to stand it any longer, Kurt closed the distance between them, resting his cheek on Blaine's shoulder and

curling fingers around both hips under his jacket.

Blaine seized a slow, shaky breath, letting his eyes fall closed as his body relaxed under Kurt's.

"Mom lets him stay, when Father's out of town," he said. "They get along well enough. I think ... she knows. That I need him."

Kurt squeezed his hips gently. "You know he can come see you, still? He's welcome."

Blaine turned in his arms, shoulder dragging over Kurt's chest as he stared back at him with huge, surprised eyes.

"Any time," Kurt assured him seriously.

A rush of air escaped Blaine in shaky relief, and he bowed to press their foreheads together. "Thank you, Kurt, thank you."

"Shh," Kurt whispered softly, tipping back to kiss his forehead. After a moment, he rubbed his arm reassuringly. "Come on. We need to get this packed up, get you home."

Blaine's eyes drooped slightly, and his mouth curled in to a soft, adoring smile.

"What?"

"You said 'home'," he whispered.

It struck Kurt at that moment what it meant for Blaine. Even after the trauma of the field, and the claiming - *aftereverything* - he could still smile. He belonged to someone now. After a lifetime of barely belonging to anything at all.

"That's what it is," Kurt answered gently. "It's your home, Blaine. I'm your home. And you're mine."

They didn't talk as they packed the rest of Blaine's smaller possessions, just swayed in the silence, bumping shoulders and exchanging soft touches whenever they moved past each other.

By the time they'd brought the last of the bags down to the Navigator, Blaine turned and let his gaze linger over the front of the house, smiling to himself.

"Are you okay?" Kurt asked from behind him, worried at how long he'd stood staring at what he was leaving behind.

Blaine shook his head. "I am... perfect," he whispered, and turned to meet Kurt's eyes with a grin.

"Take me home."

CHAPTER SIX

Kurt couldn't sleep.

He rolled over in bed, pressing his face to the cool edge of the pillow and sliding both arms underneath. Everything was too cold or too hot, his pyjamas were too tight, or they were suddenly too loose and twisted in the most uncomfortable places possible. His knee itched, the small of his back tickled, and his shoulder ached for no reason at all.

Grunting softly in frustration, he wriggled again, trying to find somewhere new, searching for that one little niche where he could relax and forget his body. It had to be somewhere.

Why was he suddenly the wrong shape in his own skin?

Two doors, one hallway.

He blinked at the stray reminder flickering across his repeating thoughts of *thirsty, tired, uncomfortable*, and rolled onto his back. He peered at the ceiling, pushing a hand through his hair. *Two doors, one hallway.*

The things between him and Blaine.

It was just the claim, he told himself. It was just biology. He dismissed it with a sigh, lifting himself up to punch at his pillow and settle into it again.

It's not that far...

He forced his eyes shut, drawing deep, calming breaths.

When they'd come back home, they'd found Finn's old room was already made up and waiting. Blaine had carried his bags in hesitantly after dinner, smiling at the dresser and the broad ensemble bed decked in fresh, soft linen; the care that had been taken by strangers, just for him.

Carole had beamed at him all the while, pointing out different things and how she'd hoped he'd like them, chatting endlessly about all that they could do or buy to make the room feel more like home. It took Burt's amused smile and guiding hands to pull her away, and Blaine's breathless admission of endless, heartbreakingly genuine gratitude to make her tear up and scurry to hug him before they left the room.

After too long spent sprawled out on their backs on Blaine's bed talking and exchanging absent, innocent touches, Kurt had to tear himself away. It was late, and as relieved as he'd been that the day was finally over, he still couldn't shake the hesitance to leave Blaine alone.

He'd managed to get back to his bedroom, go through his night time routine and get into bed while his brain came up with random excuses to go say another goodnight.

But he'd stopped himself, forcing the urges away as best he could. Blaine was here, and he was safe, and that's what mattered.

But Kurt couldn't sleep.

The next morning was a haze of half-awake stumbling and shuffling as he dragged on his clothes with weak and weary arms, stopping every five minutes to yawn. Breakfast was relaxed and quiet, comfortable like it *shouldn't* have been, not with everything that had happened the day before.

But it was, all the same. Blaine was simply *there*, eating and washing up and brushing his teeth, just as relaxed as if it were old routine.

School became a tired blur of words and random people slipping past his peripheral vision, of surprised faces and

unenthusiastic congratulations lost in the sea of too many hours between Blaine being in the passenger seat of his car and the seat beside him at lunch. By the time they climbed back in the Navigator at the end of the day, it was all Kurt could do not to reach out and pull Blaine to his chest.

If we're going to do this, Blaine had said to him the night before, *if we're going to be this*, *we need to just be friends*.

Kurt was fairly certain that friends don't pet each other in the school parking lot.

Still, he let his control slip in the in-between moments, when nobody was looking. He let himself reach out and take Blaine's hand, or rest a palm against his shoulder, like an anchor; something to keep him grounded and ease the ever-building discomfort lingering beneath his skin.

Another day passed before he noticed the bags under Blaine's eyes, how sluggish his walk had become, and the yawning punctuation riddled throughout every conversation.

By the third restless night, he was certain there was more going on than just some discontent stirring the markers in his blood.

He tossed and turned into the hours of the morning, catching his clock too often and counting down to daylight without meaning to. *If I fall asleep now, I'll still get five hours*.

If I fall asleep now...

He dipped into unconsciousness from sheer exhaustion, fading in and out like the real world was a lighthouse; bursts of awareness always dragging him away from the edge of the blissful dark.

When he woke again a moment later, it wasn't to sunlight but sound; a shuffling thump outside his door. For a moment he tried to decide if he'd truly heard it, too tired to tell reality apart from imagination, but shook himself as he sat up.

It didn't matter if it was real, it was a reason.

He threw off his blanket and slid from the side of the bed as gracefully as his sleep-addled brain could manage, moving swiftly to the door and tugging it open to peer down the hall.

The outline of Blaine's shoulders shifted in the dark as he turned in surprise, his shadowed features looking every bit as weary as Kurt felt.

Blaine let out a careful breath, eyes darting sideways and back again. "I can't sleep," he said in a whisper, a sheepish smile curling at the edge of his mouth.

Kurt nodded, leaning against his doorframe. "Every night?"

"Every night."

With a sympathetic tilt of his head, he met Blaine's half-lidded eyes with a soft smile. He reached out his hand, and chuckled to himself when Blaine's entire frame slumped in relief.

As he watched his Sub shuffle sleepily towards him to take his hand, Kurt was struck with a sudden dull ache. Something about Blaine in this state - lost and sweet and so utterly *vulnerable* with exhaustion - left him sore inside.

He let the door click shut behind them, hands moving to Blaine's shoulders to guide him over to his bed. Like a half-asleep child, Blaine flopped onto the mattress and burrowed his face into the pillow, ass half-raised in the air at an awkward angle before he finally flattened. Kurt barely managed to keep himself from laughing aloud.

When he settled in to his side of the bed, Blaine had turned over, and Kurt found his hand again, open and waiting for him against the cool sheets.

Just the weight of the hand in his sent a radiating peace through his body, and he felt the gradual pull, the sinking comfort that had been missing all those nights before.

He rolled his head on the pillow, watching Blaine's profile as his breathing evened out to a soft rise and fall, and sleep took him under.

Kurt traced his thumb over Blaine's fingers, blinking very slowly, fighting to stay conscious and keep looking just a moment longer. His gaze lingered on the darker shadow of the fading bruise by Blaine's eye, and he held back the urge to lean over and press his lips to it softly.

He's here. He's safe.

When Kurt woke again, it was to birdsong and Blaine's arms around him, head pillowed on his chest. He smiled, raking a hand through the tangle of curls in front of him and letting his gaze drift absently over the bright white of the ceiling bathed in sunshine.

His bladder quickly reminded him that lingering wasn't an option, and he held back a groan at the blare of his alarm clock, right on cue.

"Mrrphsh," Blaine murmured against his chest, letting out a soft grumbling noise and snuggling down tightly. "Five more-mphrsh."

Kurt chuckled. "School," he said. "We have to. Come on."

Tension tightened Blaine's body for a moment at the sound of Kurt's voice, but it fled just as quickly under the brush of a warm, gentle hand down his back.

"I slept," Blaine mumbled.

"So did I," Kurt said. "Finally."

Blaine rolled back, stretching carefully and fixing him with sweet, sleep-drugged eyes as he propped himself up on an elbow. "I'm sorry for the- bed invasion, I didn't mean-"

"We should keep sleeping here," Kurt cut him off, and rushed to explain at the surprised look he received: "I think... it's the only way we're going to get any sleep. And I'm okay with it. If you are."

Blaine seemed to hesitate for a moment, narrowing his eyes, almost as if he were trying to decide whether or not he should say what he was thinking.

Kurt waited, unmoving, until a timid smile tugged at the edge of Blaine's lips, and he nodded back.

"We should get dressed," Kurt insisted, pulling himself up.

Blaine flopped back onto the bed with a dramatic groan, holding Kurt's pillow over his face.

"I know, I know. Come on," Kurt said as he turned and swatted at Blaine's legs playfully. "Up."

Dropping the pillow and scrunching his nose in reply, Blaine followed the soft command, dragging himself out of the bed as exaggeratedly slowly as he could and laughing when Kurt smacked teasingly at his arm.

With a parting, mocking purse of his lips in Kurt's direction, he padded over to the doorway to make use of the other bathroom.

Kurt couldn't help but watch him go, sighing in quiet relief that somehow, even after claiming, even after his life was wholly uprooted and his world turned upside down, he was still the same Blaine. *His* Blaine.

He's your best friend, a voice inside reminded him.

The smile fell from his face.

Don't screw this up.

He was in the shower and staring at the wall tile with unfocused eyes when he decided it was actually very simple. It was easy. They were *friends*.

Friends hugged. Held hands. Friends could sleep in the same bed, it didn't mean anything. It didn't have to *be* anything complicated. They could do this.

Blaine was more important than some fleeting, dizzying feeling in his stomach and his head and his heart. And he'd already come close enough to ruining his life.

You turned him down when he wanted you. You took him when he didn't. This isn't fair, you can't fall in love with him now.

Kurt's eyes widened, and his loofah hit the shower floor with a wet, echoing smack.

Oh god.

He shut the taps off, scrambling for his towel and trying to focus on anything but the twisting feeling in his gut and the single word playing on frantic repeat in his head.

He skipped the bulk of his morning routine in favour of freaking out.

Halfway through pacing his room and getting dressed, he caught the tiny knock at the door and whirled around with wide eyes.

"Kurt, are you okay?"

Blaine.

"I'm fine!" he called out, tugging his sleeves up and securing a suspender clip.

"Cause it kinda feels like... you might be having some kind of existential crisis in there," Blaine ventured carefully from the other side of the door, and Kurt caught the tiny hint of amusement in his voice.

With a huff of laughter, he let his shoulders drop. "Come in."

Blaine pushed through the door, eying him for a moment. "You sure about this bed thing? You know we don't have t-"

"No, no," Kurt cut him off, waving a hand. "It's ... not that. I'm just..." He glanced around. "Fashion crisis," he lied.

Chuckling, Blaine let the door slip closed behind him and raked his eyes up and down Kurt's figure slowly, taking in the tight black jeans and knee-high boots, paired with a half-untucked Henley and hanging suspenders.

"You're about three layers short of normal," Blaine teased. "So that's probably why."

Kurt shot him an amused glare.

"I like it," Blaine insisted, sticking out his chin. "I like the more," he waved a hand, "layer-lite you."

"You don't like my outfits?" Kurt straightened in alarm.

"No, no!" Blaine waved both hands in the air defensively. "I love them, it's just - this is more... like the you that I see. It's ... warm, and casual and... with less layers, I mean, I feel closer when..." His voice trailed off as the blush rose slowly in both cheeks.

Kurt smirked at him softly. "Uhuh, go on."

Blaine ducked his head, and Kurt couldn't help but laugh.

"Alright, I'll go with this," he said, unwilling to admit that was the plan in the first place. "Come on."

He slipped his hand into Blaine's on his way to the door without thinking, and the tiny flare of panic rose in him again before Blaine fell into step and followed silently, calm as ever.

It's going to be fine. He doesn't know. Just act normal, he told himself.

Wow his hands are soft. And warm. How did I not notice that his hands are soft and warm?

Catching himself, Kurt wondered absently how he'd somehow turned into a thirteen year old girl overnight.

It took everything he had to push the giddy, butterfly-inducing thoughts from his mind at every shared glance as the day went on, trying not to grin dopily and give himself away whenever Blaine smiled at him. Or spoke to him. Or breathed in his general direction.

*You're an idiot, Kurt Hummel. What is **wrong** with you?!*

He made it through the day mostly unscathed and with few slip-ups, with the mortifying exception of almost missing his chair when he sat down at lunch. But Blaine had just finished his early swim practice at the time, and his hair was wet, and his eyelashes seemed so much *longer* and darker than before, and when did Blaine start to look like *that*, when exactly did *that* happen?

The only distraction came in the form of an low, irritated murmur filtering through the din, and Kurt realised soon enough it was coming from the table of jocks. He kept an eye on them as they ate, all too aware of the glares that were fixed on Blaine's back.

A large part of him wanted to reach out and swipe away that one drop of water clinging to Blaine's temple, wanted to glare back at the jocks' table defiantly, pull Blaine into his lap, and make it very, very damn clear who he belonged to.

He smiled darkly when one of the jocks caught him looking, and, before he could think about what he was doing, slipped an arm around Blaine's waist.

It was instantaneous at the touch; Blaine rocked against him, settling into his side without so much as a pause in his conversation with Rachel about modern vs. classic theatre.

It's as easy as that, a voice in Kurt's head told him smugly. *He's already yours.*

He forced the voice away as fast as he could with the same old reminder. *He's your best friend.*

But come dinner that night, all his willpower had slowly bled away, and he found himself leaning on his elbow, chin in his hand, staring at the back of Blaine's head every time he carried another handful of empty dishes to the kitchen.

"Kid," Burt said, dragging him out of his reverie.

"Hmm?"

"You wanna tell me what's up?"

His gaze darted to the doorway. "Fine, Dad. I'm ... fine."

Burt rocked back in his seat, folding his arms over his chest and waiting patiently.

After a long drag of silence, Kurt met his determined stare and let out a huff. "I'm that obvious?"

"Like a freakin' neon sign," Burt insisted.

Kurt sighed. "I don't know, Dad."

"Is it Blaine?"

Kurt shifted in his seat at the sound of his name, eyes flicking to the kitchen again where Carole and Blaine had started the dishes.

"That'd be a yes," Burt answered himself.

Drawing a deep breath, Kurt tried to figure out how to put the feeling into words. Words that he could say aloud to his father, no less.

"I don't know," he began softly, shaking his head. "I don't know if ... I did the right thing."

Burt nodded lightly. "Let me guess," he said. "You want him, but you won't do anything about it, 'cause you think he deserves a better Dom than you?"

Kurt blinked at him in surprise.

"How did you-?"

"That feeling usually hits around three or four days in," Burt cut him off. "Every single time."

Kurt wet his lips. "But he does. He deserves someone he wants."

"He wanted you enough to present in the first place," Burt shot back. "Before he even knew you. That kinda says it all."

Kurt shook his head. "No," he said softly. "He... he deserves someone better."

"Better than what he knows he wants? Kurt, that's-"

"He deserves somebody who would have accepted him the first time," Kurt said sadly. He sat back in resignation, fidgeting with the table cloth.

"You were surprised," Burt insisted, leaning forward on the table and tapping at it with a pointed finger. "Kurt, anybody coulda had that reaction. It doesn't mean anything."

Kurt pressed his lips together tightly, gaze flicking to the doorway and back again.

"You wanted to, didn't you?"

Kurt met his father's eyes.

"The second time," Burt said. "You're the one that got him to present."

He nodded tentatively, aware of how bad it could look. Doms weren't supposed to initiate. But all he'd done was draw him to the ground - Blaine had lifted his hands, of his own free will.

"So what's the problem?"

Kurt drew and held another deep breath, thinking for a moment.

"You remember," he said carefully, "how I told you I never wanted a Sub?"

"You wanted a boyfriend," Burt acknowledged, nodding. "I know."

"I have a Sub, Dad," Kurt said with a shrug, trying not to let his emotion show on his face. "One that I... I think I'm..." He cut himself short, unwilling to say it out loud. "This wasn't supposed to happen."

"Kurt," Burt said firmly, dipping his head to stare directly at his son. "Who in the hell told you he can't be both?"

Kurt blinked at him, stunned.

He let the words play over in his head through the rest of the night, let them tangle up in his thoughts and twine around the strong, thrumming awareness of how Blaine made him feel. The moment Blaine had settled in bed beside him that night, he'd closed his eyes, breathing evenly, still trying to understand what was happening to him.

For so long, the two had been completely separated in his mind. Claiming a Sub had always been a physical thing. It was about sex and ownership, and all the things he always thought he didn't want any part of.

But having someone, having a boyfriend, was the thought that kept him awake so many nights, lost and sore with longing. He wasn't stupid. He knew a boyfriend would, by nature, have to be a Sub - but the romantic in him had kept the two forced at opposite ends of his mind for so long, the way they bled together now left him lightheaded.

Blaine was his.

Why couldn't he be both?

Maybe he doesn't want to be, a voice reminded him.

Wide awake and staring at the shadows on the ceiling, listening to Blaine's breathing and stroking soft fingers over the back of his hand, Kurt decided there had to be a way to know for sure.

It was Saturday when he found one.

Blaine had spent the better part of the morning unpacking his music collection and pouring over Kurt's, laughing and smiling up at him from the floor excitedly with every new discovery of something he hadn't heard, or something they mutually adored.

For Kurt, the idea wasn't a lightbulb or a sudden epiphany that struck him to the core, but rather a calm flicker of conscious thought that slipped in when he wasn't looking. The knowledge, the physicality, of how to find out.

He watched Blaine for a moment, lips parting in surprise.

It couldn't be that easy, surely.

But there it was.

What if I'm right?

Kurt drew himself up to his knees on the bedspread, nervous, rocking back on his thighs and still watching

carefully as Blaine sorted through CDs.

What if you're not just my Sub?

He wet his lips, peering at him for a moment, trying to figure out the best way to go about it. It was just one thing, one simple thing, and he would know.

What if you were made for me?

"Blaine," he said softly.

Blaine glanced over at him, brow lifting in reply.

"Come here."

Blaine straightened slightly, blinking at him, stunned by the sudden command.

Pointing to the bed with his eyes, Kurt nodded once.

As he climbed onto the bedspread, Blaine suddenly seemed smaller, like he had that first day. He rested on his knees with both shoulders drawn tight, arms together in front of himself, eyes flashing nervously.

When Kurt shifted closer, Blaine drew a sharp breath, and his eyelashes fluttered briefly as he tried to understand what was happening.

"Blaine," Kurt said again, and met his gaze as he looked up. "I want you," he said, "to sit perfectly still."

He nodded jerkily in reply, trying not to fidget, eyes unreadable but so different now than they had been a moment ago.

"Don't move, no matter what," Kurt commanded firmly, and Blaine dipped his head in silent acknowledgement.

Kurt shifted his balance back and forth between his knees, reaching out a hand to brush light fingers over Blaine's face. He followed the path with his eyes, watching the ripples as Blaine's breath hitched in his throat, catching the surprised flash of his pupils.

It was always meant to be this easy, it's why we're made this way.

He trailed the pad of his thumb down the line of Blaine's profile softly, fingers ghosting over his face with the motion. He felt strangely unselfconscious at the act, and the nervous, flipping feeling in his stomach began to melt away.

His thumb caught on Blaine's lower lip and lingered, swiping gently. The eddies of heat building under his skin left him dizzy, and he panted quietly as he leaned in and brushed his lips over Blaine's.

It wasn't a kiss, just a graze of soft skin, but it was sweet and heady like nothing he'd imagined. He did it again, slowly, mouthing at Blaine's lower lip and feeling him tremble under his fingers as they cupped his jaw.

The third time, it was a kiss.

His eyes fell closed as his body moved without him, pressing their lips together tightly and seizing a loud breath. He pressed in, sweeping his tongue over Blaine's lower lip and licking at his mouth softly until Blaine opened up underneath him, letting him in.

It didn't even take a full second.

The rush came too fast, and threw him off balance as Blaine whined into his mouth and wrapped himself around

his body, kissing him back for all he was worth.

Kurt settled into his lap, bringing both arms up to fist handfuls of curls, tipping Blaine's head back to kiss him deeper as he rocked against him, lost in the taste of him and the explosions in his blood firing in bursts of *more, need, want, own*.

Mine.

He sucked at Blaine's lower lip and pulled away with a wet sound, shaking, cradling his head in both hands.

"You kissed me back," he said breathlessly, struggling to keep his voice even.

"Of course I kissed you back," Blaine said with a laugh, eyes dark and beautiful, brimming with stunned disbelief.

"Oh god," Kurt pressed another kiss to his lips, faster this time, "you kissed me back."

"Ku-" another kiss, "Kurt, what-?"

"I told you to sit still, and not move," Kurt whispered, closing his eyes and resting their foreheads together as he tried to control his breathing. "You broke a command to kiss me back."

Blaine blinked rapidly, trying to understand. "You thought- you thought this was just about being your Sub?"

Kurt nodded gently, just enough for Blaine to feel it.

"Kurt."

"Kiss me," Kurt commanded, voice thick and dark with everything thrumming in his veins.

Blaine met his mouth again, firm and eager, and more than happy to obey as they rocked back on the bed and collapsed in a heap, mouths still locked together.

"Oh *god*," Blaine moaned, tearing his mouth away as Kurt fell on top of him.

"What?"

"It's just-"

Kurt dropped a soft kiss to the side of his mouth, working his way down his jaw. "What is it?"

"You- the weight- it's-"

"I'm too heavy?" Kurt asked, stunned.

"No, god, no, *perfect*, good, oh god," Blaine babbled, head twisting against the mattress.

Kurt's eyes widened. He'd forgotten that part of their lessons, had swept it away with all the other little facts that he thought he'd never need.

The pressure of a Dom's body on top of a Sub is overwhelmingly pleasurable for the receiving party. It is comfort, it is being owned, at its most absolute.

He shifted his hips back, settling down more firmly and watching Blaine writhe as he pressed another line of kisses up his throat.

"Blaine," he whispered.

"Hnng-"

"We're going to lie here, and I'm going to kiss you," he insisted evenly, "for," his eyes trailed up to the clock, but he didn't lift his mouth from Blaine's skin as he mumbled against it, "at least the next few hours."

"Mmmmf-" Blaine agreed wordlessly.

With a smirk, Kurt lifted his head to gaze down at him with bright, adoring eyes.

Blaine blinked dopily up at him, mouth open and kiss-swollen, eyelashes fluttering intermittently as he managed to put the words together. "You want this?"

"I want you," Kurt told him firmly. "I have you."

Blaine's eyes fell closed, and he let out a sound that sounded like a sob of relief. "*Kurt.*"

"Shh," Kurt whispered, lowering himself down to press another soft kiss to Blaine's lips. "I've got you."

Blaine moaned softly, sinking into the mattress and reeling with the intensity of his Dom's weight on top of him. They relaxed into the slow, easy rhythm; mouths moving together, arms coiled around each other, content and spread out in the late morning sun.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Kurt decided very quickly that he would never, ever get tired of kissing.

He'd spent the better part of the day with Blaine spread out beneath him, making little noises like breathless music at every press of Kurt's lips. He wondered if it could be an addiction; those sounds, the warmth in his veins, the awareness of how good he was making Blaine feel. Every jolt of pleasure in his Sub's body reverberated through his own, heady and satisfying like nothing had ever truly been till now.

He was fairly certain he could be happy just making Blaine feel good for the rest of his life.

They emerged for dinner on Saturday night, kiss-swollen and dishevelled despite Kurt's last-minute attempt to fix his hair and straighten Blaine's shirt. Burt had taken one look at them and huffed a quiet, knowing laugh, shaking his head as he slid into his seat at the table and earning a violent blush from Kurt.

It wasn't until he turned and pressed a twenty into Carole's outstretched palm that Kurt straightened in his own seat, outraged.

"You took *bets*?"

"You couldn'ta held out just one more day?" Burt asked teasingly.

Blaine tried to hide his snicker, ducking his head and pressing his grin into his palm.

"I love you, too," Kurt huffed quietly, ignoring his father's chuckles.

The conversation faded in and out as they ate, changing subjects from school to the weather to the tire store, and Kurt breathed a quiet, grateful sigh at the fact that their relationship hadn't come up again. It was one thing for his Dad to know about what he and Blaine were doing, it was another thing entirely to talk about it over dinner.

By the time they'd finished washing up, the mood had gone from mildly awkward to perfectly relaxed, and Kurt rocked his hips against the sink, humming quietly as he put down the last plate.

"We'll be out tomorrow," Carole said gently, resting a hand on his back as she reached past to pick up the plate and dry it. "Your father is taking me to that big travelling marketplace, they're stopping out past Westerville so we're going to make a day of it."

"Uhuh," Kurt drawled, eyes narrowing in suspicion.

