

The Proper Way to

by

IWatchTheRain

Kurt/Blaine || AU || NC-17

The first time I met Kurt Hummel I realized something. Everyone lies, but not everyone does it because they choose to. M for cursing/sexual situations/Blaine's mind

WIP 30/?

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CHAPTER ONE

The Proper Way to Lie

Lying makes being alive just a little bit less intolerable. Only when it's done right, though, and I can safely say I am the only person in the world who does it right.

You want an example now, I bet. Fine, I'll give you one. Just know that if you read my example and say to yourself afterwards "that's the stupidest thing I ever heard," then go right ahead. I'd have to say I really couldn't give two fucks. It's not my job to change my life around so that *you* like it. So you can take your opinions and shove them at someone who actually gives a flaming shit. Don't get me wrong, it's cool and all that to have an opinion. Just don't expect me to care.

Anyway.

Here's the example, and for the record, what I'm about to tell you is true. And, no, the irony of that statement isn't lost on me. Believe my story or don't. What you choose to believe doesn't concern me. I'd repeat the whole two fucks, flaming shit bit again, but I don't feel like it, so I won't. If you really want to read it again, though, it's not like it disappeared.

Getting back on track...

Example:

I go to this fancy boarding school. It's called Dalton. I don't go because I like it. I go because living at Dalton means I don't have to live with the two fuckwit accidents I'm forced to call parents, and that is always a win. There is a downside of course. My roommate, Steven, happens to be a whiny little bitch with an ass puckered up so tight it's a wonder that he's actually gay. Short story even shorter: we don't like each other.

Back to Stevie boy later though.

So one day the headmaster calls me to his office. On his desk he's got a small packet of weed and on his face he's got this pinched, disappointed look. I don't ask, and I don't have to ask, but he tells me anyway.

He says the floor captain was making his rounds in all the dorms. He says the floor captain checked my dorm, which, yeah, no fucking shit he checked my dorm. But anyway. He says the floor captain found weed in my dorm. In my dorm, in my dresser, in my sock drawer.

My, my, my, my, my.

Only the weed doesn't actually fall under that category—the 'my' category. Know why? Cause it's not mine. Because I don't smoke weed. I don't do drugs. Not even cigarettes. Not cause it's 'wrong' or 'bad for my health' or any of that crock and bull shit, but because I honestly just never felt like it and if I don't feel like doing something, then I don't do it. Simple as that.

I'll give you ten guesses who the weed does belong to, though.

Stevie boy.

A fun fact about Stevie: he doesn't actually do drugs. Ass puckered tighter than a drum, remember? You pop more than 2 Advils at a time where he can see you do it and the guy will rant for two fucking hours about the merits of proper drug use. He's a goody goody. So, no, he doesn't do weed. What he *does* do, however, is plot and scheme more than a fourteen year old girl with a bad case of Imafuckinganoyingassedbitch. Basically, what I'm getting at is he set me up.

How do I know this? Cuz I watched him do it. Why? Because he was creeping around my side of the room at three in the morning and I wanted to know what the fuck for. And instead of rolling over and going back to sleep I watched him and saw him put it in my sock drawer. *Then* I rolled over. The next morning, there it was sitting there and there I left it to sit.

Why didn't I take it out? Because nothing interesting had happened in a while and I was bored.

So anyway. Back to the story of Jeremy Bennett, Headmaster of Dalton Academy for boys and the meeting in his office with a delinquent named Blaine Anderson.

After throwing around about a thousand we-found-weed-in-your-this-and-in-your-that's all over the damn place, Headmaster Bennett *still* picks up the little package, gives it a shake as if somehow that makes shit real, and says, "Now, I don't want anything but the honest truth from you... is this yours?" He said the honest truth bit real serious like. Like he really meant it, or else.

I'll tell you a secret, though. He didn't actually mean it. What he actually meant was: *Lie, you guilty little shit so I can nail your teenaged balls to the wall.* And that is straight from the horse's mind—yes, you read that right, *mind*, not mouth—but I'll tell you more about that some other time. For now, back to the story at hand.