"So we'll be gone," she added. "All day."

Kurt turned, resting a hand on the kitchen counter as he eyed her carefully, eyebrow quirked.

She smiled and reached out to pat his cheek. "Have a good day, sweetie."

"Subtle," he said, squeezing her shoulder affectionately as he brushed past. "But thank you."

She covered his hand with hers for a moment before it slipped away, and he wandered back out to find his boyfriend and his father transfixed by a football game.

He smiled at them fondly, leaning against the doorframe.

"Come on, pick it up," Burt cursed at the TV, scowling. "I tell ya, they're just not playing like they used to."

Blaine nodded in agreement, mouth twitching at the side in disappointment. "Last year was beautiful, I wish they'd just find that energy again."

Kurt's brow lifted, and he filed the information away in his head. *Blaine likes football.*

After a moment he shot them a parting glance and wandered back up to his room, content to read and let Blaine enjoy the game. A part of him felt the small internal tug the moment he sat on the bed, *Blaine should be here*, but he knew it was just his blood stirring for more of him. After a day spent covering Blaine's body with his own and exploring every inch of his mouth, all he could think about was more.

He tried not to wonder for too long what it'd be like, if they weren't made to be driven by their bodies and their blood. Would he still want Blaine this badly?

It only took a flicker of memory to remind him; the honey-brown in Blaine's eyes when he looked at him, his face when he woke up in the morning, the mess of curls pressed against Kurt's chest. The way he ducked his head when he laughed.

Yes. I would.

There was a quiet knock at the door before Blaine slipped inside and pressed it shut behind him, tilting his head. "You left?"

Kurt smiled at him sleepily. "You looked like you were having fun."

Blaine crawled across the bedspread on his hands and knees, craning to kiss at the corner of Kurt's mouth. "Thank you."

"Mmm," Kurt hummed, dropping his book in favour of pressing both hands to Blaine's cheeks and shifting to kiss him back properly.

He pulled away with a tiny nip to Blaine's top lip. "We should-"

"Uhuh." Blaine rushed in again, balancing on his knee as he slid their mouths together for another kiss, only pulling away when he felt the vibration of Kurt's laugh.

"What?" he asked, smiling back.

"I was going to say," Kurt went on, eyes dropping to Blaine's mouth and flicking back up again, devilish and dark. "We should get changed for bed, before we lose track of time."

"Ah." Blaine shifted back sheepishly, and Kurt couldn't help but grin at this expression.

Scooting to the edge of the bed, he rolled to nudge at Blaine's shoulder.

"So we don't have to later," he clarified, and chuckled when Blaine perked up instantly.

Even with separate showers and their individual skincare routines, they were both back in bed inside of twenty minutes, draped on their sides and exchanging soft, slow kisses. Kurt pressed his hand over Blaine's heart through his tank top, fingers stroking against skin and soft cotton fabric.

"They're going out tomorrow, all day," Kurt said, lifting his hand up to brush loose curls away from Blaine's forehead as he studied his face.

His black eye had healed, and the cut to his lip had left no scar. Unblemished and still flushed from the heat of his shower, Blaine stared back at him through seemingly mesmerised eyes, deep like black coffee in the dim light.

"All day tomorrow," he parroted back softly, distracted as his fingers traced over Kurt's lips.

"Blaine," Kurt dipped his head on the pillow, trying to catch his eyes. "It's just going to be us here."

Blaine narrowed his eyes for a moment, and they widened just as quickly when he realised what Kurt was asking. "Oh."

Kurt tilted his head, watching him with fond amusement.

"I mean, but, it doesn't-" Blaine said, wetting his lips. He let out a nervous laugh. "It doesn't mean anything has to happen."

"No, it doesn't," Kurt confirmed. "Not if we don't want it to."

Blaine met his eyes and held them. After a long pause, he croaked quietly; "Do you?"

Kurt thought about it for a moment, gaze unfocused and drifting over the wall past Blaine's shoulder. More than anything he knew he never wanted to lie; the compulsion to protect was too strong. But it didn't help that it was seated quietly alongside the near-constant compulsion to peel Blaine's clothing from his body and make him speak another language using only his tongue.

"Yes."

Mouth falling open in surprise, Blaine blinked at him rapidly. "Oh."

"You... don't?" Kurt guessed carefully, trying to hide the note of disappointment in his voice.

"No, I do - I mean - there's-"

"Shhh," Kurt leaned in, pressing a reassuring kiss to the corner of his mouth and stroking hands through his hair. "It's okay."

Blaine let out a rush of breath, eyes falling closed. He smiled softly, almost sadly, as he spoke. "I never thought anybody would... want to. With me," he confessed quietly.

"Why?" Kurt asked. He rocked back a fraction, surprised at the volume of his voice and how fast he'd felt the upset rise inside.

Why didn't Blaine think anybody would want him?

"I'm sorry," he said quickly, realising Blaine was still startled at his outburst. "I just don't understand. I mean, I know Subs are prone to doubt, you told me that. But you're - you're-"

"Small?" Blaine asked, voice empty and frustrated. "Invisible."

"Beautiful." Oh my god, Blaine, no," Kurt pressed in, drawing Blaine against his body with both arms and kissing him deeply, trying to roll them back.

"Mmf-" Blaine mumbled into his mouth, breaking away and bracing himself so they wouldn't tip over. "No, don't."

Kurt blinked, stunned. "You don't want me to?"

"Just, if you lie on top of me right now, my brain is going to short-circuit and I need to be able to think straight," Blaine said, smiling and resting their foreheads together.

"Oh," Kurt said, feeling suddenly sheepish himself.

"I just don't know if I can," Blaine began again. "I feel like if you... see me like that. Or if it's not what you expected. You won't..."

"What?" Kurt asked, worried.

"You'll regret everything."

Kurt let his head drop down onto the pillow, drawing Blaine back down onto his side in front of him. "You remember when you tried to take off the bracelet?"

Blaine blinked at him, eyelids dipping slowly under the attention of Kurt's fingers massaging into his hair. "Yes."

"This is just like that," he assured him gently, adding more pressure and watching Blaine's slow blinks grow gradually heavier. "You're mine. Nothing's going to change that."

With a soft sigh, Blaine closed his eyes, murmuring. "But what if-"

"No," Kurt cut him off gently. "We can take our time. We have *so much* time. And tomorrow we can lie here all day, and it doesn't have to be anything."

Another soft, contented sound fell from Blaine's lips, and Kurt leaned in to press two short, soft kisses to them quickly.

He wondered absently if he could find the right spot, the right touch, to make Blaine purr.

"I love you," Blaine mumbled, eyes still closed, breath evening out as sleep carried him down.

Kurt's fingers stopped. "What did you say?"

Blaine didn't answer.

Oh my god.

"Blaine?"

Still nothing.

Kurt seized a long, frustrated breath, rolling back onto his side of the bed and fisting at the blanket.

After a moment caught up in his own private tantrum, he let his head tip on the pillow to gaze at Blaine's sleeping face. With a soft smile, Kurt twisted carefully, curling closer. He slid an arm around Blaine's waist to rub at his back, inching his cheek across the pillows until he could feel Blaine's breath on his lips.

"I want you to hear it," he whispered. "I can't say it now, okay? I need you to hear it when I say it the first time."

Blaine didn't respond, but it didn't matter. Kurt was perfectly content to lie still and soak in the warmth of him as he drifted off to sleep.

He woke again to darkness and the feeling of a body pressing urgently against his, the sudden jolt of nervous pleasure from his hips riding in waves up to his brain. It took him a moment of half-awake blinking in the dark to realise that Blaine was hard, curled tightly against his chest, and moaning softly.

Kurt tried to lift his head, to reach for the lamp, only to feel a sharp bump as Blaine's crown knocked his chin and slapped his jaw painfully shut.

"Ow, *Blaine!*" he whispered roughly. "Are you-?"

With another soft moan, Blaine pressed in tighter, hands groping blindly at his body, hips rocking slowly against Kurt's thigh.

Kurt's eyes widened, and he settled his hand on Blaine's bicep. "Blaine? You're dreaming, wake up," he said.

When Blaine didn't wake, Kurt shook a little harder, and the movement died down for a moment to stillness.

"Hmm?"

"You were dreaming," Kurt said gently, unable to keep the worry from his tone.

"Mmmh," Blaine mumbled before he pressed his lips to Kurt's throat, and snuggled down again.

Kurt sighed, weaving fingers into the hair at the base of Blaine's neck and stroking there, eyes wandering over the room. Something was wrong.

All the nights they'd spent in bed, and this hadn't happened before. They'd both ushered quietly apart in the mornings when either of them woke up hard, happy to let it go unspoken. But this was different. Blaine was dreaming and clinging to him so desperately, and Kurt couldn't help but feel the painful longing underneath it.

He extracted himself carefully, rolling Blaine back and ignoring the sharp sting in his veins at the sound of Blaine's soft, helpless whimper when he let go and slipped out of bed.

As quietly as he could manage, he tip-toed across the room, gathering his computer and sliding out the door.

While the laptop booted up on the dining table, he made himself a warm glass of milk, rolling his shoulders and sighing softly in the silence of the kitchen.

He should have done this a week ago. If not for himself, at least, for Blaine's sake.

The sheer font of information available to him made him rock back on his stool, overwhelmed at the seemingly endless sources. He browsed quickly, flicking in and out of different health sites and educational pages until he came to one that caught his eye.

SubCare International: Teaching Doms About Sub Nature. He clicked on the first few pages, scanning the information slowly as he sipped his drink.

By the time he glanced at the clock again, two hours had passed, and his milk had gone cold where he'd abandoned it on a coaster.

He cleaned up quickly, pressing his laptop shut and tucking it under his arm as he scaled back up the stairs and pushed into his room.

Blaine was curled up in a ball and had worked his way across the bed in his sleep, face drawn in visible discomfort.

When the claim is still new, loss of contact at vulnerable stages can be uncomfortable for both parties, often resulting in sleeplessness or nightmares.

Kurt slid the laptop onto his desk and padded over to the bed, drawing back the blankets and lowering himself down. He groped in the dark, finding Blaine's waist and pulling him back tight to his chest. He pressed an open kiss to the exposed line of his neck, feeling the tension wash away like a tide.

As he settled down, he fanned his hand out over Blaine's belly possessively, resting his cheek against his shoulder. A slow-creeping warmth spread through his veins as his body drank in the physical contact. The relief was palpable, too real, and in light of the new information swimming around in his head, soothing in an entirely new way.

They were made for each other. They were meant to hold each other. It was their nature, at the very core. Blaine was his.

But the dreams were another problem entirely. If what the site had laid out was accurate, just bringing up the subject had kick-started Blaine's hormones, and the only thing that would satisfy them now was more. More

touch, more contact, more of Kurt holding on to him and giving his body what it needed.

But Blaine was afraid.

Kurt tipped his head back, resting on his pillow and slipping his fingers under the edge of Blaine's singlet to stroke gently over warm skin. Blaine murmured in his sleep; just a soft, indecipherable sound of contentment, and Kurt smiled.

He lay awake in silence for another hour, sweeping small touches over Blaine's chest, pressing gentle kisses into his neck, his shoulder, his hair. *Loved*, Kurt thought, holding him closer. *Please, please, I need you to feel loved.*

When Kurt woke up again, he didn't remember having fallen to sleep. Blaine was already awake, boneless and warm in his arms, and he tipped back to look up when he sensed Kurt had stirred.

"Morning."

"Morning," Kurt said softly, dipping to kiss his nose and grinning as Blaine's face scrunched up with laughter.

It wasn't until after they'd climbed out of bed an hour later, showered and dressed, that Kurt remembered his research from the previous night, and Blaine's feverish dream.

A Sub's body knows what it needs before they do, consciously. Sex dreams, stress dreams and nightmares are regular precursors to desires, tension or fears, spurred by the self-doubt that all Subs are burdened with.

His eyes were unfocused as he thought about it, paying little attention to the movie they were watching. Instead, his gaze dropped absently to the curl of Blaine's legs across the bedspread as his mind wandered. He dragged his eyes over the swell of Blaine's hip and his ass in his sweatpants, the exposed skin of his back revealing small dimples that drove Kurt absolutely crazy the instant when he realised what they were.

My hands would fit there.

The movie played on, and Blaine kept still throughout, curled on his side and content to rest his head on Kurt's thigh right above his knee.

Kurt shifted carefully, too warm and only getting worse every time he noticed another part of Blaine he hadn't really looked at before. He brushed fingers through Blaine's hair, coaxing him back until his head tipped completely and he gazed up at him in surprise.

Dipping down, Kurt dragged their mouths together slowly, sweet and familiar, sucking lightly on Blaine's tongue before he pulled back.

Blaine blinked up at him, smiling still and perfectly relaxed. "What is it?" he asked.

"You woke up during the night, last night," Kurt began carefully. "Do you remember? You were dreaming."

After a pause, Blaine blushed, eyes lowering in embarrassment. "I didn't realise I'd... oh god-"

"No, it's okay," Kurt said quickly. "I... did some research. I want to know - what to do, when you need me to."

Fixing him with warm, adoring eyes, Blaine shifted in his lap. "You did?"

"I did," Kurt confirmed. "But I'm getting mixed messages and I don't want to... pressure you. But your body's telling me one thing and you're..."

Blaine wet his lips carefully, eyes narrowing. "I want to," he said softly.

Kurt seized a sharp breath at the admission.

"But," Blaine added quickly. "I don't... know if I can."

Kurt curled down to kiss him again quickly. "I have an idea," he said.

"Oh?"

"Slow," Kurt elaborated. "Very slow. And you say stop the moment you want to, and we stop."

Thinking for a moment, Blaine lifted himself up and sat still with his back to Kurt as he considered. When he turned again, there was a different expression on his features, something new and unnamable that made Kurt shiver.

Shifting to his hands and knees, Blaine crawled very slowly over the bedspread, keeping his eyes low. His lips were still parted, full and trembling as he stilled at Kurt's side and rocked back on his thighs.

"Tell me what to do," he whispered, leaning in.

Kurt held back the moan that threatened to slip out of him at Blaine's words, kissing him back in sharp, needy bursts as he reached out and found Blaine's waist, pulling him into his lap.

Blaine had always been strong and broad-shouldered, but Kurt was still bigger; a fact that seemed to send both of them quietly mad with arousal when it became more obvious.

Kurt fought the shudder that rippled through his entire body at the contact, the settling weight on his thighs, having Blaine there and *his*. He couldn't stop his hands from sliding over Blaine's back, palming at his shoulder blades through his shirt and raking down possessively. He couldn't stop his fingers from dipping into the dimples at the base of his spine and teasing over his sides in long sweeps.

The rush of quiet, punctuated, breathless noises that Blaine made under his attention only seemed to fuel the pounding blood in his veins, the ache that he felt in his bones. *Mine*.

Too fast, too soon, slow down, his head warned him quickly. He stilled his hands, catching his breath and resting his head against Blaine's chest for a moment as the hammer of his blood gradually slowed down with him.

He fought the instinct to tug at the hem of Blaine's shirt, to pull at his sweatpants, remembering Blaine's only request. *Tell me what to do*.

Kurt's hands fell back to rest on Blaine's thighs where they were spread either side of him.

"Take off your shirt," he instructed softly. He knew the voice was his, but it was calmer than he'd ever heard it before; deeper, and carrying a strange sense of power. He could hear the affection in it, too, a strong current under the command.

Blaine slipped his shirt off quickly, so fast Kurt wondered if he'd even thought twice about obeying.

With Blaine's skin bare and smooth in front of him, Kurt felt suddenly dizzy in the head-spinning rush of too many things he wanted to do to him all at once.

There was time for all of it later, he reminded himself, shivering with excitement at the thought of exploring, of taking his time to slowly make Blaine come undone.

His fingers trailed lightly up Blaine's biceps, cupping his shoulders and drawing him in as he pressed his lips to his breastbone. Blaine moaned at the contact, shifting in his lap and letting his head fall back.

"Does it feel good?" Kurt murmured against his skin.

"Yes, *oh*," Blaine's voice was barely audible, lost in breathless panting as Kurt swirled his tongue around a nipple

and scraped his teeth over it. Blaine whined, writhing from the sensation.

"Shh," Kurt said soothingly, arms curling around his shoulders to hold him still, working his lips and mouth across each nipple in turn until they were hard against his tongue.

Blaine simply took it, every stroke of Kurt's tongue and squeeze of his hands, straining not to cry out or roll his hips for more friction until he was told.

When Kurt pulled back, he let his gaze drift over Blaine's body, revelling in the undeniable thrills that every red mark sent rocketing through his veins.

Blaine swayed in his arms, lightheaded and blinking, seemingly amazed at what had just happened.

"Are you okay?" Kurt asked.

"Mmm," he hummed. "I've never felt ... anything like that."

"Me neither," Kurt admitted with a soft laugh, squeezing at his hips. "Slowly," he insisted again, sliding his hands down over the swell of Blaine's ass and drawing him in tighter, locking their hips together.

Blaine whimpered, dropping his head down onto Kurt's shoulder as his body bowed. "*Kurt.*"

"Do you want me to stop?" he asked, hands still squeezing lightly.

"No, god, oh," Blaine mumbled into his shoulder. "Please, just... I need you to."

That would be his brain catching up with his body, Kurt thought, and kissed the side of his head softly.

Blaine writhed against him at every scrape and every lingering press of fingers, losing himself, moaning when Kurt slipped both hands into his sweatpants to stroke over the curves of him as he sucked patters into the muscle of his shoulder.

"Blaine," he said, voice so broken it was barely audible. He swept his fingers over the hem of Blaine's sweats. "I want you to push these down your hips."

At any other point he would have been stunned at the lack of hesitation, but Blaine's hands pulled back, tucking into the edges of the elastic and drawing them down over smooth, tan skin.

Kurt's hand on Blaine's spine bowed his body the other way, and he rose up again only to be met with Kurt's mouth, desperate and hungry.

Kurt pulled away again, letting his gaze fall between them to where Blaine's cock was hard and curved up to his belly, leaking and flushed dark. He bit back a moan at the sight, hand moving on instinct and curling around the base. The contact was electric, and Blaine arched in his arms, crying out as Kurt's hand swept up and down.

Pressing his forehead to Blaine's chest, he closed his eyes, hand pumping slowly, his body working purely on the thrumming control that burned in his veins. Every choked-off, exquisite noise from above him sent fireworks into his nerves, fuelled by the awareness that he was doing this, he was making Blaine feel this way, and it was enough to distract him from the ache and pulse of his own painfully hard cock, trapped in his pants under Blaine's weight.

Kurt's hand slowed to a smooth rhythm, thumb stroking up a prominent vein and over the head, spreading slick moisture down the length of Blaine's cock and earning him a babbling string of words that were mostly his name.

Blaine was close, Kurt could feel it ringing in his ears and drowning out everything else.

"Shh," he whispered softly, pressing his lips to Blaine's chest messily between words. "Blaine," another kiss,

"Blaine, look at me."

Rocking forward, Blaine met his eyes, mouth open around silent noises that had dimmed at Kurt's command.

Kurt used the hand on Blaine's back to tip him forward, close enough to share the same breath as he squeezed his fist lightly.

"Kurt," Blaine moaned around quick, hitched breaths.

"Shh, baby," Kurt squeezed again, eyes dark and fixed on Blaine's breathtaking features as he fell apart. "Come for me."

Blaine shuddered, hands fisting Kurt's shirt desperately as his body coiled tight and he spilled over Kurt's fist in long, thick stripes, letting out an endless stream of broken sound.

Kurt felt his own body draw tight at the sharp, intense flare low in his spine, and he clutched at Blaine's waist, eyes slamming shut as he buried his face in Blaine's chest and came with a choked cry.

He barely remembered the languid, rolling kisses they'd shared in the aftermath, brain swimming in soundlessness as Blaine collapsed against his body. He panted against the side of Blaine's head where his cheek was pressed tightly, trying to figure out how words worked, trying to remember his own name.

Their breathing slowed as they both began to come down, ignoring the sticky mess between their bodies, content to simply be weightless and wrapped around each other.

"Blaine?"

Blaine stirred against him, grunting softly as he lifted himself up. "Mm?"

"Are you- was that-?"

Blaine cut him off with a messy kiss as he pressed in, rocking them back into the headboard.

Kurt settled into it, wrapping himself up in Blaine's body and sinking down in the warm, perfect feeling of having his Sub safe, and spent, and utterly contented in his arms.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Sunday was a slow-burning, blissful dream that Kurt never wanted to wake from. After hours spent coaxing moans and breathy, pleading sounds from Blaine, he'd settled for simply holding him through the evening while he recovered from the satisfying tax on his body.

School was easy, now. The jocks still eyed them dangerously, still glared and skulked after them like hyenas everywhere they went, focused on Blaine's letterman jacket like crosshairs. It didn't matter anymore. The usual dumpster-tossing and locker slamming had subsided, and while a part of him secretly worried what it could mean, what they might have planned, he was more than content to spend his lunch hour with Blaine curled against his side, happily oblivious.

By Tuesday afternoon, he'd decided on his next move. Blaine had been so much stronger in the last week, smiling constantly and sure of himself like he wasn't before, and Kurt realised it was the perfect time. There was so much more to him, so much more under there that he never let anybody see, and it hurt to know he kept that part of himself so guarded from the world.

It was too beautiful to waste away in the dark.

Kurt managed to get out of Glee club early, escaping down the halls towards the pool and thinking over how he might broach the subject carefully.

His nose pinched when the sharp scent of chlorine reached him at the door, and he glanced over at the pool to where a single figure was breaking through the water.

He smiled at the sight, making his way over to where Blaine's towel lay on the benches and sitting beside it gingerly, avoiding the random wet patches blooming on the dull grey concrete. He perched both arms on a folded knee and watched as Blaine slipped through the water effortlessly with strong, practiced strokes. Kurt could feel his concentration, and at the same time an odd sense of peace. Swimming relaxed him, let him turn in on himself completely and ignore everything else.

It struck him suddenly as the perfect escape for a hiding Sub, locked inside himself.

When Blaine stopped by the blocks he kicked up off the wall, spinning to peer over and see who was watching him. He grinned when he spotted the outline of Kurt's designer jacket through the misted plastic of his goggles.

By the time he'd made his way to the edge of the pool, Kurt was up and rocking casually on his feet. "You love it here."

"I do," Blaine agreed, peeling off his goggles and folding his arms on the edge of the pool to grin up at him.

The sight of that giant, adorable smile left Kurt's chest warm, and he fought the compulsion to drop to his knees and kiss that mouth, to brush the wet curls away from Blaine's face and dive in the water and just be *free* and young.

This is a McQueen, a voice in his head reminded him sharply.

"You said you have practice on Tuesday afternoons, but..." Kurt glanced around. "You're the only one here?"

Blaine nodded, wiping at his nose with the back of his hand to push away trickles of water. His face was scrunched with one eye open as he tried to peer up at Kurt around the rivulets tracking down from his hair.

"I train on my own. The team don't really... like it. When I practice with them."

Kurt kept the flare of protective anger from showing on his face, but couldn't disguise his voice. "*Why?*"

Blaine laughed softly, eyes falling to the grate. "You know why."

The quiet felt too heavy, and the soft *splash splash* of water over the hollow roar of the drains felt like nails on a chalkboard.

"You know, you can swim any time," Kurt told him carefully, voice strong and loaded with intent.

"Uhuh," Blaine answered, eyeing him.

"You can still come out one afternoon each week and swim, like you do now. You don't have to be on the *team*," he said, "to swim."

Blaine nodded slowly. "I guess. I mean, they took me off the active roster, so it's not like they'll let me compete this year."

Kurt swallowed the hollow swell of rage in his throat at Blaine's absent confession.

He hadn't known. He'd had no idea how Blaine's life had changed in the wake of his outing, and his claiming. He knew it would be different, but to be excluded from everything, even the things he loved most?

Kurt pulled a slow breath, flattening his hands over his jacket and forcing himself still, fighting the urge to pull Blaine out of the pool bodily and wrap him in his arms.

"I could quit," Blaine said, mostly to himself. His eyes were wider now, and a gentle smile tugged at the side of his mouth. "I should quit. I don't need it."

"Then your Tuesday afternoons would be free," Kurt added lightly.

Blaine glanced up. "Yeah, I could - do this another afternoon, I guess. Any afternoon but Monday, that's when they pr..." His voice trailed off, and his brow set lower in amused realisation. "You want me to join Glee?"

Kurt smiled, eyes rolling up to the ceiling playfully. "Well, you know. If you're not busy on Tuesday afternoons. We could. Maybe. Do that together."

"Kurt, you know I can't put myself out there like that," Blaine argued, but he was still smiling fondly.

Fixing him with a bright, defiant stare, Kurt asked; "Why not?"

Blaine blinked at him, stunned.

"Why can't you sing, Blaine? You're so good. You don't understand just how amazing you are, but you have to believe me; you *are* amazing."

Blushing, Blaine ducked his head, sinking down in the water and bobbing back up again slowly. His eyes lost focus and trailed over the pool tiles, and he played with a small puddle of water for a moment with an outstretched finger.

"What if they don't want me there?" he asked casually, eyes still cast down.

"They will," Kurt answered. "We need more voices. We need talent like yours, if we're ever going to take nationals. I mean, we have some incredible singers, myself included," he said, brushing fingers over his hair dramatically in jest.

Blaine grinned up at him, bouncing slowly on his toes in the water.

"But honestly?" Kurt met his eyes again. "There's nothing wrong with making a good thing even better."

Bowing his head, Blaine worried at his top lip for a moment, and then his bottom lip, eyes flicking back and forth as he weighed the options.

"I will," he said, looking up. "For you, I will."

Kurt beamed at him. "It's for you, actually," he insisted as Blaine pushed off and climbed out of the pool. "But you'll see, soon enough."

His voice died in his throat at the sight of Blaine, wet and almost naked, dripping on the concrete and painting it a darker shade as he moved to get his towel.

Raking his eyes up and down Blaine's body, Kurt turned with him and reached out to snatch the towel away before he could open it.

"Kurt!" Blaine protested, laughing. "I kinda need that."

Kurt shook his head, eyes fixed on Blaine's chest, lower lip trapped under his teeth. There was a nervous, fluttering feeling building in his hips, and a tell-tale ache riding underneath it. *Mine*.

Blaine's brow shot up at the look on Kurt's face.

"Home?" he ventured, flushed and slightly short of breath.

Kurt nodded sharply, passing the towel back. "Quickly."

Once Blaine had dried off and pulled on some clothes, Kurt dragged him from the gym too fast for a shower, insisting they'd have plenty of time for that at home. He didn't even mind the overpowering chlorine smell in his car, all he could feel was the heat bleeding through his veins, making it difficult to breathe. Everything in him hurt in an exquisite way; a strange and somehow pleasant ache that rose off his bones into his bloodstream, rushing through his body and leaving him lightheaded with need.

If it hadn't been for the empty driveway, he wouldn't have even realised that his family wasn't home.

The moment he and Blaine got through the door they were already hurrying for the stairs, bumping into walls on their ascent every time they stopped to kiss and grope at whatever they could put their hands on, sliding against each other in small bursts until they finally made it to Kurt's bathroom and quickly stripped down.

Blaine's eyes were heavy-lidded and dark as he was pressed back into the tile beneath the spray. Kurt brushed hands possessively over tanned, wet skin, a small reminder of what he was (*beautiful, perfect, mine*), before he gathered up the loofah and body wash and began to work a lather over Blaine's chest.

Head tipped back and eyes closed, Blaine let himself be touched, cared for and massaged lovingly with firm hands. The lingering chlorine faded away under the heady, warm mixture of vanilla and cinnamon, and the rising steam washed over them both as Kurt pressed his body into Blaine's, stroking along his shoulders, dipping fingers into the lines of definition in his muscles.

He spread his lips wetly over Blaine's pulse, sucking and scraping his teeth until Blaine moaned underneath him, trapped against the wall but still so perfectly pliant and relaxed.

Nobody was home, they had time, and Kurt fully intended to use every second of it to own every last inch of his Sub.

Blaine's soft, needy whimpering noises echoed off the tiles as Kurt mouthed along the curve of his neck, hands stroking down his hipbones and sliding over the high curve at the top of his ass, pushing against the wall.

He moved slowly, dragging his tongue over the taut skin of Blaine's shoulder and pressing it into dips in his collarbone, sealing over it with his lips and sucking sweetly before he moved on to Blaine's throat, his jaw, and the soft skin below his ear. Met with the hollow star on Blaine's neck, he kissed it gently before he nipped at his earlobe, and felt the body under his tremble.

"Kurt," Blaine mumbled, head lolling to the side. "Kiss me, please."

"Not yet," Kurt answered smoothly.

Hearing the firm tone of his own voice, he realised that this was where it began. Their natures would begin to take over from this point on; he would act without thinking, he would take control before he realised he was even doing it. The need to possess Blaine, to make him feel wanted and loved and cherished, would override his senses. It already had. All he could do now was enjoy it, and let Blaine revel in the pleasures of being an owned Sub.

As if on cue, Blaine murmured softly, hips pressing forward. A low whine escaped his throat as Kurt brought both hands up to brace either side of his head and fluttered soft kisses over his face, taking drops of water with his lips.

"Please," Blaine begged, pawing at Kurt's chest gently, arms curled up between them. "Please kiss me, Kurt, *please*."

Kurt brushed their noses together for a moment with a smile before he sealed his lips over Blaine's, pushing his tongue past them, feeling Blaine's mouth open up hungrily beneath him. The thick, solid weight of Blaine's cock was pressing into his hip, amazingly hot against his skin as their bodies slipped and slid together and Kurt forced him into the wall.

Blaine moaned in Kurt's mouth as his hips rocked forward, and again, hands finding both of Blaine's wrists and pinning them to the tile over both of their heads.

"Kurt," Blaine begged softly.

"Shh," Kurt nipped at his mouth again, moving across his jaw before he settled in the crook of Blaine's neck, concentrating on the slow rub of their bodies, the coiling heat between them and the perfect friction that left Blaine breathing raggedly and stuttering helplessly against the tile.

He could feel the ache pooling low inside, building in his spine, but it was comfortable and drawn-out, seated and static. There was no driving need for release, no desperate rush to get them both there. More than anything else, Kurt realised as he pumped his hips slowly, rocking them into the tile - more than *anything*, he wanted Blaine to come.

Pulling back slightly, he blinked through wet lashes catching the side spray off the rushing water, and watched. Blaine's eyes were almost completely closed, lips parted around breathy moans that were punctured every time Kurt thrust a little harder, and the noise got caught in his throat.

He loosened his grip on Blaine's wrists, pulling them back down and draping them over his own shoulders before he swept both hands behind and cupped the solid, heavy curve of Blaine's ass, lifting him up to his toes and working their bodies together roughly.

"Come on, baby," he whispered between kisses, "god, you're so beautiful like this."

Blaine stiffened in his arms, clinging tighter as his body shuddered and he buried his face against Kurt's skin. The blast of spray off his shoulder sent water higher around them both, and Kurt ducked his head to keep his eyes protected, pressing kisses into Blaine's hair and squeezing the warm, firm skin in his hands.

Blaine's noises broke off with a sharp cry and his body arched, fingernails digging into Kurt's back as he came.

Kurt took his weight easily, keeping him upright when he slumped in the wake of his orgasm. He nuzzled his face against Kurt's neck absently, barely aware of what he was doing as the sound drowned out under the pounding water.

With a knowing smile, Kurt shifted to get a better grip, rocking Blaine back under the water and lowering him down until he was steady on his feet. Curling against him, Kurt pushed long, careful fingers back through his curls, shielding his face and letting the spray rush over them both.

"Kurt, oh," Blaine babbled softly. "You didn't"

"I'm fine," Kurt cut him off firmly. He cupped water over Blaine's chest and found the sponge to wash him again, mouth curling in delight at the tiny jerks and tremors of his body, still too sensitive in the aftermath.

"You... feel..." he finished up and leaned in, pressing a slow kiss to Blaine's lips. "Amazing."

Blaine smiled dopily at him, eyelids still low. "You can feel that?"

"I can feel that," Kurt confirmed with a sweet smile.

He'd learned so much over the last few days, but every new physical experience still left him surprised. With every exchange he felt more of Blaine, warm in his chest and aching in his bones, the constant driving need to keep him safe and satisfied now as much a part of Kurt as his own desires.

This is what it is, to be claimed.

"Bed," he commanded softly, hanging up the sponge and shutting off the taps.

"But you're still..." Blaine's hands dipped between them playfully, ghosting over Kurt's thighs and brushing lightly over his still-hard cock as he watched Kurt's face with an adoring, teasing smile.

Kurt twitched at the contact, body tensing. "Mmm," he ducked to kiss at Blaine's shoulder as he pushed him gently out the door, "that would be why I said *bed*."

They dried off quickly, exchanging small touches and soft, lingering glances until Kurt moved past him and back out to his bedroom.

Our bedroom, he thought, glancing around at the high cream-coloured shelves and the bright bedspread. It all belonged to both of them now.

He turned and dropped down coyly, leaning back on one arm and stroking himself slowly as he watched his boyfriend dry off.

He'd always hid from this, for so long - hid from anything so openly sexual - but the Dom stirring in his veins was too proud of the body he'd worked hard for, and the fact that there was someone who could enjoy it.

Blaine glanced up from under his towel in time to catch Kurt leaning to one side, head tipped, fist lazily pumping up and down. He let his eyes drop to watch Kurt's hand for a moment, wetting his lips.

A shudder rippled up Kurt's spine, slow-building and exquisite, curling his toes into the carpet as Blaine wandered out towards him.

He wondered often about that look in Blaine's eyes, the one that had always been there behind everything; dark and knowing and a little too wise for his own good. Sometimes he caught himself in a moment of surprise when he remembered what Blaine had done; that he'd presented out of nowhere, with nothing to go on. Sometimes he remembered that boy on the floor, passionate and beautiful and staring up like he wanted nothing more than to be right where he was.

Kurt wondered if Blaine had known this was what he wanted all along.

Why didn't I see you sooner?

"Come here," he whispered urgently, suddenly shivering with emotion.

How much time had he lost from sheer stubbornness? Purely out of refusal to look past a jacket?

Blaine did as he was told, reaching the bed in two strides and settling over Kurt's hips as he scooted backwards into a better position for both of them. Blaine lowered himself on instinct, arms coiled around Kurt's waist, holding himself tight to Kurt's body as long fingers worked through his hair.

"I'm so sorry it took me so long," Kurt whispered, feeling a weak trill in his hips, the arousal fading away under the new pressure of his regret.

"Hey, no," Blaine looked up, eyes wide and worried. "Where did that come from?"

"I just, I keep forgetting," he went on, "that you were there for so long, and I didn't see you. Because of that." He nodded over to where Blaine's letterman jacket was draped over his bag.

"It's okay," Blaine said softly, pressing kisses to his chest and down to the warm curve of his belly. "You have me now."

Kurt smiled at him softly, unable to keep the sadness from his eyes.

"I won't be wearing it anymore," Blaine said, resting his cheek on Kurt's stomach and drawing patterns over skin with callused fingers. "I'm quitting, remember? I don't need it."

With a huff of laughter, Kurt rolled his head. "Pity we can't burn it."

"Mmm."

After a pause, Blaine lifted his head suddenly, smile curling the edge of his mouth. "But..."

Kurt's brow shot up in surprise as Blaine rolled off the bed and reached out to snatch up the jacket, returning with it opened in both hands.

"Put it on?" he asked softly.

Kurt blinked at him. "What?"

Blaine's gaze trailed down the line of Kurt's naked frame for a moment, eyes dark and almost devilish.

Kurt's mouth fell open in surprise. Driven by the skin-prickling lust in Blaine's eyes, he slid to the edge of the bed and onto his feet, turning to push both arms into the jacket as Blaine lifted it over his shoulders.

It was heavy, and so much warmer than he expected. He smiled at the strange sensation of it against his bare skin, shoulders lifting up to his ears.

It smelled like Blaine.

He turned and found Blaine's jaw with both hands, cupping it and pulling him closer, sliding their lips together and sweeping his tongue inside slowly in sweet but demanding strokes. Blaine made a soft sound at the intrusion, sucking and nipping at Kurt's mouth as he drew them down onto the bedspread, rolling back and stretching out like a cat while Blaine settled over his hips.

The combination of Blaine's smell all around him, washing over his senses in waves, and the wet, open-mouthed kisses that Blaine was sucking into his thighs left Kurt panting, cock hardening again under Blaine's attention.

He was swimming in the jacket, spread out over the bed and writhing in it, mouth open around audible breaths as Blaine's tight lips slid over him and down, impossibly down and further still, until he could feel Blaine's nose nuzzling at soft skin and the wet, hot squeeze of his throat.

"Oh *god*," Kurt breathed, eyes slamming shut as heat spread through his body.

Blaine pulled back slowly, sucking hard and sinking again, and Kurt's hands darted down to twine through curls as his legs lifted off the bed and over Blaine's shoulders under firm, guiding hands.

Finding a rhythm, Blaine bobbed smoothly, stroking his fist in time, stopping occasionally to suck at the head and drag his tongue over the slit. Kurt arched, both hands dropping either side of his head, the seemingly too-big jacket still pooled all around him as he happily drowned in the feel and the smell of *Blaine* seeping into his senses in waves.

"Blaine, oh-!" His voice broke off into a moan as Blaine sank down completely, swallowing around him once, and again, the tight clench of his throat sending fire up Kurt's spine.

His breath hitched at the sudden pressure and he arched again, thrashing helplessly, thrusting up into Blaine's mouth.

Kurt could feel the vibration as Blaine moaned loudly around his cock, and a sharp flare of warning shooting through his nerves as he tightened both hands in Blaine's hair and came down his throat with a shaky, fractured cry.

Collapsing back onto the bed, he blinked up at the ceiling in a haze. The world spun, and his eyelashes fluttered weakly at his attempts to move, arms too heavy to lift.

Blaine pulled away with a soft, wet sound, working his way out from under Kurt's legs and wiping at his chin with the back of his hand. He watched Kurt for a moment, soaking in the sweet and satisfied spread of him before he made his way up the bed on hands and knees to settle down again. He slid both arms inside the jacket, resting his head against Kurt's collar and pecking lightly at his jaw.

"Good?"

"Hnnhf," Kurt murmured, still blinking dazedly.

Blaine grinned and tucked his head, eyes falling closed. "I want you to feel it," he whispered.

"Feel it?"

Blaine shifted, surprised Kurt had heard him.

"How much I love that I'm yours," he said carefully, turning to meet Kurt's bright and glassy eyes.

"I do," Kurt assured him with a lazy smile.

Dropping back down, Blaine pressed his grin to Kurt's flushed chest.

As he came back to himself, Kurt traced his fingers up and down Blaine's spine lightly in long sweeps, content to simply lay there in the quiet.

Until he wasn't.

"We sh-"

"I love you," Kurt said, startled that they'd spoken at the same time.

Blaine's head lifted quickly and he met Kurt's eyes, blinking in shock.

Kurt froze, staring back and waiting.

"I love you, too," Blaine breathed, eyes falling to Kurt's lips for a brief moment before he pushed his body up and clashed their mouths together, rolling on top of him.

Kissing back hungrily, Kurt clutched at Blaine's shoulder blades, dragging both palms over heated skin desperately and spreading his legs to wrap around him.

"Kurt-" Blaine managed between kisses. "I want-"

"Me too," Kurt agreed on a sharp punch of breath as they pawed at each other, hands sliding and groping too fast and too rough, needy with the sudden urge to have everything.

The flare of Blaine's new cell ringtone stopped them dead, and Blaine dropped his forehead onto Kurt's shoulder in exasperation.

With a chuckle, Kurt rubbed light fingers over the back of his neck. "You should get it."

"Mmm-phffmm," Blaine muttered against Kurt's skin, earning another laugh as Kurt lifted him up.

He slipped off the bed quickly, gathering his phone from his bag and swiping at the screen.

"Hello?" he answered, sliding onto the end of the bed.

Settling back in the warm weight of the letterman jacket, Kurt picked at it absently, tracing over the design and rubbing at the cuff. It wasn't that bad.

The chill struck him square in the chest the moment Blaine's mouth fell open around a broken string of words; "Y-Yes, I'm his ... emergency contact. What-"

Kurt jolted up straight, spurred by the painful rush of cold clawing through his ribcage. *Protect.*

"Oh. I... yes, I will- I understand."

He scrambled to the end of the bed, hands coming up to brace Blaine's shoulders.

"He's stable? Yes. I'll be right there, I can- Thank you."

Blaine's hand dropped like a dead weight into his lap as the call cut off.

"Blaine? Talk to me, what is it?"

"They... they couldn't touch *me*, so they-" he babbled softly. "I have to get to the... I..."

"Blaine?"

He turned in Kurt's arms, blinking slowly with unfocused eyes. "It's Cooper."

CHAPTER NINE

Kurt did all of the talking at the front desk when they arrived. Some unfamiliar part of him had risen out of the shock, had taken control, detached and calm and utterly *aware* like he had never been. He got them both dressed and out the door in record time, and now he couldn't stop his own commands. Every roadblock they encountered only served to strengthen his voice.

*Anderson. Comma. Cooper. Cooper Anderson. Where is he? No, I'm not a relative, I'm his brother's Dom. We've been ignored for the last two hours, we want to see him. **Now.***

The newest nurse behind the desk had taken one look at Blaine - so still and wide-eyed and not-quite-there - and given them a quick nod of consent; the first hint of cooperation. She rolled her seat back and pecked two frantic fingers over the keyboard.

Level 6, room 8A. You can see him now, he's out of surgery. But visiting hours are almost over.

He held Blaine in the elevator, rubbing soothing circles over his shoulders and watching the lights count for them as they ascended.

The room itself was small and stale, and Kurt couldn't help the feeling scratching at the back of his mind, telling him to get out. *Get Blaine away from this place.*

Kurt never did like hospitals, but then, he supposed, nobody did.

"Coop?"

"Hey, kiddo." His voice was small and strained, and his eyes were half-lidded under medication, but he was smiling.

Blaine's face was clouded and child-like, drawn tight with worry. "I'm so sorry, I'm-"

"Not your fault," Cooper told him, voice slightly slurred and head rolling on the pillow. "I'm fine. I'm gonna be fine."

"What happened?" Kurt asked.

Cooper's gaze flicked across to meet his, and his chin lifted slightly. "The jackets from your school paid a visit to my hotel. Figured they'd teach me a lesson."

"But you-" Blaine shook his head. "You didn't do anything to them."

"He means teach us a lesson," Kurt clarified gently. "This is how they're trying to get to us. Because they can't touch you."

Blaine bit back a sudden sob, forcing himself calm. He already knew, but hearing it aloud somehow made it so much worse.

"Hey, kid," Cooper began, swiping an absent hand in the air at him. "I'm fine. There weren't that many of them, they got in a few good kicks. Broke some bones. Nothing that won't heal up just fine, and I got my own in."

Blaine smiled around the beginning of tears. "You would."

Cooper chuckled and winced.

"Plus, the nurses here are all sweet on me," Cooper told him, raising an eyebrow cockily. "They'll have me up in no time."

"I can come and stay with you," Blaine insisted. "They can't touch me, I can protect you if I'm-"

"No," Cooper cut him off firmly. *"No."*

"Cooper."

"You're safe with Kurt, so you'll stay there. Understand?"

Blaine's eyes narrowed into a glare. "Cooper-"

"Enough," Cooper cut him off, unblinking.

The brothers held each other's gaze long enough for Kurt to feel the tension prickling his skin, the uncomfortable current of a quiet power play. Cooper would win, he knew that much. Blaine was strong, but Cooper was older.

"Blaine," Kurt interjected softly, slipping an arm around his waist.

Blaine turned without hesitation, drawn by the sound of his name.

"Can you refill the water jug?" Kurt asked, nodding to the empty plastic container. "I didn't see a nurse doing the rounds, and he's probably thirsty."

Blaine nodded sharply and gathered the jug with a careless sweep of his hand, angry and bristling at being sent away.

"Some food," Cooper added weakly, already aware of what Kurt was doing.

Kurt burrowed a hand through his pockets for some spare change, pressing it into Blaine's reluctant palm.

"See if there's a snack machine?"

Blaine nodded silently before he turned and disappeared out the door with one last glare over his shoulder.

The moment he was out of sight, Kurt shifted to the bedside quickly.

"They were all jocks from McKinley?" he asked. "All in the jackets?"

"Yes," Cooper answered.

Kurt nodded.

He weighed his options uncomfortably for a moment, reluctant to force commands on a Sub that wasn't his. But he needed to know. He'd realised the moment they walked in that Cooper wouldn't be able to fight him, not like this. Medicated, broken and weak, Cooper could only lie still and do what he was told.

"Answer everything," Kurt commanded. "Truthfully."

Cooper's eyelashes fluttered softly, and he nodded his compliance.

"How many were there?"

"Seven."

"Did they say anything?"

"Just that they'd get to him," Cooper said in a half-whisper. "Sooner or later."

"I won't let that happen," Kurt insisted.

Blue eyes flicked up and met his, glassy and dark, and quietly grateful.

"Your injuries?" Kurt asked.

"Pneumothorax. Broken ribs. Internal bleeding. Surgery was successful."

"How long are you here?"

The questions went on and on, as quickly as he could think of them and as fast as he could get them out. When the calm settled under his skin, Kurt realised they'd both needed exactly *this* from each other, at this moment. He needed as much information as Cooper could provide, he needed to know everything and anything that might fuel some kind of plan to keep Blaine safe. And Cooper needed a Dom, now more than ever. His body could only benefit from the peace that came with finally giving in completely to his nature.

Like he never really has, Kurt thought, struck with an unnerving realisation.

His eyes fell on the hollow star on Cooper's neck, flashing in the pale fluorescent lights overhead in time with his breathing.

"You pretend, for him," Kurt said suddenly.

Cooper blinked, unsure of how to answer.

"You act like a Dom," Kurt clarified. "For Blaine. Even though it's ... against your nature. Against everything you are."

Measuring him with sad eyes, Cooper let out a shallow sigh.

"After... the dance. After what happened..." His mouth twitched at the side; the equivalent to a shrug, as far as Kurt could tell. "Someone had to. Before you."

Kurt swallowed down the heat in his throat, the hollow feeling that had built up at the awareness that there was too much here out of his control. He reached out a hand and swept his fingers smoothly through brown hair, grazing over Cooper's scalp and moving in comforting circles, like he always had for Blaine.

As both his eyes fell closed, Cooper let out a slow gust of breath, his body relaxing visibly into the hospital bed.

A tiny, sad smile quirked the corner of Kurt's mouth. He could feel the warm current under his hand; the *Sub* part of Cooper that held on tight, curled in the shadows, was finally letting go and letting itself be cared for at last, even if it was just something as small as a loving hand stroking his hair.

Kurt wondered at the strange connection he could feel between them, whether it was a part of Blaine in Cooper or the other way around. He could feel the quiet helplessness in him, hiding behind a wall built up of imaginary control. The Sub playing Dom, the abandoned boy and his make-believe kingdom, where he kept his baby brother protected. He'd believed it for long enough, and it had become real, just for his conviction.

All those years, Cooper kept Blaine safe by sheer force of will.

"The swim team," Kurt began. "The jacket. Drawing on the star, hiding in plain sight. It was all your idea, wasn't it?"

Cooper blinked drowsily for a moment before he closed his eyes again. "Yes."

"You figured out how to keep him safe, even when you weren't there."

He didn't answer this time, and his breathing had slowed down to an almost unnoticeable wave.

Kurt watched the gentle rise and fall of his chest for a moment, startled suddenly at the sheer volume of damage. *Pneumothorax is a collapsed lung. Broken ribs. Internal bleeding?*

They wouldn't have done all of this just for the sake of sending a message.

"You fought back, didn't you?" Kurt asked carefully, voice trembling. He'd thought he was joking.

Cooper nodded, but kept his eyes closed.

Kurt seized a slow breath, thumbing over Cooper's hairline and resisting the urge to press a kiss to his forehead in thanks. *He's not your Sub.*

"I'm going to fix this," Kurt told him, eyes bright and wet. But there was no reply.

He caught the tiny grunt behind him, the soft cough of someone clearing their throat, and turned to see Blaine watching him with a sweet, soft gaze.

Kurt smiled, brushing the back of his hand over Cooper's temple gently for a moment before he pulled away.

After Blaine had set down the jug and the random handful of snacks, he pressed into Kurt's arms, resting his head on a shoulder as they encircled him.

"Thank you," he said softly.

Kurt's eyes darted up at movement in his peripheral vision, catching sight of a nurse as she leaned in the door and tapped her wrist at them sternly. He glanced at the clock on the wall.

"Visiting hours are over," he said. "We can come back tomorrow, I promise."

Blaine nodded into his collar.

They picked up dinner on the way home, but Blaine barely ate, content to stare out the window for most of the drive. Before they'd left he'd pushed the water jug and snacks closer to the bed on the rolling table, had scribbled out a promise on a piece of paper to be back the next day, and let Kurt guide him to the door with stunted and visibly reluctant steps, glancing back at every chance.

Kurt held him in the parking lot for another ten minutes after that, pressing kisses into his hair and keeping him warm against his chest, both of them bathed sporadically in the wash of headlights as the lot slowly emptied out.

When they got home, Burt was waiting, worried and pacing in the living room.

"We got home and you were gone, you didn't leave a note, you didn't-" his voice cut off when he saw Blaine.

"I'm going to - lie down," Blaine mumbled, and Kurt gave him a gentle, reassuring smile as he turned and wandered slowly up the stairs.

"What happened?" Burt asked the moment Blaine was out of earshot.

Kurt nodded to the doorway, following his parents to the dining room and preparing himself to tell the story over again in as much detail as he could remember from Cooper's answers.

By the time he finished he felt raw, uncomfortably exposed and drained of his energy, and barely able to hold himself up on his elbows.

Carole pressed her hand over her heart intermittently, eyes flicking over the table. "But ... the boys, he - he

recognised their jackets. They could be charged, we can - he can - identify them?"