To refresh your memory... packet shake, implied admonishing finger wag coupled with a stern 'Now, I don't want anything but the honest truth from you,' dramatic pause, and then finally, "Is this yours?"

And I said with a shrug and a head roll, "Yep. S'mine."

It cost my father ten thousand dollars to hush Bennett up about the whole thing, but hush Bennett up he did. He's a real trooper, that one. My father, not Bennett, at least not in this particular case, because Bennett can be a trooper too.

So, anyway, there you have it: "The Proper Way to Lie," by Blaine Wyatt Anderson.

For those of you who need me to spell out, though: Lying should never be inconsequential. If people don't think you're crazy for lying about whatever it was that you lied about, then you're doing it wrong. Why? Because people lie about the smallest, *stupidest* shit every day and it pisses me off. Go big or don't fucking bother.

But, yeah, that's the end.

I have more, if you're interested.

"The Proper Way to Tell the Truth"

"The Proper Way to Ignore Kurt Hummel"

"The Proper Way to At Least *Pretend* to Ignore Kurt Hummel"

"The Proper Way to Cope With the Fact That You Can't Even Pretend to Ignore Kurt Hummel"

The list goes on, really. I'll share them with you if you want.

But only if you're interested. If not, I see no point in bothering myself with it.

-Blaine

CHAPTER TWO

The Proper Way to Tell the Truth and Other Stories

Have you ever met someone who makes everyone else seem like crusted dirt-filled gum on the bottom of your shoe? Kurt Hummel made everyone I couldn't tolerate about ten thousand times less tolerable. Every second I *didn't* spend staring at his eyes or his hair or just him in general felt like a second wasted.

For the record, though, no, I didn't feel compelled to watch Kurt's every move just because he's gorgeous. I mean, don't get me wrong, Kurt Hummel *is* absolutely gorgeous, it's just not the *only* reason I couldn't take my eyes off of him. In fact, him being gorgeous isn't even the primary reason why I couldn't take my eyes off him. Not at first anyway.

The reason why I turned into biggest creeper on the planet whenever Kurt was within a five mile radius of me was because he was *different*. Different in every single way someone could ever hope to be different. I could list all of the ways out for you in bullets, but that's time consuming and boring, so we're going to go through this in steps.

First is step is called, "The Proper Way to Tell the Truth, Meeting Kurt Hummel and Other Tales."

Unlike last time, I'll tell you the proper way to tell the truth without getting into a massive back story. Basically, the proper way to tell the truth is to be truthful about anything and everything most people would normally lie about or try to hide. Kind of like my philosophy about the proper way to lie: you should only lie about the things most people would never, ever lie about. Basically my life is one big opposite day.

But anyway, that day—the day I met Kurt Hummel—had been one of those shitty days that left me tired enough to fall asleep sprawled out on top of my covers as soon as classes were over. I woke up a few hours later when it was mostly dark to the sight of good ole Stevie pinned up against our wall and moaning like no one's business.

The one who was doing the pinning was Sebastian Smythe, who was proudly on display as naked as the day he was born, beams of moonlight bouncing off his decently muscled ass. Stevie was mostly clothed. He had his fly undone and his cock hanging out.

For kicks I looked around for Sebastian's clothes, but they were nowhere to be seen. There wasn't even so much as a robe or towel on the ground, which could only mean he had walked from his dorm to ours stark assed naked, which really didn't surprise me in the slightest. Smythe was something of an exhibitionist, and, judging from the sheer force he was using to rub his bare dick against Stevie boy's clothed leg, apparently a masochist too. As prestigious as Dalton was, our uniforms were made with some pretty abrasive fabrics. I could only imagine the burning sensation Sebastian would suffer in a few hours.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me," I grunted as I pushed myself up and deadpanned at them. Stevie gasped in alarm at the sound of my voice and tried to push Sebastian away.

Sebastian would have none of that though. He merely shoved Stevie back, fisted his cock, and smirked at me over his shoulder. "Wanna join, Anderson?"

I rolled off the bed and tried to ignore Stevie whining like a whore for Sebastian to jerk him harder. Apparently, so long as he was being played with, Stevie was something of an exhibitionist too. How perfect. "No thanks," I said darkly.