Kurt shook his head. "He saw their faces, and their jackets. The police came to talk to him, but-"

"Half those boys have parents on the force." Burt huffed out a humourless laugh. "They're not getting charged. With anything."

"It'll all disappear," Kurt confirmed, rubbing fingers over his eyelids roughly. "Cooper's nobody to them."

"But his *parents*, surely-" Carole began in an aggravated rush, but Burt's firm hand on her shoulder soothed her and cut her off.

"He's an adult Sub." Kurt met her eyes sadly. "He might as well not have any."

"He's safe in the hospital," Burt said. "I know it's not much, but he's there for a while longer, so we got time."

"I'm working on it," Kurt said distractedly, eyes trailing over to the stairs. "I'll fix this."

Burt nodded. "We will."

With a grateful glance back at him, Kurt smiled half-heartedly.

"You just gotta promise me," Burt said, leaning in and tapping a finger on the table. "That you boys are gonna be safe. Don't go after them. Don't even talk to them."

"I won't," Kurt agreed. "But they went after Cooper for a reason. He's all they had left to use against Blaine, and now he's out of reach, they have nothing. It's Carter, I'm sure of it. It's all Carter." He pushed both hands through his hair. "I'm just glad he doesn't have anything left to use."

"Be careful," Burt warned. "When somebody that determined to do damage gets backed into a corner? That's when things get outta control."

Kurt swallowed, letting his hands drop. He nodded quickly as he pushed his chair back and rose to his feet.

"I need to..."

"Go," Burt nodded to the stairs. "Just, remember you boys aren't alone with this thing, okay? You get worried - about *anything* - you come to me."

"Thanks, Dad."

Burt pressed his lips together, nodding slowly as his son turned and disappeared up the staircase.

Kurt found Blaine on the bed, half-undressed and lying still, staring at the ceiling.

"Do you... do you think, if I was a Dom, I could've-"

"Stop," Kurt commanded softly. "Don't."

Blaine drew a ragged breath and pressed both hands to his face.

"It's going to be okay," Kurt told him, wandering to the bed and pulling off Blaine's other shoe. He sat down and began to carefully unwrap his boyfriend, peeling off socks and undoing his belt, lifting his shirt and drawing his pants off with careful, loving hands. "Cooper is safe. They can't touch us."

"But they-" Blaine huffed out a puff of air as his hands dropped. He shifted under Kurt's attention, giving him easier access to his body without a second thought. "They put him in hospital. They wanted to get to me, well -

they won."

"Cooper's going to recover. They didn't win," Kurt told him, sitting back to peel off his own clothes. "You're *mine*. They didn't win."

Blaine's gaze trailed over Kurt's calm and determined features as he finished undressing.

"I love you," Kurt said, moving over Blaine's body on hands and knees and pressing a gentle kiss to his forehead before he met his gaze. "They didn't win."

"I love you," Blaine mouthed silently, and his eyes fell closed as his body relaxed the moment Kurt's weight settled on top of him.

They drifted on the quiet hum of the energy passing between them; the press of fingers into hair, the crush of bodies moving together. Blaine's legs spread open as Kurt settled between them, knees lifting while Kurt dragged gentle, slow kisses over his throat.

It wasn't like it had been before; the desperate rush to be with each other, inside of each other, the heat-sparked teenage lust. This time Kurt could feel how badly Blaine simply needed to be touched, to be cherished and held on to. How badly he needed to forget that the world would always try to hurt them both, just because of who they were.

Kurt rocked slowly in a comforting and steady rhythm, enough to keep Blaine's body lax with quiet bliss, and his mind far, far away from the hospital.

I will always take care of you.

When he woke again, Kurt couldn't remember how long they'd spent in the silence, kissing and stroking at each other until they'd fallen asleep. Blaine was soft and warm beneath him, head tipped to the side and features peaceful, lost in the tranquil haze of being held through the night.

In the daytime, the peaceful moments came in between everything else; going to school, the hospital, coming home each afternoon, and the constant need to take the long way to every class, to avoid the telling flash of red and yellow. His dad had seen Figgins already, the faculty knew what was happening; they just couldn't do anything about it. Not yet. Not until they had solid proof that the police couldn't sweep away.

Not until Kurt could figure out some way, somehow, to stop this.

Even after just two days, Cooper was recovering, and had been stronger for Blaine's constant visits and the kinder Dom nurses' care.

They stopped at the hospital again on Thursday night, but even with Cooper's carefully painted-on smile and his deliberately upbeat tone, Kurt could see past the front. Cooper was still just barely holding himself together, for Blaine's sake.

He watched the brothers talk, silent in his seat and enjoying the sounds of their voices. He watched the telling dip and rise of Cooper's tired, frightened eyes, hidden behind his wall where Blaine couldn't see, and Kurt knew that just being safe wasn't enough. Not after all this. Cooper needed to be loved.

He'd known the moment he tried to walk away from Blaine once, long ago, in a school hallway stained with blue corn syrup, that he had to turn around. That he had to protect him.

They were barely eighteen, and they found each other. So why hadn't anybody found Cooper?

By the time Cooper's eyes were dipping too often and staying closed a moment too long on each blink, Kurt roused Blaine from his seat and guided him over to the door to talk in private.

"He needs rest," he said softly. "Do you want to go?"

Blaine glanced back, shaking his head.

"He needs someone," Kurt said suddenly.

"He has me," Blaine answered.

"That's not what I meant," Kurt clarified, fixing Blaine with a serious look.

"You know it doesn't work like that."

"It doesn't have to be a claim," he said. "Just - a Dom. Someone. Anyone. Just a friend."

"We don't have any," Blaine whispered. "None that aren't... already claimed, themselves."

Kurt nodded slowly. Even with his strength slowly returning, Cooper would still be in the hospital awhile longer. He'd still be safe, here.

They had time.

"Stay with him, I'm just going to call Dad, let him know we'll be late again," Kurt said, pressing a kiss to Blaine's forehead and slipping away.

He heard the chair pull out and the soft thump as Blaine fell into it before he'd made it to the door, and slipped out into the hallway, pushing through his pocket for his cell.

He barely had it unlocked before the thought struck him, and he stiffened, eyes wide.

The number wasn't on his recently dialled, he had to find it in the backlog of his address book - but the moment he saw it, his eyes light up with quiet determination.

This would work.

"Hello? Hi, yes. I'm looking for Josephine. Ye- yes. Jo, that's her. This is Kurt," he said, smiling to himself.

"I'm her nephew."

CHAPTER TEN

"What's she like?" Blaine asked suddenly while they were waiting by the door.

It was Friday afternoon, and with Blaine's hand in his and school finished for the week, Kurt was feeling strangely confident. So much was still unknown, so much still had to be fixed, but every time he remembered Jo's voice down the phone line (*I'll be there tomorrow*) he couldn't let go of the feeling that everything was going to be okay.

"She's ... unique," Kurt offered quietly, squeezing Blaine's hand. "I haven't seen her in awhile, last time we talked was... when I came out, actually. She helped. I went from a little kid who was scared to say anything at all about being gay, hiding behind fake crushes, to... well, me."

Blaine smiled softly at him, eyes sweet and adoring in the fluorescent light.

"Don't worry," Kurt told him as they made their way in, feeling light and relaxed like he hadn't all week. "I have a good feeling about this."

Even Cooper's room seemed brighter.

His face lit up when he saw them, lifting into an effortless smile. The curtains had been pulled back to let in the afternoon sun, and it warmed the room with a hazy glow.

"Hey," he said brightly, hitting mute on his remote and dropping it onto the side table.

Blaine grinned in response, letting go of Kurt's hand to tuck himself into the bedside chair.

Cooper's fingers lifted quickly, brushing at Blaine's hairline. "What's with the gel? I thought you'd stopped using it."

With a shrug, Blaine twitched under his brother's hand, like a child whose mother was trying to spit-clean his face. "It keeps it under control."

"Keeps you invisible, you mean," Cooper said flatly. "You know, you don't have to hide anymore. You're safe with that bracelet on."

"I know." Blaine bobbed his head in a slow nod.

When Cooper's fingers poked at his hairline again, he swatted them away. "Stop it!"

Kurt watched them both with a gentle smile as the bickering exchange carried on to playful jests and taunting. He folded his arms and leaned against the wall, grateful and slightly envious of their ease. He'd never felt that way about Finn, never felt like he had someone who would always understand, someone he could trust in.

No matter what happened to either of them because of the other, nothing would change.

"Well, if this isn't the most ass-backwards buttfuck middle-of-nowhere shitkicker of a hospital-"

Kurt stiffened at the sound of her voice, turning against the wall with an amused glint in his eye as his aunt made her usual colourful entrance.

Both of the Andersons stopped dead in their exchange, blinking at her with wide and surprised eyes.

"Well!" she said with an exaggerated huff once she'd dropped her bags by the wall. "Whaddaya know. I made it."

"Jo," Kurt said with a laugh, closing the gap between them when she opened her arms towards him.

She rubbed his back for a moment, pursing her lips and making a tiny cooing noise before she let him go. "Christ,

Lizzy, when'd you get so fucking tall?"

Kurt ducked his head. "Kurt. Jo, it's *Kurt*."

"Kurt my ass, I'll call you what I want and you'll love it," she insisted, and glanced over to the bed.

With a sharp, melodramatic slap of her palm to her forehead, she gaped at them. "Jesus Christ, what is it, an Abercrombie catalogue in here?!"

"Jo-"

"No but they're pretty, right? I'm not imagining that, that is one beautiful fucking family. Hi!" She moved just as quickly as she spoke, reaching out a hand and gliding to the bedside. "I'm Josephine. Never call me that or you'll lose an arm. It's Jo, mostly. You must be Cooper?"

Cooper's brow dropped in alarm, his wide eyes flicking over to Kurt.

Kurt gave him a tiny nod of encouragement, and he glanced back to the newcomer. "P- pleased to meet you?" he offered, shaking her hand.

"Likewise. DAMN, you are... too pretty. Bruises and all. That's unfair. And you must be Blaine?" She turned without a pause, sliding an arm over Blaine's shoulders comfortingly. "Sweetie, it's nice to - wow. Fuck. Look at you." She shook her head, throwing an appreciative glance back over to Kurt. "*Damn* Lizzy."

"Jo." Kurt warned her, but couldn't keep the grin from his lips or the blush from his cheeks.

"Sorry, sorry!" She waved both hands in the air in apology, wincing. "I have no filter, you'll get used to it."

"Wh-... I mean, it's nice to meet you, but... why are you ... here?" Cooper ventured, eyeing Kurt again.

"This is my aunt Jo," Kurt interjected before she could start another round of enthusiastic cussing. "She used to work for Missive. She's here to... help."

Cooper straightened in alarm, eyes darting to the full star on Jo's neck. "Missive? I'm not-"

"Shh, it's okay," she said soothingly, reaching out and stroking the back of Cooper's hand. "I'm not taking you away, nothing like that."

Kurt knew enough from schoolyard discussion to know how the Sub care program, Missive, was viewed by most. Generally regarded on the same level as rehab, they took in unclaimed and abused Subs who needed help adjusting to independent life - but even the best of seemingly-selfless intentions could lead down corrupt paths.

Missive was no exception.

"Jo doesn't work there anymore," Kurt offered.

"I got booted," she said casually. "One of my boys presented, I turned him down. He cried abuse, said I forced him. There's not a lot you can do to defend yourself from some accusations, no matter how untrue."

Blaine narrowed his eyes at her. "You don't seem too upset..."

She shrugged. "I miss it. I miss taking care of my Subs, but I'm not sad I'm out of the program. Some centres are good, happy and healthy places where Missive's work is being done the way it's meant to. Others... aren't."

"Yours wasn't?" Blaine asked.

She shook her head sadly. "Nope. But I'm out now."

Cooper hadn't spoken since his recoil at the name-drop, now content to sit back and watch her carefully as she spoke and moved around. There was something quiet behind his eyes, something Kurt could see but couldn't quite feel yet. Reservation? Curiosity?

Please let this work.

"You're here for me," Cooper said softly.

Jo locked eyes with him. After a stretch of silence, the longest there had been since she arrived, she reached out and stroked his hand again. "Yes."

"Look, I..." He glanced over her shoulder to where Kurt was standing. "I appreciate your intentions, I *do*," his gaze fell back on Jo, "and you're ... lovely. But I'm not... looking for..."

"I am lovely," she confessed with a haughty air. "I am pretty, and witty, and very," she closed her eyes and bobbed her head to emphasise her point, "very gay."

Blaine let out a tiny squeak of laughter that he couldn't keep in, pressing his lips together and ducking his head embarrassedly afterwards.

Cooper's mouth twitched into a tiny smile, and he eyed her carefully again. "So you're just... willing to take on a Sub. That you've no attraction to. Just for fun?"

"What better reason is there?" she asked, mock-offended. "No claim. Just living arrangements, for awhile. You need somebody. I need somebody. We might hate each other's guts, but come - what is it, Sunday that they're letting you go?"

He nodded.

"Come Sunday, if you want to see the back end of me badly enough - and not like that," she waved a hand, laughing, "I'll go."

Considering, Cooper looked her up and down, eyes shifting over to the myriad of bags she'd left stacked by the wall. Suitcases and shoulder-bags alike were piled high in a mis-matched patchwork of colours, far more than she'd need for just a weekend.

"You overpack," he said simply.

"You don't talk enough," she shot back.

"You talk too much," he answered with a playful glare.

"You just got your ass kicked and they *still* didn't shift your pretty. Now, that pretty is stuck on good and tight, what am I gonna do with that, huh?"

Cooper rocked back slightly, tilting his head. "So that's your thing? You're gay, and beautiful, and annoying?"

"So you're straight, and broken, and," she tipped her head back and forth, pulling a face, "kind of a bitch?"

He huffed a quiet laugh, eyes falling closed.

Blaine turned in his seat, unsure as to what was happening as he met Kurt's eyes worriedly.

Kurt gave him a reassuring smile. He was certain, now more than ever.

"You two," Jo turned and pointed a finger between them. "We need some time. Go. Be gone."

Blaine blinked at her. "W-what?"

"It's Friday night!" she announced. "You're young. You're gorgeous. Go. GO! Have all the sex, break a few bedsprings. We'll be fine."

Kurt rolled his eyes at her, and Blaine slipped out of his chair, ducking in embarrassment and pressing himself to Kurt's side. "We... uh. It's not..."

"Oh, please," she cocked an eyebrow at them, "you're what? A few weeks in? A month? The amount of sex you two must be having, I'm amazed you're both still walking straight."

Kurt flushed to the roots of his hair as Blaine bowed to bury his face in Kurt's shirt.

Cooper's laughter was the only saving grace; it was the first time Kurt had ever heard him laugh aloud. It was small and sweet, just a rolling chuckle, but it was the most wonderful sound he'd heard in a long time.

"We're going," Kurt said lightly, slipping his arm around Blaine's waist. "Cooper?"

"Go," he agreed with a little nod. "I've got this."

"Oho!" Jo turned back to him. "Cocky, too."

Cooper scowled playfully. "Shut up and sit down."

Jo's eyes flashed in surprise, and she glanced over at Kurt quickly, brow lifting.

He's giving me orders? she was asking. Kurt knew her well enough to read that much.

He realised all at once that even with her years at Missive, she probably hadn't met Subs like the Andersons before.

With a gentle, knowing nod, Kurt smiled at her softly. *This is why I called you*, his smile said. *They're special.*

He slipped out the door silently with Blaine still tucked against his side, the sound of the TV springing back to life echoing in their wake as it gave way to the hum of hospital conversation in the hallways.

They walked in silence to the car, and Blaine left his side just as their boots kicked across the gravel of the lot to move to the passenger door. He stopped at the handle, peering over the car with a smile.

"Lizzy?"

Kurt huffed a laugh, leaning against the window. "My middle name is Elizabeth. After... my mom. Jo's sister."

Blaine nodded, grinning. "I like it."

He'd told Blaine about his mother, about what had happened when he was a boy and how it had felt, standing in that cemetery with his father's hand wrapped around his. He'd never told anybody that, not the whole story. But Blaine had listened, had curled against him, head in his lap, pressing kisses to his wrist in apology for everything that was taken away from him. Even if it was never his fault.

"They were named after Little Women," Kurt added lightly, sliding into the driver's seat. "Josephine. Elizabeth, or Beth - my mom. My other aunt is ... Meg is different. She doesn't really stay in touch. She never really liked my Dad."

Blaine listened in silence, nodding along and watching Kurt with soft eyes.

"But we have Jo," he started the car, "she always comes when we call. Just drops everything and then she's here,

in a heartbeat. We're... we're lucky."

Blaine's brow dipped in sympathy, and he shifted in his seat, head rolling against the headrest. "You miss her."

"Mom?" Kurt asked as they pulled out. "Yeah. Yes. Every day."

He felt Blaine's hand on his thigh, a warm and comforting weight, anchoring him down to the world again before the pull of old grief could drag him away. He smiled, leaning to peer around the next corner and flicking on the turning signal.

"Let's go home," he said softly.

The rest of the night was left to comfortable swaps of silence in between dinner and explaining Jo was back in town to his father (which earned a knowing smile and chuckle, followed quickly by an astonished *"You left him alone with her!?"*).

Once they were up in their room, they'd dissolved into their nightly routine, showering and cleaning up before settling on the bed together, lost in quiet conversation.

"They really seemed to like each other," Blaine mused while he absently played with Kurt's hand, weaving his fingers between Kurt's own. "I mean, I know they were... they argued. But they did. Like each other."

"Mmm," Kurt agreed, twisting curls between his fingertips on his free hand. "I had a feeling."

"You had a feeling," Blaine echoed with a soft smirk.

Kurt shrugged lightly, amusement shining in his eyes.

"If..." Blaine began carefully, eyes dropping to the bedspread. "If he goes. How... far away-?"

"Ann Arbor," Kurt cut him off, grazing his nails over Blaine's scalp and enjoying the tiny, contented sound he received. "It's only a few hours. If he decides to go stay with Jo, then he's not far. We can visit on weekends. And they can always come here."

Blaine smiled, eyes closed and face resting against the duvet. "It's going to be okay."

"It is," Kurt agreed, craning to kiss at the corner of his mouth.

He didn't get the chance to retreat before Blaine pressed against him, sliding their mouths together and bringing his hand up to brush over Kurt's face.

After a moment they rolled back, content to kiss in slow, languid sweeps of lips and tongue for as long as they could, as long as the world was still in one piece, and no longer threatening to crumble around them.

When morning came, Kurt woke to the sound of his dad's car pulling out of the driveway. *Gone for the day*, the note on the fridge said. *Call me if Jo gets arrested*.

It was late morning by the time they'd settled again, still in their pyjamas after a phone call insisting they not come to the hospital.

("We're fine, stay home. Relax and enjoy your weekend.")

"But-"

"You can come back tomorrow. We're having an orgy, no kids allowed."

"JO!"

"Shush now. The hot nurse is here, I have to go make Coop blush. He gets so annoyed when I make fire engine noises, it's the best part of my day. BYE!")

Kurt had hung up after the call with a huff of laughter, pressing two fingers to the bridge of his nose and whispering a quiet apology to Cooper.

But it was while he was lying with Blaine, relaxed and sprawled on the bedcovers and laughing at Cooper's misfortune, that he finally began to feel the clinging squeeze in his chest fade away. That part of him that had coiled tight with fear from the moment Blaine had answered his phone one night, when they'd finally decided to *have* each other until the world had been ripped out from under them, was finally letting go.

Everything was going to be okay.

Blaine slipped a warm hand over his belly, brushing under his tank top and thumbing at the soft skin below his navel. Kurt pulled in a ragged breath at the sensation, the intent he could feel behind it, sweet and small and asking so gently for more.

They hadn't let themselves have this, not since Tuesday night. Cooper was in the hospital. The jocks haunted their every step, nothing felt right. But now...

He rolled onto his side, letting Blaine's hand slide further up his shirt, and traced light fingertips over an exposed bicep.

"Are you sure?"

Blaine seemed to vibrate softly, trembling and inching closer. "Tell me?" he asked, voice barely above a whisper.

"Lie back," Kurt commanded, and watched for the beautiful flicker of recognition Blaine's eyes as he complied.

It drove Kurt slowly insane with need, the way Blaine seemed to get warmer and more eager each time he obeyed a command. He could feel it in his skin with every touch, the need to be possessed. To be owned.

"Take off your shirt," Kurt told him, peeling off his own tank top as he did so.

After Blaine had tossed his night shirt over the edge of the bed, he settled down again, waiting, fingers dancing lightly along Kurt's thigh where he knelt beside him.

With slow, careful hands, Kurt undid the tie of his own pyjama pants, pushing them down his hips and off as he shifted his balance. He could feel Blaine pawing at his skin, bracing him as he moved across the bedspread and slid one leg over Blaine's chest to settle his knees on either side.

"Blaine," he said, voice cracking as broad, firm hands swept up both of his exposed thighs, stopping at his waist.

He was naked and straddling his boyfriend's chest, and a part of him wondered where this had come from. The confidence to do just this; to strip himself down and command his Sub (*Boyfriend. Lover. Soulmate?*) to worship his body.

He didn't have to say it out loud, Blaine had already risen up, arms locking around Kurt's frame as he slid wet lips over the head of his already hardening cock.

Kurt gasped softly, eyes falling closed and hips squeezing tight for a moment as Blaine's mouth moved down the length of him, sucking sweetly and slowly. He let Blaine find a rhythm, a slow bob that moved deeper and deeper until Kurt opened his eyes again to look down, just in time to catch Blaine glancing up at him from under long, black lashes. Blaine's eyes were focused, somehow so bright and seemingly innocent despite the slick red mouth that was gliding over Kurt's cock.

Groaning at the sight, Kurt let his head fall back, let Blaine suck him as slowly as he wanted to, take his time and

map every crease and dip with his tongue. His body tingled and ached, trapped between the ecstasy of Blaine's tight lips wrapped around his cock and the incredible peace flooding through his body, the Dom part of him that was in control, with a loving Sub coiled around his body, giving him pleasure.

"Blaine," he breathed, panting at the building electricity in his spine.

His hands dropped to push through Blaine's hair, cradling his head gently as his own hips found a matching motion, shallow at first, and then in longer sweeps, rolling him down to fuck into Blaine's mouth. When Blaine's hands dropped to his ass, squeezing and encouraging him forward as he moaned loudly around his cock, Kurt's arms shot out to brace himself against the headboard.

"O-oh!" Kurt gasped, hips working faster now, pushing him into the tight, hot heat of Blaine's mouth over and over again until he felt the squeeze of Blaine's throat around the head.

He let out a soft whimper as Blaine's strong hands held him in place, throat convulsing around his cock as he swallowed.

Kurt came with a low and broken cry, body shaking and arms barely holding him up while Blaine moaned around him again, licking at every last drop even when Kurt pulled away.

Shaky and unsteady on his knees, Kurt shifted down the bed, trying to keep from falling over.

Blaine dropped back onto the mattress, arms falling on either side of his head as he smiled up at his Dom. His eyes were half-lidded and honey-sweet, and just at the sight, Kurt felt the air get knocked out of him again.

"You're so beautiful," he whispered, scooting both legs down until he was on hands and knees over Blaine's body.

Blaine shivered at the praise, writhing when Kurt dropped to press kisses down his throat and over his chest.

"You're so good for me." He found both of Blaine's wrists, pushing them up over his head and holding them there.

Hips jerking, Blaine whimpered at the sharp flare of arousal that came with being pinned. He was still hard, leaking against his belly where his cock curved over it, and Kurt glanced down between them to see.

Kurt could feel the voice rising up inside, so much like his own but deeper, and saying things he didn't even realise he wanted to until that moment.

"You're gorgeous," he pressed a kiss to Blaine's throat. "So beautiful, baby, do you want to come for me?"

Blaine moaned, arching his body up under Kurt's. "Yes. *Please*, Kurt."

"Shh," Kurt whispered, control seizing him. "Hold the headboard. Don't let go."

Nodding and panting in shallow breaths, Blaine moved his hands to grip the bottom curve of the wooden board when Kurt's hold lifted.

"I'm not going to suck you or touch you yet," Kurt said, power coursing and thrumming in his spine, all the more dizzying in the wake of his orgasm. He dipped to suck a nipple into his mouth briefly. "But you're going to come for me. When you're ready. When I want you to."

Blaine's only reply was a fractured sound as he thrashed lightly on the mattress, helpless under the torture of Kurt's mouth while it mapped down his chest.

"You're such a good boy," Kurt purred, grazing his teeth over a hipbone and resisting the urge to take Blaine into his mouth. He was right there, flushed and straining, leaking precome onto his stomach, and Kurt wanted to taste it more than anything in his life. But Blaine's needs were more important.

He'd read enough to know how much more intense it could feel, if done a certain way, if he used his commands.

And he needed to know Blaine's strength and his limits; he needed to push them.

He dipped to lick at the inside of Blaine's thigh, holding back a moan as Blaine's legs spread for him immediately.

"*Ungh!*" The sound punched out of Blaine above him, broken and begging.

"Shh," Kurt said again, mouthing along the warm line under his belly and licking a stripe over the soft skin.

Blaine jolted, whining loudly.

"Tell me, now," Kurt instructed gently, sliding his hands over Blaine's thighs and settling his cheek against a hipbone. "Tell me what you need, baby."

"I nee-" Blaine's voice cut off with a choked sound as his hips shifted, clenching and unclenching. "I need to come, Kurt,*please let me.*"

"You will," Kurt told him. "Just ask me."

"Kurt, please, can I-"

"Tell me what you want me to do."

This is how we make you stronger.

"S-" Blaine arched again, trying to get the words out. "Suck me, please, oh god."

It was enough, and Kurt smiled to himself, pinning Blaine's hips to the bed with both hands and sliding his mouth over the head of his cock. He swept his tongue down the slit for a moment, soaking in the rush and the taste of Blaine (*mine*) before he sucked hard, rolling his mouth and hollowing his cheeks.

Blaine moaned loudly, his voice gravelling as he arched off the bed. Kurt felt the hot burst paint the inside of his mouth, and again, as Blaine thrashed and finally collapsed back down.

He let Blaine's cock slip from his mouth wetly, and licked his lips before dropping to press another slow line of kisses up the softening shaft, feeling sparks up his spine like fireworks at every overstimulated jerk of the body beneath him.

Carefully, he shifted back up to balance on his hands and knees, crawling up the bed and settling over Blaine's chest. The groan he earned in response to his weight was just as incredible as it had been the first time.

Kurt drew up both arms, resting his elbows either side of Blaine's head and curving his hands down to sweep through his hair.

"Mmm," he hummed contentedly, bathing in the radiating waves of bliss he could feel flowing from Blaine's body. "How do you feel?"

"G- good," Blaine managed to mutter, blinking dazedly at him. "Oh god, so good."

Kurt craned down to capture his mouth for a moment, dragging their tongues together so they could taste each other. He felt Blaine whimper against his lips, and let go.

"You're amazing," he said softly, returning his attention to Blaine's hair.

"I'm... I'm..." Blaine seemed to lose his train of thought, head rolling to the side under Kurt's fingers. "I'm yours."

"You are," he said with a chuckle, and dropped down to rest his face in the crook of Blaine's neck.

"You always will be."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

While he was sitting in the hallway, Kurt wondered how many songs there were about Sundays, and how many of them were sad. He wondered how many of them had the word *goodbye* somewhere in the lyrics, and how many would still sound beautiful, despite goodbye, if the voice belonged to Blaine.

They'd driven out to the hospital come Sunday morning, stopping at the Lima Bean on the way just to sit and stare at each other, waking up over the steam of café coffee.

When he'd climbed from the driver's seat at the hospital and pressed the auto-lock, he held his hand out behind him, stretched open in the air and blindly waiting to be filled like it always was a moment later. It was subconscious now, reaching back for Blaine.

By the time they got to Cooper's room, Blaine's palm was sweating, warm and clammy against his own. Kurt turned at the door and wrapped an arm around his shoulders, pressing a light kiss to his temple in passing as he let Blaine go into the room ahead of him.

Cooper was on his feet, mostly dressed and shuffling around the rumpled hospital bed as he pulled on his shirt and nodded along to the tones of Jo's voice.

It took a moment for Kurt to register her words over the noises of the hallway.

"-with your brother, but I do think you'd recover faster if you were settled and safe."

Cooper stopped when he caught sight of them in his peripheral vision. He grinned, dropping the tank top he was carrying in his mouth and catching it atop the pile of random toiletries in his hands. "Hey!"

Blaine smiled at the greeting, eyes flicking to the bed while he buried his fists nervously in his pockets. "You've been discharged?"

"It's Sunday," Cooper nodded, "like clockwork. The stitches are good, my lung's in the clear. Now I've just gotta sit around and wait for my bones to knit. They figured I can do that at home."

Wetting his lips carefully, Blaine glanced to Jo and back. "Home?"

All sound seemed to fall away from the room after the word hit the air. Kurt knew that Cooper could hear the change in pitch, that telling lift in Blaine's voice, just like he could.

Cooper grew still and barely seemed to notice Jo as she moved to his side, gently gathering the stack of toiletries and the shirt from his hands and sliding them into the old leather carry bag that lay open on the bed.

Blaine watched her as she moved, letting his gaze linger on the tattered bag. That bag was Cooper; it held almost everything he owned, he took it everywhere he went. Blaine knew that bag meant Cooper was here. But it was being filled again, packed and zipped up by long careful fingers that didn't belong to his brother.

"I've decided," Cooper began slowly, "to go back with Jo, to Ann Arbor. While I recover."

Spurred by the sharp flare of discomfort that tightened his chest, Kurt reached out instinctively and rested his hand on Blaine's back.

Blaine's nod was too quick, and his eyes cast too low, betraying the ease of his words. "Of course, I mean... that was the point of Jo coming. It'll be better." He drew a quick breath. "She can take care of you."

"Exactly," Jo said softly. "And you know, it's not like you boys can't come up whenever you want. Hey, you could come back with us for awhile?"

Kurt shook his head sharply. "School," he reminded her.

"Fuck school."

"Jo," Cooper warned, trying not to smile.

"Fine," she rolled her eyes, "but you can still come stay, anytime. I have a sofa. And a balcony, which is a great place to throw milk balloons at passing suits."

With a breathy laugh, Cooper shot her a fond scowl.

Blaine smiled hesitantly at them both, but couldn't keep the ache from showing in his eyes.

"I'm two or three hours away, tops," Cooper insisted, moving around the bed and closing the gap between them. "You have Kurt, now. When I heal up, well... we'll see."

"You'll be happy," Blaine said with a shaky voice. "You know you will."

He opened his mouth to argue, but Blaine cut him off quickly.

"Cooper." Blaine's brow lifted as his brother met his eyes. "You're *smiling* now."

Cooper pressed his lips together tightly, gaze dropping in a moment of silent guilt.

"Don't," Blaine added. "Don't feel bad, and don't stay because of me. You should go. You need time to recover, and who knows, I mean," he glanced to Jo briefly, trying his best to smile, "you might be exactly where you're supposed to be."

Sighing softly, Cooper rested an open hand on top of his little brother's head. "You're where I'm supposed to be. You always have been."

"Not anymore," Blaine told him firmly, smiling through the building tears.

Kurt could sense it prickling his skin; they were both holding on to something, keeping it just barely in check.

Cooper watched his brother for a moment, studied his determined face just long enough to realise that Blaine had already made up his mind. He laughed softly, and rubbed his hand over Blaine's head.

"Stop gelling your fucking hair," he teased with a grin.

Blaine ducked away before his hair was messed up completely, and gave a short, wet laugh. "And you watch your language."

"My bad," Jo offered, lifting a hand in apology.

"Come see me," Cooper instructed. "Next weekend, or the weekend after, don't wait too long."

Blaine nodded obediently, eyes falling to the floor.

There it was again, Kurt could feel it coming; the change in pressure, the awareness that Blaine needed him. He shifted at the sudden unbearable urge to reach out and hold Blaine so tight it almost hurt them both.

Cooper beat him to it.

Jo's hand was on Kurt's arm in an instant, guiding him towards the door.

"We'll give you boys a minute," she said as she ushered him outside.

"No, wait--"

"You're not what he needs," she said.

Kurt glanced back inside long enough to see Blaine bury his face into Cooper's shirt, to feel the sob he let out reverberate in his bones.

"No, I need to—" His second attempt to step towards the door was halted by two strong hands, pulling him away.

"Sweetheart," she said, squeezing his arms gently. "Let them say goodbye."

"But it's *not*," Kurt snapped, and on edge from the jarring wave of Blaine's emotions. "He's only a few hours away, we'll come up next weekend, it's not like..."

"It is," she said. "They're cutting a tie. All they ever had was each other, and now their paths are splitting apart, and no matter how good it is for them both in the end, it *hurts*. It's not supposed to be easy. But they should never have had to do this alone for so long."

Kurt nodded, fighting back the tears that threatened to well in his eyes. He could feel every inch of Blaine's grief, still creeping and sticking in his veins. Cooper wasn't a Dom, holding Blaine did nothing to ease the pain. It simply clung there, raw and hollow, unmoving against the wrong kind of comfort.

He eyed his aunt curiously. "Have you ever had dependent Subs before? At Missive?"

Her mouth twitched at the side in confirmation. "If two Subs who are close go long enough without a Dom to care for them, they become... twins, basically. It doesn't happen a lot. It's usually siblings, usually in care facilities where they only have each other for constant company."

"But they've never been in a facility."

"Doesn't matter," she went on, "they still only had each other, all those years. But they're both Subs, they can't care for each other like they want to, they don't have the genetics to give each other the comfort they both need. But they *do* want to, and that's what matters. The link just keeps building up as time goes by. Every time they can't fix each other, they just become more and more connected for trying."

"We're making them leave each other," Kurt whispered, eyes falling shut. His body ached as he kept fighting to resist his instincts. "I did this, I called you—"

"It's for the best, for both of them," she cut him off. "They know that, or they wouldn't be doing it. Don't you dare feel like you're to blame for anything here. This is their choice. Their free will. Subs may be obedient, but in my experience, their will is like iron, tempered by years of learning how to use the word no. And you know those boys are stronger than most."

He sniffed, nodding and pressing his nose with the back of his hand.

"It's easier for the fact that you already claimed Blaine," she added, trying to ease his tension. "The division began then, naturally. When Cooper gets claimed, they'll just be like normal brothers. It won't hurt anymore."

He tried to think of something to say, but found nothing. Instead he simply nodded again, mouth flinching into an attempted smile as she rubbed his shoulder.

"I'll be right back, I'm just gonna go get Coop's paperwork sorted out," she told him, and he barely registered the sound of her flat shoes tapping down the hall.

After a moment he shifted on his feet, sinking into a chair by the door and burying his face in both hands. His mind wandered over the pull he felt in his chest; Blaine's all-encompassing loss still lingering too heavily. Focusing on it and trying to will it away did little but agitate the discomfort, so he cast his thoughts to absent things, anything he could think of that had no real meaning at all.

Why couldn't he think of a single song about Sundays?

It was funny, he realised; he could think of at least a dozen songs about goodbyes.

With a soft huff of helpless, humourless laughter, he tried to swallow the lump in his throat. He'd get to hold Blaine soon enough. If he had his way, he'd get to hold him the rest of his life. He could wait.

For Cooper, he could wait.

When Blaine re-emerged, he was flushed and blinking slowly, expressionless and suddenly walking like the world was far too heavy.

The way he used to, Kurt thought.

Cooper was close behind, and he reached out to rest a broad hand on Kurt's shoulder as Blaine moved aside.

Kurt stepped into the hug gingerly, careful not to put any pressure on Cooper's injuries.

"Thank you," Kurt croaked softly.

Cooper's fingers brushed through the hair at the back of his neck.

"Thank you," he echoed in a whisper. "Thank you for everything, and please just - take care of him. *Please.*"

Kurt smiled, and lifted his hand to return the gesture, threading fingers through a handful of dark, messy hair. "I don't think I know how to do anything else."

When Cooper pulled away, he was smiling. His gaze wandered over Kurt's shoulder as Jo came back, scooping Blaine into a quick hug and kissing his hair.

"You be good, sweetheart," she instructed in a soothing voice. "I promise I will get him back to you, good as new."

Blaine nodded weakly into her shoulder and slumped again when she pulled away.

She shifted past Cooper, tapping him lightly on the ass. "I'll get your bags, sweetcheeks," she teased. "You just, y'know. Stand here. Do nothing. Make me do all the work. *Slacker.*"

Cooper chuckled, voice still raw from his tears. "Cute, that's... That's real cute."

"We should go," Kurt said softly.

"Us too," Cooper agreed. "Come up in a week or two, please," he insisted again. "Or I will probably go mad and kill her."

Kurt smiled and nodded. "Trust me, I know what you mean. We'll be there."

He reached out blindly for Blaine's hand, and couldn't keep his own from closing too tightly when he found it. He could feel Blaine's fingers squeezing around his palm, still shaking even as they made their way down the hall.

Kurt was certain he'd never walked so fast in his life, but it still didn't feel fast enough. They made it to the parking lot, shielding their eyes from the sudden glare of daylight. He only glanced around once or twice to see if they were alone, but even if they weren't, he didn't care anymore. The ache had grown too strong, was becoming too thick in his throat and too heavy in his chest, and he couldn't bear it any more.

He turned and engulfed Blaine in his arms, cradling his head as he rested their temples together. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry."

Blaine sniffed lightly, blinking like a small child trying to understand. "I... I don't..."

"You can let go now," Kurt said, rocking back to press kisses over both swollen eyelids and down his tear-stained cheek. "It's alright."

Blaine sank against his chest, boneless but for the legs holding him up off the ground. Clinging tight to his frame and keeping him steady, Kurt swayed lightly on his feet as the relief of simply holding on rushed over him so hard he could almost taste it on his tongue.

He could feel the splinters of doubt already forming in the aftershocks; *unwanted, empty, gone, left me*.

"I need you, I love you, I'm here," Kurt whispered.

There was no reply but for the staggered jerking of Blaine's breath, coming too shallow and too fast.

Kurt pushed his fingers through Blaine's hair, rested his mouth against the side of his head and closed his eyes, reeling with the weight of it. For the first time as a Dom, he didn't know what to do.

There was a hole in Blaine now, he could feel it. The place where he kept Cooper had been cut away before its time, and Kurt was left shaking in the helplessness of not knowing how to fill it back up. It was the one part of Blaine he never owned; a place that was carved for his twin. It was never made for a Dom to fill.

He didn't know how long they'd been standing in the parking lot of the hospital, bathed in daylight, holding on to each other in clear sight of anyone who wandered down the stairs. The sudden awareness struck him like an anvil, and he curled his arms tighter around Blaine's body.

Protect.

"We need to go. Blaine?" He tilted back to see his face, to look for any sign of recognition.

"Come with me," he commanded as he stepped back and took Blaine's hand, guiding him away from the main building.

He moved on instinct, got them both to the car and inside as fast as he could, pulling out of the lot and onto the road. He didn't know where he was going, only that he had to find something, *anything*. There was no quick fix, he already knew that much, it would take time to heal. No, he just needed something that would serve as a bandage.

The idea came to him three blocks from the hospital, and he straightened in his seat, flicking on the turning signal and finding the best place for a u-turn.

When they arrived at the school, Blaine stirred in the passenger seat, blinking slowly. Confusion flickered across his features, but was gone just as quickly as his face fell back into the defeated, expressionless mask he'd worn since the hospital.

Kurt managed to get them both to the doors, fumbling with his keys and sending up a silent thank you to Puck, for making them for Rachel so she could practice in the choir room and the auditorium, and to Rachel, for making him copies.

By the time they reached the end of the second hall, Blaine still didn't seem to register where they were going. It wasn't until Kurt pushed through the doors and the sharp scent of chlorine struck them that Blaine's eyes finally lifted.

Kurt turned, studying his face worriedly. He wet his lips, held his breath, and waited for a reaction.

It only took a moment. Blaine shifted on his feet, dropping Kurt's hand as he toed off both shoes and slid out of his jacket. He pulled his polo shirt over his head on his sprint to the water, throwing it aside a split second before he dove head-first into the pool.

Kurt skittered back from the splash, gathering Blaine's clothes quickly and piling them on the concrete steps. He turned and pressed both hands together over the bridge of his nose, watching and waiting for Blaine to resurface.

When he breached the water on the other side and gasped violently, Kurt finally let go of the breath he'd been holding since they'd stepped inside. It rode out of him on a shaky wave, and his hands dropped as his eyes fell closed, body settling at the sudden calm.

The world outside forgotten, he let the numbness bleed through him, choking back a sob of relief at how suddenly *safe* everything felt.

This is what it's like for you here, he thought as he watched Blaine dive down again. *Nothing hurts.*

He wrapped both arms around himself, eyes trailing over the dark line of Blaine underwater, only visible past the distorted ripple by his dark jeans and his hair. His body was bowed and sinking lower and lower, floating in the freedom of weightlessness.

Kurt's hands had unbuttoned half his jacket before he even realised he was undressing himself. He froze, blinking in surprise at the involuntary action. It wasn't until Blaine came back up again, spraying water and clinging to the side of the pool, that he knew why.

Blaine turned, kicking up off the wall like he had the day Kurt had first come to him here. The day he'd taken him home, had taken care of him with his own two hands. It was a sharp shock of memory, the déjà vu bleeding into the real moments that were still so clear in his mind; the taste of his skin, the smell of his hair, the weight of his body on top of him.

Staring across the water, hair plastered to his face and body rising and falling on slow breaths, Blaine reached out in the air with his fingers splayed in a silent plea.

Kurt was out of his jacket in a moment, kicking off his shoes and socks and peeling away his shirt. He slipped his jeans down his hips and off, folding them quickly and laying them over his other clothes before he turned and ran.

The water was colder than he remembered, rushing along his overheated skin in an exquisite head-to-toe ripple of sensation. When he came up, he flicked his head rapidly to keep the water from his eyes, pushing his hair back with both hands and looking around to figure out where he'd surfaced.

Blaine's arms found him first, pressing along his sides as they slipped around his waist. Kurt sank into them, coiling his own around Blaine's shoulders and holding on tight.

"I love you," Blaine confessed breathlessly, the words heavy and broken like he'd been waiting for years to say just that. Like he hadn't said it every day since the first time.

Kurt wrapped his legs around Blaine's hips underwater, anchored aching for the solidity of him; to know he was there, and safe, and *his*. He slid their mouths together, tipping Blaine's head back with both hands to kiss him deeply and taste as much as he could through coffee and chlorine.

"I will never stop loving you," Kurt promised, pulling back to meet Blaine's eyes.

Blaine nodded, blinking rapidly as he tightened his grip on Kurt's waist.

Kurt slid both arms over his shoulders, tilting for another kiss, sucking gently and slowly on his lower lip like a promise. He felt Blaine's hands slide over his back, gripping at his sides as they dipped and rose in the water, floating and rolling smoothly while their mouths and hands grew more and more needy.

Drawing deep breaths, they sank together, twisting underwater, still kissing blindly and holding on to each other even when they reached the bottom.

CHAPTER TWELVE

It was two weeks before they saw Cooper and Jo again.

The Friday night drive up to Ann Arbor for the weekend was filled with laughter and music, a welcome change from the long drag of the last fortnight. They slept on Jo's old fold-out sofa, tangled up in each other under countless blankets guarding them from the cold, completely at peace in their cocoon.

The world was different outside of Ohio. Nobody stared at the two boys holding hands as they walked down the street, ducking to steal quick kisses. Nobody noticed them smiling as they wandered back to Jo's apartment after a late lunch in town on Saturday afternoon.

Cooper was already well on the way to recovery, bright and grinning and giving back as good as he got with every playful jab Jo threw his way. Kurt couldn't help but feel strangely proud that he'd brought the two of them together.

But it was Blaine's recovery he was worried about.

He awoke in their blanket cocoon on Sunday morning to the sounds of Jo tinkering in the open kitchen; the toaster popping, the kettle whistling, the scrape of a knife dragging over toast. With a gentle squeeze of Blaine's waist and a kiss to his bare shoulder, Kurt moved his legs back to slip carefully out of bed, trying not to hiss at the sudden rush of cold air.

He padded over the tiled floor to the kitchenette, drawing out a seat as Jo poured them both coffee.

Even in his state of half-awake, his absent thoughts found their way back to the same recurring concern that had been lurking in his mind for the last two weeks. He glanced over to the sofa.

Blaine had seemed to slowly drown inside himself day after day when Cooper left. He'd ventured back to the pool each night after school, when he could avoid the swim team, swimming laps over and over until dark. Kurt would take his homework along and finish it while he waited, or sometimes just watch the long, powerful lines of Blaine's back and arms as he moved effortlessly through the water.

Each night he took him home again, washed the chlorine from his body and replaced it with his hands, his lips, his promises. He'd lay Blaine out on their bed and simply touch him, hold him, show him he was loved.

"Time heals," Jo told him suddenly, jolting him out of his reverie.

It was just the two of them hovering sleepily over her breakfast table. Kurt wondered if all Doms were early risers, content to relax in the morning hours while their Subs slept in, safe and protected.

He nodded drowsily, drawing a deep breath of his coffee steam and yawning.

"He's so much stronger for seeing Cooper again," he admitted quietly. "But I'm worried about when we leave tonight."

"He'll be fine," she said around a mouthful of toast, waving a hand at him. "They're still pulling apart, but seeing each other has solidified it. Made it easier. They both know now, that they still have each other. They're still *here*, when they need each other, they're just - not alone anymore."

His eyes dipped thoughtfully, trailing over the slope of a smeared butter knife. "He's been so lost the last two weeks."

"Cooper's been hobbling around like a kicked puppy too. He didn't talk for the first few days, when it really sank in. But we got his voice back. And then his smile."

Kurt shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

She reached out and rested her hand on his, patting it gently. "I used to do this for a living, Lizzy. I know the right buttons to push when a Sub introverts, okay? Don't feel bad."

"I should have been better, for him," Kurt said softly, tilting his chin towards the couch where Blaine still slept, just a lump of a body under an array of patchwork blankets.

"You've only been together for a couple of months," she added. "Trust me, it takes years."

"Less than a month," Kurt corrected her, sipping his coffee.

She blinked at him in surprise. "Less than a month?"

"It'll be a month next week, since I claimed him," he clarified, shaking his head in quiet disbelief. "It feels like so much longer. I ... can't remember what it felt like, before I had him."

"Lizzy, if it's only been a month then," she tilted her head, "how are you so..."

"What?" he asked.

"*Attuned*," she finished. "At this point you should still be worrying if he's getting enough of your affection, he should still be panicking that he's not giving enough of himself. It's all a part of the early claim at your age."

Kurt shrugged, and his mouth drew up into a fond smile as he glanced over to the sofa. "We never had that."

She quirked an eyebrow, leaning on her elbow on the table.

"What?" he asked again, mildly irritated this time. "Are we so different?"

"It's not a bad thing," she said soothingly.

"We feel each other," Kurt continued defensively. "I know I'm giving him what he needs, I can ... feel it. I can feel it when he's hurt, or when he needs more of me. When he needs to be left in peace. I've always been able to, even before."

She paused mid-sip, eyeing him.

He noticed her hesitation. "You too? Dad was like that."

She swallowed her coffee, eyes still narrowed as she watched him. "Like what?"

"I told him I could feel Blaine before the claim," Kurt clarified, "and he was... shocked. But he didn't say why."

She seemed to consider for a long time, returning her mug to the table and spinning it with long, thin fingers. Her eyes lingered on the glossy pink of her nail polish as her fingertips ghosted over the porcelain, and she wet her lips before she spoke.

"So, before you claimed Blaine," she began carefully, looking up. "You could feel his needs, his emotions. Is that what you're saying?"

"Yes," Kurt confirmed. "Not as strongly as I do now, but ... I did. Why? Why is that important? We were best friends. We spent all our time together, I thought it was natural."

"No," she said. "No, you ... shouldn't be able to feel someone you haven't claimed yet."

His eyes widened in surprise. "What?"

She pressed her lips into a thin line and shrugged.

"But ... I did," he said softly as he sank back in his seat, features drawn tight in confusion.

"Breakfast?"

He almost jumped out of his chair at the sound of Cooper's voice. The older Anderson wandered out from his bedroom in shuffling steps, pawing at his own sleep-mussed hair and blinking blearily at them.

"Is served, monkey. Dish your own," Jo instructed, smiling as she lifted her coffee to her mouth.

"Slave driver," Cooper mumbled, nudging her chair with a solid hip-bump as he moved past.

The loud grind of wood on tile had Blaine startling awake on the sofa, head twisting from side to side as he peered around the room from under his blankets. "Hrrmph?"

"Breakfast, Squirt," Cooper called.

As the brothers stumbled around the kitchen, gathering toast and Pop-Tarts, Kurt sat back and reeled in silence. His eyes trailed over to the window, out of focus, as Jo's words played over again in his head.

What if I made it all up? He swallowed against the bitter taste at the back of his throat. *What if I made him do this?*

His mind wandered back to the night on the football field; the sound of Blaine's voice, scared but still so strong, the jeering of the jocks, the look on Carter's face when he thought he had them both right where he wanted them.

Blaine needed him. He knew it, down to his core, he *knew* Blaine had needed him in that moment.

But that's not possible.

The drive back to Lima was long and quiet, and strangely content. Blaine took the wheel while Kurt curled up in the passenger seat, tired and silent as the roads drifted by and the music played on softly. He let his head roll against the seat every once in a while, reaching out a hand to brush through Blaine's curls, or stroke at the back of his neck, the way he always used to.

You wanted to make this work as friends.

They carried their bags from the car when they got home, saying a quick hello-goodnight to Burt and Carole before they ambled exhaustedly up the stairs for evening showers and skincare routines. By the time Kurt settled on his side of the bed, Blaine had come back from the bathroom, warm and damp and smelling like shampoo, and was flicking off the lamps and drawing the curtains.

"Come here," Kurt commanded firmly.

Surprised, Blaine moved to the bedside, pulling back the covers and sliding in beside him.

"No," Kurt said with a shaky voice. "On top of me, come here."