"Bullshit," Sebastian called, letting go of Stevie and looking pointedly at the straining bulge in my pants. "You're totally turned on by this."

I rolled my eyes. "Of course I'm fucking turned on. I'm a guy, I'm gay, Steven is moaning like he's got something to prove to the world, and you've got a hot ass, but I hate you both so I'm going to have to pass."

Sebastian grabbed Stevie's dick again and frowned at me, looking for all the world like a spoiled brat.

"Oh! *Ohhhhh*! Oh, god, ass and pass, that rhymed," Stevie panted, bucking like a piston into Sebastian's fist.

I snorted and peered around Sebastian's shoulder at Stevie. "Seriously?"

Stevie was too distracted to appreciate the gesture, of course. "Oh god, oh god, oh god, yes, baby fuck me. *Fuck!* Fuuuuck. Please, Blaine, please fuck him. I wanna watch."

"Jesus, you don't shut up, do you?" I frowned, adjusting myself in my pants as I walked to the door. Sebastian glared at me for leaving like I knew he would and I merely shrugged and left without bothering to close the door behind me.

I didn't get too very far before Trent bounced up to me. Trent was a senior and the most ineffective floor monitor I had ever had because he was just too damn nice. "Hey, Blaine! Where are you going? It's passed curfew for juniors, you know," he said with too much smile and too much enthusiasm.

I kept walking without looking at him. "I've got a hard on and no one to fuck with it, where do you *think* I'm going? To the goddamn bathroom, that's where."

Trent had followed me around for the better part of my time at Dalton, but my particular brand of honesty still stopped him in his tracks.

He recovered before I got too far away from him but didn't jog to catch up with me. "O-oh, umm..." He laughed nervously. "Well, good luck with that, I guess... see you in Warblers practice."

I waved apathetically over my shoulder and continued on my way.

I took care of business relatively quickly. No shame in that. I just wanted to get rid of it and move on with my life.

There was no way I was going back to the dorm, though. I didn't want to deal with Sebastian or Steven, so I went to the student lounge instead. No one ever went in there, probably because it looked like a bad cliché of an old boy's club, but its vacancy was what I was after so the ridiculous state of the room's appearance made no never mind to me. I opened the door without any sort of finesse and threw the hallway light into the dark room.

That was when I first saw Kurt. He was standing on the opposite side of the room in the complete dark studying the gold framed painting of Albert Denning, Dalton's first headmaster. I stopped to stare at the oddity of it all. After a wait that felt much too long he turned painfully slowly to look at me, as if my sudden encroachment upon his privacy wasn't worthy of his immediate attention.

I told you before that Kurt Hummel is gorgeous, beautiful even, and I don't lie about the little things so you can rest assured that it's the honest truth, but that first night we met had nothing to do with appreciation for his physical appearance. Mostly this was because I wasn't able to see face properly. I couldn't see the mysterious everything color of his eyes, or how smooth and perfect his skin was. I couldn't even see the color of his hair. But something about him caught me and kept me there and wouldn't let me leave.

He had turned away from the painting to look at me, but he'd arranged himself back in the stance he had been standing in before he turned. It was as if he was deliberately trying to confuse my sense of reality by erasing any evidence that he had moved.

Still, there was something wholly intriguing about the way he held himself. The way he had one arm, the right one, bent at the elbow so that the hand it was attached to could rest against his neck. The way the thumb of that same hand traced back and forth over his Adam's apple as the other four fingers pressed lightly against his skin. How the left arm was bent as well so his left hand could curl around that spot just above his right elbow. How his legs were arranged to anchor him to the ground and hold his weight, but with thoughtful care as to how and why rather than solely for the purpose of keeping his body from crumpling to the floor. The way his head was tilted ever so slightly to the left.

He looked like a painting himself. One of a dark silhouette with nothing definite for the observer to relate to.

I sensed the strange reality of the moment, but I didn't think to turn back. I walked over to him and as I went he kept his eyes on my face. I stopped walking when I was able to see a little bit more of him, just to alleviate some of the ambiguity. What I saw was this hint of an intriguing nose, uniquely shaped eyes, and a wide mouth. It wasn't much.