Blaine complied without a word, sliding a leg over his Dom's body and settling down on his chest. He let out a soft, contented sound at the contact, but Kurt's hands stopped him from resting his head, guiding his chin up instead.

Kurt stared at him, searching the lights of his eyes in the dark.

"Tell me," Kurt whispered.

"Tell you what?" Blaine asked, concerned. "Are you okay?"

"Tell me the truth," he commanded, voice shaking. "Deep down, is this - am I - what you really want, or did I make you do this?"

"Kurt," Blaine said, almost scoldingly. "You're all I ever wanted. Of course you are. What is this about? What's wrong?"

"Please tell me I didn't make it up," Kurt begged.

"You didn't," Blaine said immediately, pressing his cheek into Kurt's palm. "Kurt, this is me. You know I wanted to be yours before I even... before we'd even met. We've been here before. I *knew*. Where did this come from?"

"I just got scared," Kurt confessed in a whisper. "I just got scared that I made it up, and I made you- and... oh god, is this what your doubt feels like?"

Blaine nodded, closing his eyes and smiling gently as he let his jaw rest in Kurt's warm hands. "Awful, isn't it?"

Kurt chuckled wetly. "It's terrible. It hurts."

"It does," Blaine confirmed, pushing Kurt's hands away and sinking down. "But you need to let it go. Because I wanted to be yours ... so badly," he said, tracing fingers over Kurt's collarbone, "that I knew I would risk everything just for the smallest chance that I could be."

Kurt let go of the breath he'd been holding, letting his eyes fall shut. *This is what Jo meant*, he realised. *We still have our panic, our fears, just like any claim our age. We're normal.*

He shifted, relaxing slowly at the revelation and dragging his hands possessively over Blaine's back.

Arching at the contact, Blaine slid both arms over Kurt's shoulders and curled them around his head, brushing fingertips through his hair. After a moment, he dipped his head down meekly.

"Don't give me any more commands tonight?" he requested.

It wasn't a power play, or an instruction, just a simple plea made all the more beautiful by the imploring look on his face.

Shivering, Kurt nodded quickly.

At the permission, Blaine lowered himself just enough to slide their lips together, slow and sweet and wet, trailing kisses down Kurt's jaw to his throat.

Kurt hummed softly as Blaine sucked on his pulse, licking at it before he moved back up and pressed their mouths together again, gently rocking his body up in a slow rhythm.

The tension seeped from Kurt's muscles under the attention of Blaine's mouth, and he spread his legs absently to accommodate the shift of Blaine's hips while he moved down again. Firm, warm hands pushed up the fabric of his tank top, but Kurt barely felt it, head rolling on the pillow as he left himself to the worship of his Sub.

He could feel the transfer of weight as Blaine settled on his chest; a warm, flushed cheek pressing against his pale skin, hands sliding over his sides and pushing beneath him, wrapping around him, holding him tight. His skin tingled as Blaine's mouth fluttered over it in tiny, quick staccato kisses before he settled on his breastbone, stopping to suck a long, gentle kiss over one spot, tongue sweeping wetly under the drag of his lips.

Kurt let out a breathy, helpless sound, head swimming in and out of consciousness as Blaine held on to him and kissed him to sleep.

He woke before the alarm the next morning, blinking at the ceiling and drawing a long, deep breath. He smiled when he registered the weight on his chest; Blaine was still wrapped around his body, settled between his legs and sleeping peacefully. Stray curls stuck to his forehead, and his smooth, tan shoulders rose and fell gently. Kurt couldn't keep his hands from brushing over them, revelling in the warmth of his skin and the dips of his muscles.

Blaine only stirred long enough to nuzzle against his chest, squeezing a little tighter and mumbling something

incoherently.

"We have school," Kurt said, distracted and playing with his curls, letting them slip between his fingers.

Blaine didn't answer, just rocked side to side in the barest motion and adjusted his cheek on Kurt's chest with a *humph*.

The friction against his hips made Kurt's lips part, and his head fall back. He smiled around a mouth-drawn breath, tightening his fingers in Blaine's hair. He could feel the heat inside, building under his skin, the proximity and the freedom to own Blaine whenever he wanted to was right there.

I want all of you, he thought, squeezing his thighs tighter around Blaine's body. *I want all of you around me. Inside me.*

Blaine seemed to jolt awake at the new pressure, his sleepy eyes lifting as his head rose up so he could inspect Kurt's face. He watched the pink lines of Kurt's mouth with dark, half-lidded eyes, swiping a wet tongue over his own lower lip and following it with his teeth.

Kurt blinked at him, stunned at how fast his body was rushing to lust, and exactly how much he wanted. He wondered if Blaine had felt it.

He assumed so as Blaine dropped and pressed a kiss to his chest, mouthing at the creases of definition until he reached a nipple and sucked it into his mouth. Kurt rose up beneath him, arched into his mouth and let out a barely audible *oh* of pleasure as Blaine's hands slid down his body and his mouth kept working.

"B- Blaine, we can't r- right now," he managed to say between panting breaths.

"Why not?" Blaine mumbled sleepily, still flicking at the nipple with his tongue.

"School," Kurt said, hips working without him and rutting slowly up against his boyfriend. "Oh, *god* - we - we have to go to school."

"Alarm hasn't gone off yet," Blaine insisted.

On cue, the clock clicked over, and a blare of music flooded the room.

They froze for a moment at the sound, and fell back down to the mattress, laughing.

Kurt pushed his fingers through Blaine's hair, sweeping it away from his face. "Tonight," he said.

"Tonight?" Blaine's brow lifted hopefully.

With a grin, Kurt craned to kiss Blaine's forehead before he wriggled beneath him, pushing at his shoulders just firmly enough to force him to move. "Come on, we have to get dressed."

Groaning, Blaine rolled the other way to let Kurt up, flopping onto his back gracelessly and dragging hands through his hair.

"I have a feeling about today," he said quietly.

Kurt glanced back over his shoulder on his way to the bathroom. "Oh?"

Blaine nodded, smiling brightly up at nothing in particular. "I have a very good feeling."

It wasn't until Burt showed up in the middle of Kurt's French class that day, fidgeting excitedly and asking to see him in private, clinging to an envelope, that Kurt realised *this* was what Blaine could feel coming. This was where it began, he thought, wrapped up in his father's arms in celebration, laughing through happy tears.

He couldn't understand how Blaine had known. He didn't expect to be racing down the school hall, holding his bag tight to his side and clutching a piece of paper in the other hand, but he was. By the time the final bell rang, he was flying as fast as his feet would carry him to meet Blaine by the Navigator.

Blaine rocked back lightly on his heels when he spotted him, smiling bemusedly at the excitement that was clear and bright on Kurt's face. He let out a surprised and muffled grunt when Kurt flung himself into his arms.

"I got in!" Kurt shouted.

Blaine adjusted his chin over Kurt's shoulder, laughing and swaying with the firm weight of his boyfriend pressed tight against his chest.

"You got in? OH!" He pulled back, bumping the car door with his hips and gripping Kurt's shoulders in both hands. "NYADA?"

Kurt held up the piece of paper, breathless and beaming. "I got in."

"Oh my god," Blaine pulled him in for another desperate hug, laughing and smiling. "You got in! I *knew* you would!"

Kurt didn't care who could see them. He couldn't have stopped himself if he wanted to, leaning back to press a hard kiss to his boyfriend's lips in the light of day, in the middle of the school parking lot, and curling both arms around his neck.

"I love you," he breathed as he pulled away, bowing and pressing their foreheads together.

"We should celebrate," Blaine insisted.

Kurt nodded quickly. "Dad's taking us out for dinner. We have time though," he rushed out his words, pressing another kiss to the edge of Blaine's mouth.

"Kurt, we're- someone could-"

"I know, I'm sorry," he whispered, trying to force himself to let go. "I'm just. I'm so happy, Blaine. I ... this is everything I've wanted, for so long."

Blaine nodded, forcing his smile wide. "I know. I'm so, so proud of you."

With one last parting kiss, Kurt slipped out of his arms, stumbling around to the driver's side as he folded up his acceptance letter and tucked it away before rummaging in his bag for his keys.

Dinner was over too quickly, just a blur of dishes and desserts mixed amongst laughter and fast-paced discussions on the end of school, the approach of graduation, and the vast new world that was New York.

When he made it to their room that night to settle in, clean and damp and still riding the unexpected high of his good news, he realised Blaine was sulking quietly on the bed.

"What's wrong?"

Blaine shook his head, face pulling into a patented grin instantly. "Nothing. Nothing at all. I told you I had a good feeling about today," he said, nodding to the NYADA acceptance letter Kurt had pinned up on his board. "It's just. Wow, New York."

"It's going to be..." Kurt laughed, eyes rolling up to the ceiling as he pressed both palms to his cheeks. "*Incredible.*"

Blaine bobbed his head in another nod, eyes falling down to the bedspread and chin resting on his hands.

"I know it'll take some getting used to," Kurt offered, cocking his head to study his Sub's face. "But there are so many opportunities there for us."

Blaine looked up, blinking. "For... us?"

"Oh, that reminds me," Kurt said, pivoting on his toes and lifting his bag up onto a chair. He pulled out a small folder, flicking at the elastic catches and flipping open the cover. "We have to fill these out too."

Shifting up off his belly, Blaine sat back and folded his legs as Kurt crawled onto the end of the bed.

His eyes grew wide when he read the block print across the top of the forms.

"Sub Aid Benefits? You-" he looked to Kurt, "you're taking me - with you?"

Kurt met him with a surprised stare. "Of course I am."

Blaine's mouth hung open, eyes fluttering wildly in shock.

Suddenly frightened, Kurt pressed the folder shut. "I mean, you can ... I guess, you can stay in Lima for your senior year if you want. But your grades are more than high enough to qualify, and we'll have been claimed for six months by the time we move, it's - OOF!"

He rocked back, sliding down the bedspread as Blaine all but piled on top of him.

"Blaine!" he laughed.

"I love you," Blaine managed to utter between kisses. "I'm sorry. I'm so proud of you and I know this is everything you wanted, you deserve this. Kurt, you deserve this," he insisted, sitting back up straight. "I knew you'd have to go, and I knew it was going to hurt if you did but this is- it's *everything*."

"You thought I was leaving you behind?" Kurt asked, shocked.

Blaine smiled sadly. "It would've been okay. This wasn't supposed to happen. I wasn't supposed to happen to you, and you've wanted New York for..." He ducked his head. "It would've been okay."

"No." Kurt pushed up against him, dropping the folder over the edge of the bed. "No, it wouldn't be. You have to - please - you have to know," he begged softly, climbing into Blaine's lap and cradling his head. "You're mine. You come with me, where I go. We go. You're *mine*."

Blaine shivered underneath him, hands fisting at his tank top. "*Kurt*."

"Shh," he whispered, pressing light kisses over Blaine's face before he tipped his chin up in both hands, sliding their mouths together.

The kiss was hard, needy and pushing into Blaine's mouth. Kurt kept his head still with both hands, claiming him in rough drags of teeth and tongue. It was a demand, a promise, an instruction; *you are mine. You belong to me.*

Blaine whimpered against him, hands clinging tight to the smooth skin of his hips, holding on and taking everything he was given. Kurt rocked forward on Blaine's thighs, hands dropping to capture his wrists and bring them up between their bodies. He pulled away long enough to press a kiss to the inside of Blaine's bracelet, dragging his bruised lips over sensitive skin.

"Kurt."

"Hold me," Kurt instructed desperately, letting go of his hands. "Touch me."

Blaine's breaths were short and sharp, his eyes heavy lidded and dark with arousal. "Yes."

Kurt reached back behind himself, guiding Blaine's hands over his body blindly. He tipped forward, rocking harder into Blaine's lap, making their hips slide together as he settled Blaine's palms at the base of his spine, guiding them under the elastic of his pyjamas and over the high curve of his ass.

"Kurt?"

He smiled, pressing his weight down and revelling in the moan that he earned, nipping at Blaine's lip gently.

Calm and in control, he fixed Blaine with determined eyes. "Fuck me."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Blaine moaned softly at the command when it struck him, mouth falling open around the sound.

Rocking his hips, Kurt guided Blaine's hands further down, and squeezed them where they met the crease above his thighs, showing Blaine how to touch him the way he needed.

He'd never given a sexual command before, not like this. They'd taken it slowly and carefully until now, content to explore and discover, but now there was a rising ache inside of him that needed to be filled.

"Blaine," he whispered.

"Yes," Blaine managed to reply through stunted breaths, rough fingers squeezing and cupping at muscle, shifting in time with the roll of their bodies together and the ebb and flow of friction that left him dizzy with need.

"Fuck me," Kurt repeated, lifting his hands and sliding them over Blaine's smooth shoulders.

"Yes, oh god, *please*," he uttered as he mouthed along Kurt's collarbone, hips rising with the rhythm.

Their movement subsided as Kurt rose on his knees, and the weight of Blaine's hands dragged his pants down at the sides as he shifted. He collected the box of condoms and bottle of lube quickly from his top drawer before he settled back down and dropped them both on the bed. Blaine's hands were still clinging to the curves of him, warm and rough, thumbs dragging over his skin intermittently inside his low-slung pyjamas.

He'd bought the condoms at a drugstore the week before when the act of caring for Blaine each night had crept into his dreams and left him aching for the next step, for more touch, more taste, more of everything. A part of him had wondered if they'd even need them; they'd been content with their sex as it was, so far. But now he knew the only thing that mattered was that the part of him that belonged to Blaine, just as surely as Blaine belonged to him, needed to get closer.

Ducking to nip at Blaine's mouth again, he brushed long fingers over his cheek, locking their eyes.

"Take off my shirt," he commanded gently, gaze flicking down to the swollen pink of Blaine's mouth.

With a nod, Blaine withdrew his hands, pushing along the smooth skin of Kurt's spine to drag his tank top up and pull it over his head. He threw it aside quickly and pressed slow, wet kisses to the exposed lines of Kurt's chest, flicking his tongue over each nipple in turn and clinging tightly to his sides.

Smiling, Kurt closed his eyes and rocked on his knees while Blaine's attentions swayed them both. He sank into the embrace as Blaine coiled around him bodily, both hands exploring in patterns over muscle and bone.

Kurt tipped his head back and let himself enjoy the sensation of Blaine's hands and lips dragging over his skin. His breath was steady and slow, riding on the even rise and fall of his shoulders as heat flooded his body from head to toe.

As he opened his eyes he pressed long fingers through Blaine's hair, cradling his head to his chest gently. He could feel the hot rush of Blaine's breath, the tiny noises that vibrated in his throat, all of it building and flooding his senses.

"Kurt," Blaine moaned softly, hands dropping to squeeze at the curve of his ass and draw him closer. "I want you - so badly."

Kurt settled, spreading his knees wider and sliding into Blaine's lap. Blaine was hard, pressed hot and firm against his thigh through their pyjamas, and the sudden awareness of it left Kurt choking off a desperate sound. Suddenly everything seemed so much more real. The heat pooling in his belly left him with a nervous and excited ache, all the more intense for the awareness that he could have *this*, that he would feel Blaine inside of him.

With shaking fingers he reached out for the lube bottle, flicking the cap and finding Blaine's hand with his own to pull it up between their bodies.

Blaine's head lifted, and he watched as Kurt tipped the liquid onto his fingers, spreading it smoothly down the length of them.

"Kurt?"

"Gently," Kurt instructed, capping the bottle shut and dropping it back on the bed. "I want you to, this time," he said. "I want to try - all of it. Feel everything. All of you."

They rushed together for a desperate kiss, teeth clacking and hands scrambling for purchase as Blaine rocked back and his shoulders thumped into the headboard. His strong arm curled around Kurt's waist to hold him in place, and Kurt tilted his hips back, gasping at the flare of friction as their cocks dragged against each other through fabric.

Panting softly, Blaine tugged at the band of Kurt's pyjamas with his dry hand, guiding them down to the top of his thighs.

Kurt could feel Blaine's heart racing, and dipped to press their foreheads together, brushing over Blaine's lips with his own.

"Slowly," he instructed. "One at a time. Nobody's ever... I've never done this."

"I have," Blaine breathed. "On... myself."

A smile curled at the edge of Kurt's mouth. "You enjoyed it?"

Blaine nodded quickly, wetting his lips and staring up from beneath the fan of long, dark lashes. "When I... imagined it was you."

Stifling a moan, Kurt tipped his head to kiss his Sub deeply, rolling their tongues together and enjoying the sharp hiss of breath Blaine drew through his nose. He could still feel the thick length of his cock even through the fabric of their pyjamas, and the sensation only made the steady throb inside of him that much worse.

When he felt the cool moisture brush between his cheeks, Kurt broke away from the kiss and closed his eyes, hips kicking back against Blaine's fingers. They moved torturously slowly, slipping over sensitive skin and rubbing at the tight ring of him in soft drags, building slowly, growing rougher with each press until the first slipped inside and he cried out in a soft, aborted sound of pleasure.

"Ohh," he breathed, bracing himself on the headboard as Blaine moved deeper.

Kurt could hear his own ragged breaths on the air as Blaine's mouth found the pale column of his neck and brushed over it in light, soft kisses. His finger slipped in and out to a slow, smooth rhythm, teasing at the tight ring of muscle and slipping past it again, buried in the heat of Kurt's body.

Blaine was inside of him; he could feel it in his blood, like a roar of sound suddenly silenced to perfect calm. *This is what we are.*

"More," he commanded between breaths, and let out a sharp noise as a second finger joined the first, slow and steady. "Oh god."

"Too- too much?" Blaine asked, eyes suddenly wide.

"No, no," Kurt answered quickly, kissing at the side of his head and finding a gentle motion with his hips in time with Blaine's hand. "You feel so good."

Blaine shivered bodily with the praise, burying his face in Kurt's shoulder and pressing his fingers in deeper,

drawing out the stretch and spread each time. When he added a third, Kurt moaned, hips rolling gently and fucking back onto Blaine's hand.

It was more than he'd imagined it could be; the weight and the drag of Blaine's fingers alone was almost too much. He forced himself to control the fluttering build-up in his spine, to ignore the painful strain of his cock, hard and leaking between their bodies. He wanted this to last, he wanted Blaine to feel all of it, just like he was.

His eyes opened wide when he realised Blaine was still wrapped tightly around him, fingers sliding knuckle deep and mouth fluttering over his neck and collarbone, worshipping Kurt's body with every inch of his own.

It was pure and endless, the love of a Sub who needed to give all of himself, bleeding from Blaine's touch right into his skin. He could feel it like a calm buzz, settling in his chest; the way Blaine wanted him and wanted to please him in equal measure.

No, Kurt thought. *This can't just be about me. I want you to feel it.*

When the thought came to him, he glanced sideways to his wardrobe and the row of scarves hanging neatly from their hooks.

He tugged gently at Blaine's curls, drawing his head back and forcing him to meet his eyes. Blaine's fingers slipped away from him, and his body squeezed down instinctively, startled at the change in sensation.

They were both panting and trembling lightly, staring at each other and still holding on.

"I need you to feel this too."

"I am," Blaine said, chasing his mouth for a kiss.

Kurt pulled back.

"No, you feel - you feel *me*," Kurt said. "You're doing this for me."

He eyed Blaine carefully, swallowing against the dryness of his mouth from panting too heavily for too long. "Do you trust me?"

"Of course."

Rising up on his knees, Kurt climbed off of Blaine's lap carefully, sliding from the bed and onto his feet.

"Take off your clothes," he commanded, pushing his own pyjamas down over his thighs and letting them pool at his feet before he turned to the wardrobe. He could feel the strange, slick sensation inside from where Blaine had stretched him, smooth and unfamiliar; the hollow ache where Blaine's fingers were.

At the thought he felt a thrill ride up his spine. *The ache where Blaine belongs.*

He rummaged around quickly, and turned to find Blaine naked and lying on his side, staring at him. His eyes were dark and lustful, and they swept up and down his body slowly as he drank in the sight.

A smile curled at the edge of Kurt's lips, and he wrapped the silk scarves he'd gathered carefully around his fist as he took short, teasing steps back over to the bed.

Blaine was too distracted by Kurt's body to notice the flash of red and blue, the bright silk that he dropped on the pillow as he moved on hands and knees over the bed, pressing the flat of his palm to Blaine's chest.

"Back," he instructed. "Lie down."

Blaine lay back immediately at the command, eyes still bright and fixed as his shoulders came to rest on the pillows, head tilted forward against the headboard. Kurt's gaze dragged down to his lap.

Blaine's cock was dark and straining, and it curved up over his belly, leaking at the tip. Kurt's mouth watered at the sight, at the memory of how Blaine tasted, how he'd felt heavy on his tongue.

He sank down, fluttering quick kisses down Blaine's chest and earning himself a surprised, breathy laugh from above followed by a sharp gasp as he licked at the head. With a smirk, he reached out and gathered the scarves before he caught Blaine's wrist.

"This is for you," Kurt said, pressing another kiss to his chest before he stretched Blaine's arm to one side of the headboard, looping the scarf around his wrist and the solid bar at the end.

Blaine's breath hitched, but he lay still and watched as Kurt tied his arm in place, and moved on to the next.

Kurt pulled the second knot taut with both hands before he shifted slowly back on his knees, reaching out to cup Blaine's face.

"How does it feel?" he asked softly.

"Oh - *god*," Blaine managed to get out, pressing his cheek into Kurt's palm and closing his eyes.

"Does it feel good?"

"Yes," Blaine uttered between rough breaths. "Oh my god, yes."

Kurt smiled, sliding his leg over Blaine's thighs to straddle him again.

He'd read enough to know that for most Subs, being bound was just another form of care and pleasure. Just like having their Dom's weight on top of them, everything became more intense and more pleasurable when they were spread open, exposed, and loved while bound.

"I want you to feel everything," Kurt said. "But this time, the first time, it can't be about wanting to please me. I know you do--"

Blaine whimpered softly in protest.

"I know you do, so badly," Kurt kissed him quickly, pushing fingers through his hair, "but I need us to be... us. Together. Equally. We own each other," he said. "I want you to feel this. I want you inside me."

Blaine's hips bucked beneath him involuntarily, and he grunted softly around ragged breaths. "*Kurt*."

"Shh," he whispered, resting his weight on Blaine's thighs. "I've got you."

At the sudden rush of skin on skin a shiver rippled through them both, and Blaine's hands strained against the scarves.

"You're so beautiful, baby," Kurt said, pressing his lips into Blaine's hair as he rocked gently forward. "Let me."

He fumbled on the bed for the condoms, retrieving one and tearing the packet with his teeth. His hands were steady as he rolled it down Blaine's length, curling long fingers around the base and sliding his fist up and down gently. After the first sweep Blaine thrust up into his hand, and Kurt watched breathlessly as Blaine fell apart beneath him, muscles flashing with the pleasure and the strain.

Kurt followed carefully with the lube, slicking the length of him with smooth strokes, growing slowly firmer as he rose up on his knees and found Blaine's mouth again.

Blaine's fingers flexed in the air helplessly as Kurt hovered over him, tugging his hips down the bedspread. Kurt shifted on his knees, finding his balance and sliding a hand behind himself to curl around Blaine's cock again and stroke it firmly. Blaine was pulsing in his hand, hard and warm as Kurt lifted his hips, guiding their bodies together and feeling the blunt pressure of Blaine dragging over his still-slick entrance. His mouth fell open, head kicking

back at the sudden hot flash of sensation before he lowered himself down, and Blaine slowly pressed inside.

Kurt gasped, his mouth wide and shaking around a word that never came, eyes squeezed tightly shut as he sank further and further. The burn and the incredible, body-shaking stretch of him was somehow too much and not enough, and he fought the urge to simply take everything; to have Blaine buried inside, complete and full and everything he'd never known he always needed.

He kept his pace, sliding down slowly and letting out soft, breathy notes of ecstasy as Blaine filled him. When their thighs met, Kurt shifted his weight, drawing his hips forward and ignoring the wet slip of his own cock where it bumped against his belly.

Sweat damp and panting, he bowed his body forward as far as he could without shifting his hips, brushing fingers over Blaine's cheeks and searching his face. "Open your eyes."

Blaine's lips were flushed and parted, his face drawn tight as he let out tiny staccato bursts of air. After a moment, his eyes shot open, pupils blown wide and glassy.

"You're so beautiful," Kurt breathed, fisting a handful of his hair. "You feel so good, baby."

"*Kurt*," Blaine gasped, his body shaking.

Kurt rocked his hips slowly, feeling the slip and drag of Blaine inside like a gunshot up his spine. The slow pull and press left him soundless, his head tipped back and hips canting desperately, spurred on by Blaine's broken and ecstatic moans.

Dropping a hand to stroke himself, Kurt kept a steady, building rhythm, fucking himself relentlessly on Blaine's cock and revelling in the body-wide bliss of being so completely and utterly full.

"Kurt," Blaine babbled, head rolling side to side and hips jerking up out of his control. "Oh god, you're so tight, Kurt - please. I... I need- I'm close."

Not yet.

Kurt shifted to change the angle, rocking harder and grunting in shock at the sudden body-wide surge of ecstasy that struck him with every drop of his hips. His hands fell back to brace on Blaine's thighs as he lost himself to the rhythm, pumping his hips faster and crying out with every sharp slap of skin on skin.