"Hi," was what I said.

He said nothing. He didn't even nod his head. He just kept searching me with his eyes, studying me as deeply as he had been studying that painting before I interrupted and gave him something new to look at. It filled me with warmth even as it unnerved me.

I frowned at him and wondered whether he might be unbalanced. "You lost or something?"

Still nothing. Most people would have been uncomfortable with staring into a stranger's eyes for so long, sort of the way I was beginning to feel, but not this guy. He was content to go on staring intently at me as if people did that sort of thing to one another all the time.

And then it all stopped because something else started. He moved. He untangled himself as smoothly and deliberately as you might pull down a zipper to unlock the jacket's teeth. He broke our locked gazes as if it was the easiest thing in the world to do and walked away without so much as a backward glance, leaving

an unsettled pit in my stomach and a powerful need for a stronger grip on my now destroyed sense of reality.

CHAPTER THREE

The Proper Way to Determine Whether Or Not You've Gone Insane

Step two is called, well, it's directly above this paragraph, so I don't see any point in retyping anything, and apparently the way to do it is to talk to Sebastian Fucking Smythe...

I didn't sleep well the night I met Kurt. It had been the weirdest meeting of my entire life and I was only about fifty percent sure that it had actually happened. The fact that I woke up the next morning lying face up on one of the couches in the Student Lounge really didn't help matters much as far as clarity went.

I don't like being uncertain of things. Mostly that is because the certain truth of everything is usually punching me repeatedly in the face. So it was no surprise that I was in a shit mood that morning and I carried it with me all the way back to my dorm. Stevie was sitting on the edge of his bed when I got there.

"I need you to promise that you won't tell anyone about last night," was the first thing he said to me.

"Nope." I walked over to pick up my toothbrush off the floor, which was where I had thrown it the day before in my early morning laziness. The bag with my shampoo and conditioner was a few inches off to the side and once I grabbed that too, I turned to leave. I had to stop short to keep from plowing into Steven.

"Please," he begged and I credited him for the fact that he actually sounded kind of sincere. Then he ruined it. "I'll do anything."

No, I won't, his mind hissed in mine and I had to resist the urge to punch him in the fucking face. I settled for shoving him forcibly away from me and left the room with his "Fuck you, Blaine!" trailing after me.

A shower did nothing to improve my mood. The water actually felt like slim on my skin, so I cut it short without bothering to condition my hair, which would leave it completely out of control once it dried, but I was too annoyed with everything to care.

I ignored anyone who tried to talk to me in the hall and slept through my first two classes. My third class was in the same room as the second so I merely shifted into a more comfortable position at the sound of the bell and forced myself back to sleep.

I woke up sometime in the middle of it to yawn and stretch without bothering to use any kind of discretion.

"Alright, that's it!" Mr. Hedley snapped, finally having had enough of my blatant display of apathy. He went on to say more but I had stopped listening way back at "that's it" because an annoyed glance to my left caused my joints to tightly lock and sent blood rushing in my ears. Sitting in the desk next to mine was the boy from last night. Hedley's voice was no more than a dull roar in the background, insignificant and unimportant.

The boy sat quietly and comfortably at his desk, completely at ease as if he had been sitting there every class since the beginning of the year. He held a book with both hands and was obviously not paying attention to Hedley's math lesson. His limbs were once again arranged in the most compelling way, but I hardly cared about his arms and legs, because I could finally see his *face*.

The hint of unique perfection I had seen the night before was fully on display in the light of day and I was consumed by the overwhelming compulsion commit every tiny, but still greatly significant detail to memory. My gaze roamed over the almond shape of his eyes under two wonderfully shaped eyebrows, from left to right over both full, thick lips that made his mouth look wide and tantalizing, across beautiful skin that begged to be touched in the gentlest way possible.

Everything stopped in my mind but around me life went steadily on.

I knew it the very second Hedley gave up on his pitiful attempt at discipline and started teaching again because once his head was turned back to face the board, the boy turned to look at me and I promptly got lost in his eyes. Finally being able to see his eyes was like a booted kick in the face. His eyes were colored both crystal clear and thicker than storm clouds. They were sky blue and earthy green. They were the kind of eyes you saw everywhere and nowhere. He had everything eyes.

I stared, trapped. He looked away without effort. I kept staring.

And guess what. It fucking *sucked*.

It pissed me off too. Last night he had stared at me so long and hard it made my stomach hurt, now his undivided attention was back on that damn book. The expression on his face was so gentle and loving that it was as if he was trying to do the impossible and caress the words on the page with his eyes. Like those black squiggles called letters held the key to everything that made him live and breathe. The intensity of it made me wonder whether he was reading the words or just *admiring* at them.

For the first time in my entire life I felt trapped inside myself. I wanted to look away but I didn't. I *couldn't*. Hell, I wanted to copy down the bullshit Hedley was writing down too forcibly on the white board. I wanted to get up and walk out of the room and never see that boy again. But I didn't. I sat there and stared at him like some sort of mental patient drowning in his own inability to break free of his worst impulse. It was maddening.

It was never ending. When the bell rang I actually got up and *followed* the kid like some creepy stalker from a bad 80s movie. It was only dumb luck that we happened to be in the same class or else I probably would have sat in the wrong classroom like a fucking moron.

I had enough control over myself to sit myself down in the desk as far away from where he was sat as I could get. I felt jittery and on edge, ready to snap like a rubber band wound to tightly around rapidly purpling skin. A rubber band that just wouldn't come no matter how fanatically you pulled.

A tingle run up my spine. I turned around in my seat to look in the back right corner of the room against my better judgment. This time he held my gaze for less than three seconds before his eyes dropped down to that fucking book again.

"That's my seat."

I bristled at the sound of Smythe's slimy voice but *couldn't* look away from Everything Eyes. "It's my seat now so fuck off."

Sebastian grinned widely at me and slid into the seat behind mine. "Touchy, touchy. I bet I know how to loosen you up."

"Not interested."

Sebastian chuckled and turned to look at the boy as well. "Yes, I can see that. He sure is pretty," he said and I felt a humongous weight lift off of my shoulders. I had been half convinced I made him up. "He's also a mental case."

I tore my eyes away from the boy to narrow them at Sebastian. I wanted to rip his fucking ears out the sides of his head. All for a boy whose name I didn't know. "How the fuck would you know?"

"I read in his file that he's got some sort of imbalance." He shrugged. "He doesn't talk. The teachers aren't supposed to call on him during class."

"That doesn't make him a mental case."

"Maybe not," Sebastian pursed his lips. "He's still a freak, though."

"Lots of people are mute," I pointed out from between my teeth.

"Yeah, but he's not mute."

"And you know this how?"

"Because he's my roommate and I know for a fact that he sings."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Proper Way to Ignore Kurt Hummel

I'd like to start off by saying that Step 3 is a fluke. There *is* no proper way to ignore Kurt Hummel.

Even back then, back when we first met, I knew that, but I tried to do it anyway. Why? Because Kurt Hummel had some sort of abnormal control over me from the second we met and it scared the shit out of me, so, yeah, I was desperate enough to attempt the impossible.

In case you forgot, and, really, you shouldn't have because it really hasn't been that long since my last post, but in case you *did*, Smythe dropped a bomb on me in History class. A bomb we'll call "Because he's my roommate and I know for a fact that he sings." And since I'm reminding you of the bomb in the first place, I guess I'll also explain why a statement like that achieved bomb status to begin with.

First off, I hate Sebastian Smythe. If you want to know why I hate him that's your problem because I don't feel like getting into it. Just know that I do. So the fact that the boy who had some weird sort of control over me was rooming with Sebastian definitely wasn't the sort of information I would staple a happy dance to.

Second. I was already obsessed with Kurt to a degree that was worth a great deal of concern. Telling me that he doesn't speak but he fucking *sings* wasn't going to do me any favors. Because, really? The frickin *teachers* aren't allowed to call on him in class because of this no talking thing he's got going on, but according to his roommate he tra-la-la's during his free time? What the actual fuck? If he hadn't gained my attention before he would have gotten it then.