Blaine moaned helplessly, arms straining against his bonds as Kurt rode him into the mattress.

"*Fuck*. Kurt. Oh my god."

A high, keening sound fell away from Kurt, and he captured his lower lip with his teeth, letting his head roll back as Blaine filled him again and again in perfect succession.

"Kurt," Blaine whimpered. "I need to touch you. *Please*."

Slowing down, Kurt arched forward, keeping a slow and steady roll and sliding his fingers through Blaine's hair. "You're mine," he said, eyes flashing in the yellow lamplight. "You belong to me."

"Yes," Blaine gasped out.

Kurt dropped himself into the curve of Blaine's hips, burying him deep inside and holding him there. It only took a moment for Blaine to thrash against him, hips bucking them both up off the mattress, but Kurt gripped both thighs with his hands, keeping their bodies locked tightly together.

Blaine moaned, head tipping back violently into the pillows. "Yes, oh god, *Kurt*."

Kurt rode out another sharp thrust and tremor, fingers digging into Blaine's thighs. He drew his hips tight,

squeezing down over and over around the thick pressure of Blaine's cock inside of him as the warning flare of his orgasm rushed over his skin in a wave of heat.

"Kurt!" Blaine cried.

Kurt let his head roll forward, and met Blaine's eyes. "Come for me."

With a long, keening sound, Blaine thrashed beneath him again, body arching up off the bed and carrying Kurt's weight with it as he came hard, voice bleeding from tones to fractured words that sounded like Kurt's name.

Kurt jolted forward, bracing on the headboard and fisting his cock desperately as the heat tore up his spine. He shuddered as his orgasm rocketed through his body, breaking away from him in a rapid gunfire round of breaths as he came in stripes across his fist and Blaine's belly.

It was a moment before he drifted back to himself, still panting and trembling softly. His hands had fallen to rest on Blaine's stomach, shoulders slumped forward and eyes blinking slowly, trying to focus.

"Kurt, please," Blaine mumbled. The bed frame creaked as his wrists tugged weakly on the scarves.

Kurt swallowed, tipping forward and sucking in a sharp breath at the slip of Blaine's cock still inside of him.

"I need to touch you," Blaine managed with a choked voice, mouth trembling around the words. "I have to - touch you. Please."

With shaky hands, Kurt leaned slowly to either side, picking at his knots and freeing Blaine's hands.

They were on him in an instant, sliding over his waist and clinging to his hips as Blaine lifted himself slowly, knees drawing up against Kurt's back.

Kurt let out a high, soft sound as his body slid into the curve of Blaine's where it rose all around him, and Blaine pulled out slowly, slipping away and leaving Kurt flinching.

The unfamiliar emptiness dulled to an ache as Blaine's arms coiled around his waist, drawing their bodies flush together. He whined softly, curling both arms over Blaine's shoulders and letting himself be treasured, be held tight and tasted in languid, sleepy drags of lips and tongue. Blaine kissed him messily, wet and hot and deep as his hands dragged all over Kurt's body, re-learning the planes of his shoulder blades and the curves of his bones.

Each time Kurt pulled back to see his face, to make sure this was real, he found himself drawn in again, sliding their mouths together, desperate not to let go. He kissed Blaine over and over, slowly and softly, then roughly and forcefully, taking his time and learning him from every angle, fingers curled at the base of his neck, over his jaw, in his hair.

He drew back on a ragged breath the last time, feeling like he was sinking, utterly satisfied and ready to lose himself in the bed frame of Blaine's body all around him.

"I love you," Blaine said, smiling.

It was a gentle smile, lazy and half-awake, and it barely curled the corners of his mouth. But it still reached his eyes.

Kurt smiled in reply, tilting Blaine's jaw up with his fingertips and dropping to seal his lips over the hollow star on his neck, sucking skin into his mouth gently.

Blaine let out a soft, sweet sound of contentment, rolling back and carrying Kurt with him until they rested on the mattress.

"I love you," Kurt answered at last, propping up on both hands to gaze at him.

Blaine's hands slid down his spine, settling at the small of his back.

With his legs still spread on either side of Blaine's body and a warm, perfect weight settling deep in his hips in the wake of his orgasm, Kurt wondered how anybody could feel anything but bliss like this.

"Kiss me," Blaine said suddenly, eyes flashing.

Kurt hummed softly at the words, brushing curls away from his face. "Is that a command?"

"It is," he answered, lips parting into a soft, adoring smile. "Kiss me till I can't breathe without you."

Settling himself down gently on Blaine's chest, Kurt brushed their noses together in a soft sweep, pressing a chaste kiss over his mouth. "Yes," he said.

He caught the hitch of Blaine's breath from the pressure of his weight, and smiled.

"Anything you want."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Kurt didn't know why he was so nervous when Tuesday morning came.

He hadn't been nervous for his own Glee audition, all those years ago. He'd climbed up onto the stage at the old school auditorium and sang with an air of confidence that betrayed who he really was at the time; scared, shy, and trapped inside himself.

But not when he sang. Never when he sang.

Still, he'd been calm through every performance, even Nationals the year before. Excited and elated, yes, but never nervous.

It wasn't until Blaine stepped out of the bathroom, bright-eyed and smiling, dressed in a beautiful combination of black and red with a striped bow tie around his neck that Kurt realised the reason why.

This wasn't something he could control.

This was Blaine stepping out of his comfort zone and into something huge and new and frightening for him. Even though Kurt knew he would be there waiting at the bottom, ready to catch him if he needed it, it wasn't what he wanted. He wanted to be the one at the top holding on, keeping him from falling at all.

He smiled softly, raking his eyes over Blaine's body and appreciating the tight cut of the shirt and the bright scarlet of the highwaters he'd paired with it.

Blaine splayed both hands. "Well?"

Reaching out, Kurt brushed his fingers over the knot, knuckles grazing against the warm skin of Blaine's throat. "I love the bow tie."

Blaine grinned.

"Are you ready?" Kurt asked.

He nodded gently, eyes dipping and rising again. "I really am."

Kurt beamed at him, sliding both arms around his waist and pressing a quick kiss to his lips. "Let's go."

The long drag of another school day was only lessened by the in-between moments; the weight of Blaine's hand in his in the hallway, the feeling of him tucked against his side at their lunch table. The girls had stopped to compliment Blaine's new wardrobe, and he lit up with delight at every word of praise, thanking them kindly. Kurt quietly enjoyed the contentment spreading in his chest at the sight of Blaine so at ease in his own skin, finally feeling like he could be who he was without any fear.

By the time Glee came around, Blaine was buzzing with a nervous energy, unable to stay still even when Kurt held on to his waist and tried to soothe him.

"This is a bad idea."

"You're amazing," Kurt told him, stroking his sides. "They're going to love you."

"What if they don't-?"

"They will."

"But what if I-?"

"You won't."

"But--"

"*Blaine.*"

His shoulders slumped as he laughed softly, bowing his head.

"You love to sing, Blaine," Kurt breathed. "It's who you are."

Blaine looked up at him, eyes hesitant and nervous.

Kurt smiled. "Show them."

He took his seat quietly while Blaine was introduced, folding his legs and settling his hands in his lap, trying not to fidget. When the song began, he closed his eyes, breathing deeply and focusing on any sense of calm he could draw from, hoping Blaine could feel it somehow.

The song Blaine had chosen was perfect; but then, Kurt knew it would be. Blaine felt music; he drew it up from somewhere deep inside of him, and let it fill him up as he performed.

Each morning in the car, Kurt had listened to his voice get stronger and more comfortable. He'd heard him hum along to melodies while he set the table or dried the dishes at night and spent so long falling asleep to the sound of that voice trickling over him, sinking into his dreams.

Kurt had expected the round of enthusiastic applause, even the few cheers and words of encouragement that went up from his peers, but judging by the look on his face as he finished his song, Blaine hadn't. He was utterly stunned and speechless as he looked around the room at the small sea of faces grinning back at him.

When Blaine settled into the seat beside him, shaking lightly but smiling, Kurt reached out and took his hand.

"I told you," he whispered, and Blaine curled to hide his face in Kurt's shoulder briefly, overwhelmed.

Ignoring Rachel's rush to the floor in front of them and her subsequent speech about the perfect timing of a male voice that could keep up with her, Kurt chose instead to focus on Blaine's racing heartbeat and the tremor that still shook his hands. He slipped an arm around his waist, stroking gently at the small of his back with his thumb and holding tight to a warm, shaky hand in his own.

The rest of the meeting was simply garbled sounds, and Schuester's voice drowned out amidst the warm hum of Blaine's proximity, settling in his skin. He could feel the adrenaline, the shaky surprise and awe that still clung tight to Blaine's chest, buried underneath his attempt at a calm exterior. Kurt kept his hands on Blaine's body, subtle but firm, stroking and holding tight as the other songs dragged on and time slipped away.

When the meeting ended and the group filed out, Kurt scooped up their bags and held out his hand for Blaine, just like he'd always done.

He couldn't keep the smile from his face as they reached the hallway, interlocked hands swinging lightly between them while they wandered toward the parking lot.

"I've told you you were amazing, right?"

Blaine chuckled. "A dozen times, at least," he said.

Kurt swayed as they walked. "It bears repeating. Seriously, Blaine, this - all of this - could open up so much for you. And soon, there's New York."

"New York," Blaine echoed with mock gravity.

"I know you'll still be finishing high school, but you'll already be there, when you do. There's so *much* there, and it's all going to be right at your feet," he insisted. "When you're ready."

"It's going to be..." Blaine seized and let go of a long breath. "*Wonderful.*"

Kurt cast a sideways glance in his direction, considering for a moment. "Do you think you'll miss Ohio?"

Blaine's laugh was soft and breathy, and his gaze fell to the floor. He shook his head. "Not even a little."

It sounded so clean cut and simple, Kurt had to wonder. The prickle of doubt in the back of his mind crept up again.

Blaine seemed to sense it, and squeezed his hand gently.

Their eyes met, and Blaine smiled as he turned and slowed to a stop, pulling Kurt towards him. "Everything I love is coming with me."

Kurt tilted his head, sliding both arms over Blaine's shoulders and fixing him with an adoring grin.

He shifted on the balls of his feet, moving in for a kiss before he suddenly froze. His eyes widened as he stared over Blaine's shoulder.

"What?" Blaine asked, turning in his arms.

Kurt swallowed, fists curling around handfuls of Blaine's shirt as a sharp warning flared in his chest.

There was a red letterman jacket hanging at the end of the hall, draped over the handle of a door that shouldn't have been closed. With a quick surveying glance, Kurt could see it wasn't just closed: it was deadlocked.

"We need to go the other way," he whispered, tugging on Blaine's shoulders and guiding him around. "Quickly."

They rushed back the way they came and rounded the corner, skidding to another stop as two more red jackets slipped into view at the other end of the hallway. This time, they were wrapped around two heavy-set jocks, ambling towards them with smirks peeling across their faces.

Kurt scrambled to keep a hold of Blaine, turning around and dragging him further down the main hallway. "Run!"

Their footfalls clattered and echoed off the scuffed school floors, and they skidded and changed direction at another flash of red down the next hall, pushing out the side doors and racing over the asphalt down to the football field.

"Kurt?!" Blaine called out frantically, two steps ahead and trying to glance over his shoulder, to reach back and find Kurt's hand.

"Run, Blaine, keep going!"

Kurt could hear them coming up behind - not fast enough, but plenty of them. His heart sank in his chest when he realised they'd come from each specific direction with such perfect timing; it couldn't have been a coincidence. It wasn't just a simple plan to find them.

They were being herded.

When he caught the small swatch of red and yellow, cut out and clear against the green of the field beyond, he struggled for breath, fighting the panic that seized his throat. They were waiting, fanning out and blocking the only way out that lead back to the parking lot past the bleachers.

Even if they broke through the line, he couldn't risk leading them. He couldn't risk Blaine.

The group ahead of them waited with toothy, vicious smiles while the rest of them closed in from behind.

Kurt could feel the burn of exhaustion in his legs, the shocks of dull pain shooting up both shins as they raced over the grass. It struck him as strange that the voice echoing in his ears in that moment wasn't his own, but Cooper's; a fleeting memory from weeks past, lingering in his mind.

That's it.

"Blaine, the bleachers!" he cried.

Blaine twisted, throwing a glance back to say he'd heard and understood.

Kurt knew they'd never catch Blaine if he lead them under the stands, the memory of Cooper's voice had told him that much.

He got away. He's fast, and small, so he's hard to catch.

"Blaine, whatever you do," Kurt called out between desperate gasps for air as their feet pounded over the dirt. "Don't stop, and don't look back!"

"KURT!"

"Keep running! Run as fast as you can!" Kurt cried, forcing as much of a command into his words as he could, watching Blaine's speed pick up as the distance between them grew.

Good boy.

"Don't look back!"

The burning pain in his lungs dimmed as he slowed down, their long run coming to its inevitable end as the pack ahead of them closed in. Blaine's quick feet let him duck under outstretched arms and a slow lunge up ahead, skipping over two steps with a clatter and crash as he dropped down the side of the framework and slipped beneath the metal ribcage of the bleachers.

Run, Kurt's head cried out, but the word didn't make it to his mouth.

His body sagged with the panting drag for air, the sharp, prickly burn in his lungs forcing up a hard and painful cough. It took him a moment to realise he was surrounded.

Eyes flicking around the circle of bodies closing in, he straightened carefully and forced his features into an unreadable calm. It was the right choice, he told himself. If they had him, they wouldn't chase Blaine. But he wouldn't give them the satisfaction of seeing his fear.

It doesn't matter now. Blaine is safe.

"We lost him," a tall red-haired boy said as he jogged back over from the bleachers with three other sheepish neanderthals in tow. "He's fucking fast."

"He'll come back," Carter said.

"He won't," Kurt insisted. "He's gone."

"But we have *you*," Carter laughed, and the others joined in briefly before he stepped inside the circle, moving towards Kurt.

"Dumpster today?" Kurt asked casually, folding his arms. "Or is there a particular Port-a-Potty you want to shove me into?"

"Oh we're way past that now, fairy boy," Carter said.

"What is your *problem* with me?" Kurt shouted, unable to keep down his rage. "I've done nothing to you!"

"You flaunt your faggy ass around this school," Carter began, jabbing a thick finger in the air at Kurt. "Put on your fairy clothes and we shouldn't have to look at that shit. You're in our town. You're in our school. And your fuck-toy took something that didn't belong to him."

"He doesn't wear the jacket," Kurt countered. "He quit your stupid swim team. He's not doing *anything* to you!"

"No, but he tricked us!" another boy piped up.

"That's right," Carter nodded. "He tricked us, he tried to be one of us. He was allowed to wear that jacket for too long, and he has to pay the penalty. But he keeps ducking out on us, see, so everybody else has had to pay for him. And that's a pretty big bill. All that time wearing our colours."

"You put Cooper in the hospital," Kurt said coldly. He searched Carter's face desperately, shoulders dropping. There had to be something human in there, somewhere. Some inkling of regret in Carter's face or in his eyes, and Kurt was determined to find it. "You could have killed him. For what? For a jacket?"

"It's pride!" Carter shouted, and the others sent up whoops of affirmation. "It's not a jacket, it's power and *dominance*, and we won't stand by and let some fucking dog Sub wear it. He stole it out from under us, and then he didn't even face up to punishment like a good dog should. He ran and hid behind you. Behind a fucking *fag*!" He spat on to the grass, and Kurt tried not to flinch away as he came closer.

"So," Carter shrugged, "his pussy Sub brother paid for his mistake. And now, you will."

Kurt saw the punch coming.

His arms were barely up in time to deflect it from his face, but the force knocked him off his feet. He landed awkwardly on the hard turf, scrambling to back away until he bumped the legs of another jock and caught a sharp kick to his side.

Ducking and curling into a ball, he gritted his teeth, hissing his breath with every blow.

Don't cry out.

A hard boot tip drove into his hip.

Blaine could hear you. Don't scream.

The kicks kept coming, and he quietly thanked his past self for the heavy, thick jacket he'd worn on a whim that morning.

A vicious boot to his ribs left him winded, and he rolled onto his hands and knees, shifting to block another foot and trying to get back up. He caught the angle of a kick to the jaw, and felt his mouth flare with pain before it went numb.

"You'll keep on paying," Carter insisted, kneeling and forcing Kurt's face up with rough, sausage-like fingers curled around his chin. "Until he comes to collect his due."

The hand slipped away just as another foot came down on his shoulder. It crunched sickeningly on impact, and the sound that broke away from him was guttural and wet with pain.

"Now, you get a choice, just like the brother did. You can pick up your phone and call your bitch dog, and get him back here. Or, you can find out what the hand of a real Dom feels like."

Kurt's eyes widened as he stared up, gaze blurred by the throb in his head and his body.

They did this to Cooper too, he realised. They tried to make him trap his own brother.

"Fuck you," Kurt spat, dribbling blood on to the grass in a weak mimic of Blaine's own act of defiance all those weeks ago.

"Suit yourself, fag," Carter growled, lifting Kurt up limply by his collar and winding up an arm to deliver another blow.

"Stop it!" a broken voice cried, and Carter dropped him back down to the dirt.

Kurt gurgled in protest when he recognised the sound.

No.

"Stop! Leave him alone, I'm here," Blaine said frantically.

Kurt couldn't see him, only a whirr of faded colours as he tried to regain his balance and get up onto his hands and knees.

"No, Blaine, RUN!" he screamed, fear and helplessness tearing through his veins.

Please, no. Oh god, no. Blaine.

"Well, what do we have here?" Carter said around a vicious smirk. "Good doggie."

"Let him go," Blaine warned, his voice dropping.

Kurt rolled onto his side, blinking up through the fading daylight. He could see red; but he wasn't sure if it was a jacket or Blaine's pants.

"B-bl- no." He spat out another mouthful of blood.

Underneath the steady current of pain seeping through his body, he could feel Blaine's fear. The same clawing feeling he'd felt last time they were here, before they were even claimed. *Back when I wasn't even supposed to feel it.*

"Blaine, run," he croaked.

The shuffling of feet through grass grew closer, and the words on the air dipped in and out from muted to clear again.

They had Blaine.

"You can't touch me," *that was Blaine's voice*, "I'm claimed. You know the law. Let him go. Stop this, *please*."

Kurt wasn't sure if everybody had gone silent, or if he'd lost his hearing. He gave a weak, startled jerk when they started speaking again.

"He's right, Carter, I don't want that on my record," another boy said.

"They won't find out!" Carter hissed.

"If a claimed Sub shows up beaten, man, they'll investigate. They have to," another voice chimed in. "We can't."

There was a quiet murmur of agreement, and Kurt strained to look up, eyes focusing on Carter's clueless face as he weighed his options.

"Fine, then," he said with a smirk, eyeing Blaine carefully. "We'll just have to make you an unclaimed Sub."

Terror shot through Kurt's body, and he pushed up off the ground with the last of his strength, unsure of whether the hollow, burning fear clawing at his throat was his, or Blaine's, or both.

Blaine was thrashing against the two boys that held him, trying to keep his arm tight to his chest as they pried it away and tore the bracelet off his wrist.

To break a claim, remove the Sub bracelet and return it to the Dominant party.

"DON'T! PLEASE!" Blaine screamed desperately as he struggled.

Kurt shuffled on the ground, swatting at the meaty hands that dragged him up and crying out at the brutal, crushing grip that found his arm, twisting it up in the air and holding it still as the bracelet was clipped over his cuff.

He waited for the pain to come, like he knew it would; the roar in his chest, the tearing down the middle of his body and his heart as the part of him that belonged to Blaine was crushed underfoot.

It never came.

Blaine sobbed quietly around a broken breath, body shaking, face glittering with tears in the dim light.

"Kurt."

His eyes flicked up, meeting Blaine's and flashing wide in an instant. Nothing happened.

Mine, he thought.

You're still mine.

Blaine didn't speak, but his mouth twitched at the edge, just the hint of a smile as his gaze dipped for a split second.

Kurt followed the instruction, glancing down to Blaine's other hand and the cell phone still alight in his palm.

He didn't come back, Kurt realised, heart thundering in his chest. *He never left.*

"Now, doggie," Carter said, voice thick with intent. "Get on your hands and knees like a good boy."

Blaine's eyes narrowed for a moment, and his muscles flexed visibly, seemingly straining against the command.

Kurt blinked numbly, confused. He couldn't feel any resistance, any real fight. Just determination and carefully guarded fear.

Blaine was faking it.

His head swam in muggy heat, and a sudden wave of nausea rose inside, riding on the pain in his shoulder. After a moment, his gaze fell back to the phone in Blaine's hand, and he swallowed against the bitter copper taste in his mouth, trying not to choke.

"Down!" Carter screeched, but Blaine put on the show of resistance still.

His eyes fell to Kurt one more time. "I'm so sorry," he mouthed.

No.

"Blaine," Kurt murmured wetly, trying to get up again only to be pinned by the weight of a boot pushing down on his spine.

"Hold him," Carter insisted, pointing to Blaine.

The two jocks on either side obeyed Carter's command, and Kurt thrashed on the ground as Blaine grunted and choked with every punch.

The pain was real and burning under Kurt's skin, and he could hear and sense every hit like an echo in his bloodstream. When Blaine's ribs broke, Kurt screamed against the ground. When Blaine fell to his knees, Kurt rolled, beating at the leg that pinned him viciously before another kick sent white lights shooting behind his eyes.

He could hear a rumble in the distance like earthly thunder, vibrating the ground against his ear and fading in the night. *Cars rolling by in the distance*, his brain offered absently.

It took a moment for his vision to clear, and when it did he realised the cars weren't far away at all. They were here. He glanced up as best he could to measure the faces of the boys above him, but nobody had heard. Nobody else was pinned to the ground.

Blaine's face was caught in Carter's grip, chin twisted between chubby fingers as Carter leaned down. "You're going to be a good doggie, and do what I say."

A sharp thrill rippled up Kurt's spine at the sound of Blaine laughing. His eyelashes fluttered rapidly as he tried to come back to himself, to understand what was happening. *Why is he laughing?*

There was a loud smack as Carter slapped Blaine's face with a hard, open palm. "-fucking laugh at me! Do as I tell you, you piss weak little fag!"

"You hit me before," Blaine said, voice clear and loud like it hadn't been till now. "Before I was claimed."

"You'll remember this one a lot longer," Carter threatened. "You'll learn your lesson if I have to beat you till every last bone in your body is broken. Now do as I say!"

Blaine spat on his shoes. "You're never going to be able to tell anybody what to do," he whispered gravely. "You're never going to lay a hand on anybody. Ever again."

His eyes flicked over to the entrance that divided the bleachers, and Carter turned in alarm, mouth falling open in shock.

Kurt squirmed on the ground, craning to see what was happening. The pressure on his back released in an instant as the jocks stumbled back in unison.

He recognised his father's shoes first as they came towards him, then his cap and jacket, followed by the dark cut of police uniforms against the grey metal of the stands as they emerged onto the field, closing in rapidly.

"Kurt!"

Dad.

He could hear the rapid crunch of his father's heavy work boots, and suddenly he was being lifted off the ground and into strong, powerful arms.

"No," Carter choked. "I - I can explain!" he insisted, facing the officers. "This is a misunderstanding!"

"My brother - the other Sub you beat? He's on the other end of this call," Blaine said, wheezing in pain and cradling his ribs as the jocks backed away. "Every word out of your mouth was recorded. And they saw you," he nodded to the police officers, "and heard you."

Kurt huffed soft breaths of air as his body flooded with relief, safe in his father's arms and watching with heavy, pain-drugged eyes as Carter was led away in cuffs. The world spun around him as the hum of voices picked up again while the officers dispersed amongst the remaining herd of jocks to take down their stories.

His hands flexed loosely in the air. "Bl- Blaine?"

"Blaine!" Burt called out desperately, head lifting up. "Where's Blaine?"

Kurt rolled his neck limply against the arm cradling his head, but his eyes were only open long enough to see Blaine's shoulders and the bright red of his pants where he lay on the ground just a few feet away. In the static rush of voices he caught the blare of a radio, and the sound of an ambulance siren.

"It's gonna be okay, kid," Burt told him gently. "He'll be okay."

"No, I need h-him-" Kurt struggled, head hanging as what little strength he had left seeped out of him too quickly. "*Blaine.*"

And then there was only darkness.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

One hundred and forty four minutes.

Kurt had counted every single one from the moment he sat down again, waiting.

When he'd awoken in the hospital emergency room, his father was already there. Burt had jolted out of his seat, faster than Kurt had ever seen him move, just to smile and take his hand and stare down at him with wet eyes and a trembling mouth.

Concussion and heavy bruising, he'd said. *You're going to be alright.*

Kurt's distinct lack of severe injuries had been nothing short of miraculous, though the bone-shaking pain in his arms and shoulders had reminded him with every gesture of each individual blow he'd deflected from his body and his organs. The heavy boots that had pummelled him mercilessly had each left their own mark.

You're lucky, the doctor had said, and Kurt had swallowed bile at the words.

Blaine was lying broken on a surgical table in the same building.

You're lucky.