So after our dear Sebby dropped the bomb on me, for a crazy second I just stared him down and waited, hoping to hear the hissing truth behind his lies in my head, but that didn't happen. It was both a relief and a disturbance. A relief not to have his slimy voice slinking around in my skull and a disturbance that he was actually telling the truth, and the juxtaposing forces actually made me shudder. Sebastian caught my reaction, of course, and smirked at me as he ran his tongue over his top lip. It was one of those gestures that was both hot and completely ridiculous at the same time.

I rolled my eyes. "Stop it."

"Why?" he purred. "Is it turning you on?"

"Not nearly enough to get you what you want."

The rest of history was absolute hell. Not because of Sebastian, he was easy to ignore. Because of Kurt. I kept feeling his eyes on me, traveling up my spine with agonizing slowness until they came to rest at the back of my head and seep into my curls. His gaze was like a physical thing, touching and learning every fiber of my being to the point where I had to sit with my hands curled insanely tight around the front of my desk to keep from turning around.

It wasn't normal. It was weird and disturbing and yet the second I felt the intensity of his stare fall away I immediately wanted it back.

When the bell rang and we were permitted to go, I followed him again, feeling sick with myself. I studied the back of his head as he walked and tried to make sense of the things I was feeling, but with every second I spent examining the intertwined strands of his chestnut brown hair, the more confused I felt.

Sure, he was beautiful, but lots of other people were as well. Dalton was filled with gorgeous boys and I had never followed any of them around. Fucked around with them in the dorms now and again to let off steam, but nothing like this.

It was more than just his beauty, though.

I wanted to be close to him. I wanted to rest our foreheads together and let his thoughts mingle with mine. I wanted to test how perfectly our fingers might connect and hear how soft he might sigh if I touched my lips to the spot of marred skin on the left side of his neck. I wanted to run my hands through his hair until he fell asleep and share his breath.

Those were the things I wanted to experience with him, and each and every single one made me feel sick to my stomach. I hated being close to people. People sucked. People were dishonest and petty and listening to people talk usually gave me migraines.

I'll tell you why, too.

When people lie, and for most people that is almost all the time, the truth that tries to hide behind their spoken lies crawls into my head and creeps incessantly around and around, like a thing eating and lapping away at the most private corner of myself.

It's impossible to describe how terrible it is to have your most personal space invaded—to describe how it feels when that space inside of you that's supposed to be impossible to touch is being prodded again and again. To describe how it feels to have loud, echoing, inhuman voices screaming over and over and over to be heard until all you want to do is hide yourself away. It's impossible to describe my reality, my fucking *life*.

And I asked myself why this boy should be any different. If anything he was worse than the rest of them because he even though he hadn't uttered a single lie he was *still* forcing me to give him my attention. He was *still* forcing me to notice him with no never mind about what *I* wanted. His silence was supposed to be my salvation but was I more trapped by it than I was by everyone else's lies.

That day I hated Kurt Hummel more than anyone else in the entire world.

And not only for the reasons I just finished explaining. I also hated him because he finally walked to a place where I couldn't follow. It turned out that we didn't have fourth period together. I was left standing in the doorway of a classroom I had never stepped foot in, wondering what the fuck I was supposed to do now.

The bell rang to signal the start of fourth period. The teacher gave me an odd look. So did several of the students sitting at their desks. *He* sat with his back to me, his goddamn book open in his hands.

"Can I help you?" she asked. She was young and a substitute.

I did my thing and gave her the honest answer. "No."

She bit her lip. "Oh. Well. Okay. I—I have to teach now."

It was a pretty lame thing to say, and everyone who heard it knew it. I couldn't blame her though. I was well aware that I was acting like a basket case.

She walked over to stand at the door and fisted the doorknob, looking at me nervously. "If there's nothing... I'm just going to..." She pushed the door. "Okay? Okay." She closed the door.

For a few minutes I didn't move and the woman glanced nervously at me through the glass window once she walked back to the front of the room. I was looking at Kurt though. The most I could see of him now was his elbow. I turned my body to put my back against the wall and slid down.

I skipped my own class and waited with my eyes closed and my head leaned back. I thought about the look I had seen on Kurt's face when he was reading his book last period and wondered if he still had that look on his face now. I wondered what about the book itself and how it had put that look on his face. I wondered what book it was.

When the bell rang to signal the end of fourth period I opened my eyes. I had lunch fifth period and I was already trying to talk myself out of following Kurt to whatever class he had next even though I knew I would just follow him anyway.

When the door opened he was the first one out and he looked at me as he walked by. He didn't stop or pause, but he didn't break the connection of our eyes either. He looked back as he walked, twisting his elegant neck to stare. There was a discernible tightness around his eyes and I studied it until he rounded a corner and looked away. Then I got up.

It only took me about twenty seconds to round the same corner and catch sight of him. It took less than five more seconds to realize he was headed for the cafeteria despite the fact that I avoided that part of the school like the plague.

Just before he walked through the open doorway he glanced back at me. I was still far enough away that I couldn't discern anything more than the nonsensical sound of multiple conversations being had. I was still far enough away that I was safe. And by the look in his eyes, I could tell he knew it.

He walked inside.

My blood boiled.

I made a snap decision I would regret later. For the first time in my three years at Dalton Academy I walked into the cafeteria and the lying voices of the people all around me crashed against my skull. I knew I would be sick later. I might even have to run over to a garbage can to throw up. But I kept my eyes trained on my destination: a brown, plastic cafeteria chair that sat at a table occupied by Warblers. A chair that faced the table Kurt sat at alone.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Proper Way to Push It All Away

I used to think that the proper way to push it all away was to force myself to forget. To forget everything unpleasant that had ever happened to me. To sweep under the rug and erase it like it had never happened. I don't think that way anymore. I've learned that sometimes it's the unpleasant memories that we should try our damndest to remember.

When I think about that first I spent tripping over myself to be near Kurt, it's impossible not to think about those first seven words he gave to me outside the boy's bathroom and how they changed everything.

I still have them. Not anywhere that I can get them if I wanted them this very minute, but I did keep them. They're hidden someplace safe where no one would ever think to look. Lately I've been thinking that maybe one day, when I can, I'll go and get them. Just to have them close again because it's been a while.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. It's too soon to talk about my present reality.

I can tell you about the words though, about what they are, and I can tell you about the paper he wrote them on, too—well, I'll describe it, but I won't say why it's special just yet. Just know that it is. Special, I mean.

Here we go...

I had just followed Kurt into the cafeteria—a dangerous place for someone like me to be.

I should clarify something first. I'm not a mind reader. I can't wrap my hands around the sides of your skull and force my stream of consciousness through your ears to listen in.

If anything, what I can do is closer to what a mind hearer does. And if you think you just read the words mind *reader* look again, because you didn't. What a mind *reader* does is deliberate. What a mind *hearer* does is not.

When a mind hearer walks into a room full of people, he or she is forced to listen to the thoughts of every single person in that room. Thoughts jump into a mind hearer's head without his or her consent. It's infinitely worse than hearing a conversation out loud, mostly because the way people think is very different from how they talk. Thoughts are fragmented and make no sense half the time unless the thinker is focusing on something really specific. Also, a person's mind never stops. People never stop thinking. Constantly hearing jumbled nonsense in your head will get to you after a while. It will also fuck you up worse than any drug.

I've seen the effects of it often enough to know. Mind hearers can't function in society.

I'm not a true mind hearer, though. I don't hear people's insignificant thoughts, just the truth they try to hide. I don't need to be locked up for my own safety and the safety of everyone around me. My brother used to call me Not Quite, meaning not quite crazy, but close. But don't worry about Cooper just yet.

The fact that I only hear people's truths and not everything else certainly didn't stop the cafeteria from becoming my own personal hell. Lies were everywhere, whether they were intentional or not, and they found me as I walked among the eating masses and wormed into my head.

Another thing I should clarify. Some lies are easier to take than others. It really depends on the person doing lying. Some people have mental voices that are actually pleasant. Others have voices that twist and stab like knives. Those are the ones that make me want to bash in my skull.

Still, unless I know the person and have heard their truths before, it's impossible to tell who is safe and who isn't, so as I walked I tried hard not to eavesdrop on anyone's conversation. I tried to focus on the murmuring rather than what was being murmured. As long as I don't hear the lie, I won't hear the truth in my head.