He'd felt the numb prickle in his skin and his chest; the awareness of Blaine's absence, the sense that he was still there somewhere, lost in drug-induced unconsciousness as they cut parts of him away and sewed him back together.

Broken ribs. Ruptured spleen. Internal bleeding.

He'd listened as Burt explained the aftermath of what happened on the field, trying to stay focused.

Kurt's voice had been croaky, distracted, and unfamiliar to his own ears as he'd answered the police officer's questions, one after another. He'd barely remembered what he'd said afterwards.

When the officer had finally left, he'd slid down in his seat, eyes out of focus and staring at one small piece of carpet across the room. It was darker than the rest, like a stain or a hole in the weave. Like a hole in the middle of a star.

Blaine.

One hundred and forty four minutes after he'd awoken and spoken with his father, dressed himself and escaped the emergency room, after he'd discovered Blaine was out of surgery, and collapsed into a chair to wait - one hundred and forty four minutes later, he saw Blaine again.

They wheeled the bed down the corridor and into a small room with Kurt trailing close behind. He ignored the clicks and clunks as the bed was hooked up, as the machines were checked and the nurses went about their routine. His eyes were trained on Blaine's peaceful face; beautiful and so calm, like he was simply sleeping.

When they left the room, Kurt swayed on his feet, stuck standing on the one spot and staring at the steady rise and fall of Blaine's chest.

I've got the door, he heard his father say before the glass pane slid open and closed again, clicking softly.

He forced his feet to move, one small shuffling step after another until he made it to the bedside and slid a knee onto the thin hospital mattress. He climbed gingerly over the metal bracket and lowered himself onto his hip, stretching out carefully and shifting in tiny motions to fit his body to Blaine's side.

"I'm here," he whispered. "I'm right here. You're okay. I'm here."

Blaine expressionless features didn't move, and Kurt lifted his hand to brush long fingers over his face.

"I'm here."

He leaned down to press a soft, careful kiss to Blaine's dry lips, mouthing at them slowly and wondering at the sudden rush of wet warmth over his own mouth. It took him a moment to realise he was crying.

"I'm here."

Kurt could hear himself saying the same words over and over again, but he knew he couldn't stop.

"They did a splenectomy," he explained in hushed tones, dropping his fingers to adjust the collar of Blaine's gown, to keep it clear of his throat and comfortable.

"You're down one spleen." He laughed wetly, brushing fingers through Blaine's hair. "You'll heal, but you're going to have a scar. But we can find some minimising products to help it fade faster. I'm positive Dior has something. But you're okay, that's," he patted Blaine's chest gently on the right-hand side, studying his face, "that's what's important, you're okay, and I'm here."

There was no reply.

Kurt smiled around his tears, wiping his face quickly with the back of his hand. "I mean, you're not going anywhere. You're coming with me. To New York. So you've got to wake up, so we can..."

It took him a moment to school his breathing back down to a calm and even pace, and he closed his eyes, thumbing gently over Blaine's collarbone. He lowered himself down slowly, tucking his face against the side of Blaine's neck and nuzzling there, feeling suddenly so much more like a frightened child than he had in a long time.

His free hand hovered over the expanse of Blaine's chest, unsure of where to rest it, terrified of causing pain. After a moment of shaky indecision, he let his hand drop between their bodies and found Blaine's fingers, pushing his own between them.

"I'm here," he whispered again, playing with Blaine's hand absently, running fingertips over his knuckles and thumbing at soft skin.

"They arrested Carter, and stripped his cuff," he said. "The others got away with warnings, some got arrested too. But everybody already knows what he did. You were right."

He waited for a sound of acknowledgement, but there was none.

"He's never going to touch anybody ever again," Kurt finished, his voice barely audible. "So you can wake up."

The quiet pressed in, leaving him with only the soft beep and hum of the machines playing over the murmur of absent voices in the corridor for company.

"I'm here. I love you," he insisted, closing his eyes, "and I'm here."

He heard the door slide open, but didn't look up. He knew it was the doctor; he could hear his father's voice, arguing quietly. He only caught a handful of words, too busy breathing in the scent of Blaine and gently rubbing his cheek against the crook of his neck.

"-can't be on the bed like that."

"That's his Sub, you're not moving him, he-"

Kurt swallowed roughly, trying to tune them out. He squeezed Blaine's hand, ignoring the cold press of the metal bed frame against his calves.

*"Are you gonna stand there and tell me that if that was your Sub, your **wife**, that there's a force on god's green earth that could tear you out of that bed?"*

He heard the door click shut moments later, and opened his eyes again.

"I hate you," he whispered, blinking slowly. "I hate you for coming back. I told you to keep running, but you never listen. You're supposed to do what I tell you to, Blaine. But you don't."

Silence.

"I don't like circles," Kurt confessed around a choked-off sob. "But I keep seeing them. Everywhere. In the waiting room, in the ugly paintings they have on the walls."

When he let go of Blaine's hand, he wet his lips carefully and slid his fingers under the collar of Blaine's gown, gliding them lightly over his chest to settle on his heart. He waited in the quiet, trying to feel the beat under his palm.

Griefcircle, his brain offered absently. The old lesson came surging back into the front of his mind, droning in the disconnected monotone of their old D/s Ed teacher's voice.

When a claimed pair is separated by death the remaining party will, in cases of devastating loss, often choose of their own volition to be branded with a circle over their star. It means they seek no future claim. It means they will never love again.

"I don't like circles," Kurt murmured, sweeping his thumb over skin in a shaky caress. "But I would wear one for you."

He felt Blaine's chest swell and dip under his hand, the same steady rhythm as always.

"Don't give me a circle, Blaine."

Kurt didn't know how long he'd been lying on the bed, drifting in and out of reality, before he spoke again.

"When you wake up, we're going home. And you're not allowed back here, ever again," Kurt insisted firmly. "I c-command it. I..."

He choked on his words as he buried his face against Blaine's throat, sobbing quietly.

"I'm *here*," he whined in a shaky voice. "*Wake up.*"

He didn't know if it was morning or night, only that there was no light outside. He didn't know how long he cried into Blaine's shoulder before he fell asleep.

When he woke again, it was to the sound of shuffling footsteps and plastic tapping, the beep of a machine and a firm hand lifting him back.

"Hmm?"

"Shh, it's okay."

"No," he swatted at the hand that had pulled at his shoulder, but it was gone. *Did that happen?*

"He needs me," Kurt mumbled, trying to open his eyes. His mind sputtered into consciousness, sleep-clogged and left wondering what was actually going on.

There was a soft sound of amusement, and the shoulder beneath him moved.

His eyes shot open.

"I do."

Kurt propped himself up, staring.

"Need you," Blaine croaked, smiling. "Morning."

Lips parting around shallow breaths, Kurt blinked rapidly at him.

"Sorry about the nurse, she just had to check on me," Blaine said, eyelids dipping and lifting slowly. "Go back to sleep. It's cold."

The hand that had touched his shoulder was the nurse, he realised. The noises, the machines, all from the nurse's checks. Kurt glanced around the empty room before his eyes fell on Blaine again. "You're awake."

"I'm here," Blaine confirmed with a gravelly voice, and settled back into his pillows as Kurt covered his mouth with a slow, desperate kiss.

"*Blaine*," Kurt said breathlessly, petting at his hair and trying to stay balanced on his side, trying to keep his tears behind his eyes.

"You're not hurt?" Blaine whispered. "You're okay?"

"I'm fine," Kurt gushed. "Just a concussion. Some bruises. I'm fine, I'm here. You're- how do you feel?"

"Sore." Blaine laughed briefly before he coughed, wincing.

"I'll fix it, I'll make it better," Kurt said in a rush, hand hovering over Blaine's chest and finally settling against his heart again.

Fixing him with heavy-lidded eyes, Blaine smiled dopily. "You always do."

Kurt stared at him for as long as he could, drinking in the dark coffee of his eyes and the soft curve of his mouth, the way his eyelashes fanned against his cheeks with every sleepy dip and rise. He wanted to tell Blaine how beautiful he was, even now, even in this ugly place. He wanted to lie on top of him, bring him calm and quiet release, prove that he could make him feel better. But he couldn't.

His eyes trailed down to the thick cuff on his own wrist, and he shifted quickly, unclipping the bracelet that had been forced over it.

"Here," he said, reaching out for Blaine's hand and sliding the cool metal over skin.

"Wh- what happened?" Blaine asked numbly. "I thought that when he took it... I was so scared."

"It doesn't work that way," Kurt insisted, echoing his father's explanation. Burt had soothed him when he'd woken in the ER, frantic and clawing at his wrist. "We were never broken."

"How?"

"It's like," Kurt swallowed against a dry, hot throat, "if a stranger signed someone else's divorce papers. It doesn't mean anything," he said, thumbing over the metal. "We have to *want* to break it, for it to matter. For taking this off to change anything. The cuff, the... they're just visual cues, for other people to see that you're mine. We get it in our heads that it represents the claim and your body reacts to wearing it like that's what it is. But it's just a bracelet."

Blaine's eyes were wet as his head rolled against the pillow, and he smiled weakly up at Kurt's face as he explained.

"I was always yours," Kurt said. "You were always mine."

"Yours," Blaine echoed softly, eyelids drooping.

Kurt shifted, lowering himself down carefully to fit along Blaine's side again and rest his head on the pillow. He pressed his forehead into Blaine's hair, nuzzling softly at his ear.

"Shh, sleep," he whispered. "We're together now."

They drifted in and out of consciousness, waking with each nurse and doctor's visit and learning what they could of Blaine's recovery before the day darkened to night again.

Family came and went as the week rolled by; Burt and Carole, Cooper and Jo, friends from the Glee club. When Blaine was discharged Kurt helped him into his clothes, smoothing the creased lines of his shirt and sliding on his jacket.

As days at home turned into weeks and bruises faded, Kurt lay Blaine's body out on their bed every night, covering him lightly at first and then firmer as angry red scars turned pink. He kissed the marks he found, wishing them away under his lips and fingertips, holding tight and silently promising to always prove how much he needed the body beneath his.

Blaine hadn't gone back to school, but seemed content to do his classwork at home, curled in a seat by the window most days. He didn't speak as often anymore, Kurt had noticed, and his eyes glossed over when anybody else touched him.

PTSD, Burt said one day. Like it was as simple as that. *Kurt, he's been hospitalised twice. His brother was nearly killed. It's gonna take time.*

There was an ache in Kurt's heart and his ribcage, building as the days went by, longing for Blaine's old smile and the sound of his voice singing softly in the car, the bright lights in his eyes as they drove.

"I have to find something, anything," Kurt told his family one day over breakfast, sipping his coffee and letting his gaze linger, out of focus, on the bench.

"He's recovering, sweetheart," Carole said with a pat to the shoulder. "It's going to take time."

He remembered Blaine's own admission so long ago in the Lima Bean, the first time they'd sat over coffee together. *Doubt is in us like water. Feed it and we drown.*

Doubt had been beaten into Blaine three times now, so hard his bones had broken.

"He's drowning," Kurt mumbled.

Burt and Carole exchanged a quick glance before Burt turned the page of his paper.

Kurt stiffened with realisation, eyes flicking back and forth. He emptied his mug quickly and rinsed it, dropping it carelessly by the sink.

"What is it?" Burt asked.

"I have an idea," he called back as he hurried out of the kitchen, climbing the stairs two at a time.

Inside their bedroom, Blaine was curled on his side under the blankets, still lingering in the remnants of his sleep the night before.

"Up," Kurt commanded, moving to the wardrobe.

Blaine shifted into a sitting position, blinking at him drowsily. "Don't you have school?"

"Are you coming?"

Blaine looked down, suddenly seeming fascinated by the bedspread.

"Then no, I don't have school. Not today," Kurt continued, flicking through Blaine's clothes to pull out a pair of jeans and a long-sleeve shirt. "Get dressed. We're going out."

"Not today, I-"

"Blaine," Kurt cut him off, voice strong and thick with intent. "Get up. Now. Get dressed."

Blaine met his gaze for a moment, but his features were unreadable. After a long pause, he pushed off the quilt and climbed out of bed, reaching out for the clothes Kurt had gathered for him.

The drive was quiet, but Kurt barely noticed; he'd grown used to Blaine's silence and the undertow of unspoken discomfort as the weeks had gone by. When he pulled into the lot, Kurt cut the engine and gathered his bag, slinging it over his shoulder as he climbed out of the Navigator.

Kurt reached behind himself as he took the first few steps towards the gate, just like he'd always done when they got out of the car together. His hand hovered, too empty in the air for a moment too long, and he felt a strange and unfamiliar pain rise in his chest.

It faded in an instant when Blaine's fingers slid into his palm.

It was raining softly when he paid their entry fee. Blaine stayed guarded, kept his arm wrapped around himself and his other hand in Kurt's while he was led into the open area of the North Lima pool.

"I can't," he said softly when they came to a stop.

"It's been five weeks," Kurt countered, breathing in the light scent of chlorine and the damp, sweet grass under rain. "I did the research when you came home from the hospital. Four weeks is long enough to swim again, after a splenectomy. You need this."

"I can't," Blaine repeated, his eyes dull and dark.

Kurt sighed, measuring him carefully. He dropped his bag on the side stands, glancing around to ensure they were alone before he turned back to Blaine and caught the hem of his shirt, pulling it up.

Blaine's fingers came up to tangle in his and halt them. "Kurt, don't-"

"Let go," Kurt instructed evenly, and Blaine's hands dropped.

Kurt drew the shirt up to Blaine's collar, holding it bunched in one hand as he splayed the other over the bright pink scar.

Blaine's eyes fell shut at the touch.

"I love you," Kurt said, peeling off Blaine's shirt completely and tucking it beside his bag. "But I'm losing you. Because I've been too scared to be your Dom, too scared to be firm. For the last month, I've been so afraid of... *everything*. Blaine, this isn't us."

"I know," Blaine whispered. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry," Kurt insisted, dropping back onto the seat and pulling Blaine closer to stand between his spread knees. "Be *here*."

He moved his hands up Blaine's chest, caressing him slowly.

"We're in public, Kurt, we can't," Blaine said worriedly, glancing around.

"We can," Kurt argued. "The pool is freshly cleaned, there's no staff on duty but the two out in the front. It's a school day, and it's raining, so nobody will come. Nobody's around but us."

Blaine drew and released a shaky breath.

"Nobody will hurt you, Blaine. I'm right here." He slid forward on his seat, gripping Blaine's waist and pressing a kiss over the scar. "Let me touch you."

The air punched out of Blaine's lungs as his body relaxed against Kurt's hands and mouth.

Kurt's fingers dropped to the catch of Blaine's jeans, unbuttoning them slowly and drawing them over his hips. The boxer briefs beneath were dark enough to pass as swimming trunks, and Kurt grazed both palms up the back of Blaine's thighs lovingly, resting his cheek against the warm curve of his belly.

They hadn't had sex since the attack, despite holding on to each other each night. He'd been too afraid of moving too soon, of taking too much control when Blaine had come from being the most helpless he'd ever been in his life. But it didn't stop the need from rushing through his body at the sight of Blaine's bare skin, at the feel of it under his hands.

Kurt fought the urge to pull Blaine into his lap and peel off his briefs, to sink his mouth down and make Blaine writhe and cry out, and fill his veins with that heady, sweet, all-encompassing pleasure that he loved so much; the aftershocks of Blaine's enjoyment that reverberated through Kurt's bones. But he couldn't.

Even alone, they were still in a public place.

Instead, he rose to his feet, tugging off his own shirt quickly and undoing his pants. "Come with me," he said. "Do as I ask."

"Yes," Blaine answered without hesitation.

He tugged on Blaine's arm, and they ran together to dive in, sending up geysers of chlorinated water as they met the surface.

"Blaine," Kurt called out, reaching blindly through the water until he found him and drew him closer. "Deep breath."

Nodding, Blaine did as he was told, seizing a huge lungful of air before they both descended through the water, sinking till they bumped the bottom.

Kurt reached out with both hands, cradling Blaine's jaw and sliding fingers over it, willing him to open his eyes.

Blaine blinked at him through the clear water, pupils huge and bright, frozen in the stillness and the absence of sound. Kurt pushed forward, propelling himself with a kick to the pool's floor and coiling both legs around Blaine's waist. With both hands, he tipped Blaine's head back to seal their mouths together.

It was a command without words, just a simple instruction to breathe. He could feel Blaine filling his lungs, rocketing through his veins, the sweep of their mouths rippling as bubbles of air danced along their faces and rose above to the surface. He could feel Blaine's arms wrapped tightly around his waist, clinging to his body desperately, unwilling to let go.

Breathe.

He knew he should be panicking, desperate for more air, but all Kurt could do was settle in the cradle of Blaine's body entwined with his, drifting in weightlessness. He raked fingers through the silky, billowing curls of Blaine's hair underwater, holding him as close as he could.

When they broke the surface again, gasping, Kurt wrapped both arms around Blaine's shoulders as he shook.

"Breathe," he instructed. "Look at me."

Panting, Blaine looked up through the tracks of water racing over his brow and down his cheeks. He settled his forehead against Kurt's, trying to find a rhythm to his breathing.

"You're safe here. With me. They won't hurt you again, they won't hurt me," Kurt told him, voice high and trembling. "You're mine. You're coming with me, and I will never leave you. Do you understand?"

Blaine nodded against him, breath hitching with emotion.

Kurt kissed him in rapid bursts, pressing fingers against the sides of his head fiercely and claiming him for all he was worth.

"I felt you," Kurt confessed between kisses. "Before we were this, before us. I felt you. I didn't make you do this, you didn't make me love you, I was meant to."

"Wh-what? You can't-"

"I did," Kurt cut him off. "When you ran out of that cafeteria, I felt you. When I found you in the bathroom. When you weren't at school, the entire time we were just friends... we were never just *friends*, Blaine." He rushed the words out, breathless and desperate for him to understand. "I don't know how."

"I felt you too," Blaine admitted, voice thick and strained. "I knew it was you. I knew it was worth risking *everything*," he said, gasping for air. "I don't know how, I just knew."

Kurt squirmed in his grip, trying desperately to get closer, to feel everything, pressing kisses over his jaw and capturing his mouth.

They rolled in the water like they'd done once before, tipping and turning together, lost in the taste of each other and the absolute awareness that they would always come back to this.

When Kurt pulled away, he brushed their noses together gently, twitching at the tickle of water over his lips.

"I know you have doubts that are... a part of you," he began. "I know you can't face some things yet, and there's nothing wrong with that. You need time. You need to find your strength again, but it is there, Blaine. I've seen it."

Blaine ducked his head, blinking away droplets and trying to steady his breathing.

"I know you can always choose *not* to do what I ask you to," Kurt breathed. "And I love that I know that when you do something for me, it's because you *want* to. But if you only obey me once ever again, please let it be this one thing."

Glancing up, Blaine met his eyes seriously.

"Never doubt *this*. Because I will always be there when you wake up, Blaine. I will always love you."

"Yes," Blaine uttered, smiling softly. "I promise."

Kurt loosened his grip slowly, floating and still clutching Blaine in the cage of his arms.

The water rushed and roared over the drains in the distance, the sound blending with the rustle of sprinkling rain on the surface and wind in the trees that stood outside the gates. It was cold, and the rain prickled their skin with an icy mist, blending with the lukewarm heat of the pool and driving them in and out of chattering cold as they clung to each other and sank down again to get warm.

The sound fell away as they drifted through the water, twisting in slow motion clutches and caresses to the floor of the pool, content to sit curled up in each other's arms, lips sealed together, and breathe.

EPILOGUE

When summer ended in New York City, the heat lingered.

Kurt could feel the sweat beading on his skin, clinging and sliding in trails down his stomach as he pumped his hips aching slowly, rising and falling to a drawn out rhythm, keeping Blaine inside of him.

He loved it when they fucked like this.

Sprawled on his back on the bed, Blaine was spread beneath him like a blanket. Kurt could feel every twitch of muscle, every rumble in Blaine's chest where it was pressed up against his back, could feel the tremor in his hips and the slick sweep of shallow thrusts inside of him as his hips settled into the curve of Blaine's again and again, but only ever for a moment.

They fucked slowly and lazily, and Kurt let his weight rest on Blaine's chest, head tipping back as he fucked down onto Blaine's cock relentlessly, and Blaine let slip wanton moans at every inch of pressure on his body. Kurt met Blaine's thrusts each time in a slow dance of rise and fall, the slide of Blaine's cock inside of him hot and heavy and *perfect* like it had always been.

He groaned brokenly as Blaine thrust up harder, hands finding and gripping tightly at his sides, keeping him from slipping in the sweat of their bodies as Blaine's hips canted out of his control and buried him deeper.

Kurt let out a sharp and breathy *oh!* at the sudden stretch, the complete and utter fullness that sent waves of pleasure into every nerve. He let his breath fall away with each soft smack of skin on skin, like a drum beat pounding in his blood. After a moment he settled his weight again, forcing Blaine down into the mattress, earning the beautiful response he loved so much; the writhing, keening sounds of his Sub.

He stretched out carefully, locking Blaine inside his body tight and shuddering at the squeeze before he lifted and bent his legs again, letting his feet sit flat on the mattress as his hips rocked up and down torturously slowly.

His hands found Blaine's on either side of their bodies and wove their fingers together.

"Do you want to come, baby?" he asked softly, tipping his head to the side and nuzzling against Blaine's jaw.

"Yes," Blaine gasped, eyes closed and lips parted around shallow breaths. "Please, Kurt. Oh god."

It had been hours - but that was how he'd wanted it this time. He wanted Blaine inside of him, filling him up and belonging to him in the most intimate ways for as long as possible before the night turned into day again.

Day meant NYADA, and leaving the warmth of their apartment and their bed, and Blaine.

He let out a shuddering breath as Blaine's hips bucked again, and the thick weight of Blaine's cock buried deep inside, meeting that perfect place that made his body twitch violently.

"Blaine," he breathed, head tipping over a tan shoulder to rest on the pillow as his back arched and the surge of his orgasm shot down his spine. "*BLAINE!*"

His body shook and spasmed as he came, untouched, over his own chest, shuddering under Blaine's hands where they were bracing him, keeping him from falling as he rode it out. His muscles drew tight in the aftershocks, squeezing around Blaine again and again until he let out a cracked moan and rose up off the bed, carrying Kurt with him as he cried out at his climax.

Kurt panted heavily as they settled back down, his head lolling against the pillow in the dip of Blaine's collar. He pressed his lips to the side of Blaine's face, ignoring the awkward angle to plant messy, weak kisses over stubble, each of them just as desperate as the first.

"God, Kurt," Blaine groaned softly, eyelashes fluttering. "I can't feel anything."

With a chuckle, Kurt pressed his forehead into Blaine's curls and grinned. "Good."

He rocked his hips down, ensuring that his weight was balanced and that Blaine's slowly softening cock stayed inside of him, thick and spent and so perfect he couldn't put real words to the sensation. *You belong inside of me*, was the best his brain could conjure.

"I don't want to move," Kurt groaned. "Ever."

"Don't," Blaine said simply, wrapping heavy arms around Kurt's waist and pecking soft kisses over his shoulder. "Stay."

"Mmm," Kurt wriggled on top of him, eliciting a grunt from Blaine and a delighted shiver that passed between them both. "I could stay like this forever."

"I could just never let you go," Blaine murmured sleepily, squeezing Kurt's body at the suggestion.

"*You have made my life complete*," Kurt sang softly, his mind still wandering in the high that settled over him post-orgasm. "*And I love you so.*"

"I remember that morning," Blaine rubbed his cheek gently against Kurt's pale skin. "Singing in the car."

"We were always connected," Kurt said. "I could feel how much you loved to sing, even then."

"I wish there was a name for it," Blaine admitted. "For what we are. I've never known a claim to exist before... a claim existed."

Kurt hummed contentedly. "I don't need a name for it. Just *us*."

He could feel Blaine's smile pressing against his shoulder.

The memories of their lives before the claim stirred in the back of Kurt's mind, and he didn't know why he'd recalled the dream itself, but once he had, it was too clear to forget again.

"It was you," he whispered. "I dreamed about you. Before."

"Before?"

"Before I met you, I used to dream about you, I think," Kurt said, trailing light fingers along Blaine's forearms where they held tightly around his waist.

"What kind of dreams?"

Kurt smirked. "Sex dreams, mostly."

Blaine chuckled beneath him.

"But more than that. I was owning somebody, before I ever wanted to," he confessed. "All I wanted was to make you feel good. Make you feel wanted, and needed."

"I do," he said, nuzzling his face into the crook of Kurt's neck.

Kurt felt Blaine's eyelashes flutter against his skin, and felt the steady rise and fall of his breathing as it evened and slowed.

He smiled.

"You are," he said gently.

NYADA was tomorrow, and Blaine's senior year would begin. Beyond that he had no idea what lay waiting for them, but he realised all at once, he didn't care. The only part that mattered was them.

Kurt closed his eyes, settling into the cradle of Blaine's body, where he belonged.

"I loved you in my dreams," he whispered, and hummed softly as they drifted somewhere between sleeping and awake.

*Love me tender, love me true,
All my days fulfil
For my darling, I love you
And I always will*