But it's hard to keep from hearing anything specific when there are conversations going on all around you. And no matter how loud I scream LALALALALALALA in my head, something *always* creeps through.

It only takes one...

"Yeah, man, it was great." *It sucked.*

...and then through the crack the first left in my defenses, in creeps another...

"—broke up with her. Best thing I've ever done." *She broke up with me. I want her back.*

...and then more...

"Hey, what's up?"

"Nothing much." *My toe keeps poking through the hole in my sock, I woke up late today, I had a math test, I can't decide if I want fries with my pizza or chicken strips, it's really been bothering me that Jenny still won't have sex with me, my mom...* (In case you're wondering, yeah, those continue until it's all been covered, and distance doesn't make it stop. Only time. Mental voices aren't like spoken ones. The person listening can't just run away.)

My head was pulsing by the time I made it to the table and wrapped my hand around the back of the chair. Trent was the first to notice me with his huge, happy smile like I was the best thing since orgasms and sex. And, no, he's not gay.

"Blaine! What are you doing here? You're never in the cafeteria."

"Yeah, for good reason," I muttered as I sat down heavily and pinched the bridge of my nose. A sharp throb started in the socket of my right eye. "Being in here makes me feel sick."

From beside me someone asked, "Why are you even here then?" and it took a minute because of the pounding in my head, but eventually I recognized Greg Hadley's usual condescending tone. Greg's particular brand of annoying made me want to staple things to his face.

I gave him the truth. "Because stalking someone really only works when you follow them wherever they go."

Greg scoffed and muttered something under his breath but I didn't really care what he had to say so I didn't call him out on it. Instead I leaned down to rest my forehead against the cool cafeteria table. I could feel *his* eyes on me again.

Jeff, who was sitting on my other side, nudged my shoulder. "Who are you stalking?" he asked with interest. Jeff thought I was 'amusing.'

I lifted my hand to point without looking up. For all the bravado of sweeping in after Kurt to try my hand at having a pissing contest with a guy who wasn't going to piss back, I needed a break from the confusing staring. Maybe if I didn't look at him for a while...

"The new kid?" someone asked.

"He's in one of my classes. He's really weird."

"Right? That's what I thought. He's in one of mine too, and he just sat at his desk the whole time and read that book and the teachers didn't say anything."

"That's 'cause he doesn't talk."

"Sebastian says he does," Jeff informed everyone.

Nick scoffed. "Ugh. Can we *not* talk about Sebastian?"

"Maybe he's just shy," Trent put in.

"Does anyone know his name?"

Yes, what *was* his name?

"Who cares?"

I was going to kill Greg.

"How does being shy explain the teachers letting him read in class?"

Never mind. I was going to kill them all. People don't have to lie to piss me off. The Warblers were worse than a squawking bunch of girls. It occurred to me then that I was going have to deal with their squawking all over again at Warbler practice later and my headache turned into a full blown migraine.

"His name is Kurt Hummel," a new voice said suddenly, like it was no big deal. I didn't have to look up to know it belonged to Wes, but my head snapped up anyway to gape at the sound of Kurt's name.

Kurt Hummel.

Kurt.

Kurt.

The name seeped into my skin for the very first time and my blood carried it all over. My eyes moved without my permission to look at him and I tried to match it to his face, trying to find something in his features that validated him as Kurt. I couldn't, of course, but I also couldn't think of any other name that would fit him either. It shouldn't have mattered, really. Names were just random labels given out at birth. But this was *his* name, and that made it something different—made it something important. Unable to help myself, I whispered it under my breath, just to taste the sound of it on my tongue. I could see myself becoming addicted to its sweetness. I didn't whisper it a second time.

Wes dropped into the seat across from me and threw his humongous blue binder on the table so that it landed with a vicious slap. All of us recoiled at the sight of it, knowing what it was. David and Thad, who had been standing behind Wes, sat down at either side of him.

"Fuck, I sure picked a *day*," I groaned, knowing that the stressed out look on Wes' face couldn't mean anything good.

Wes snorted and shot me a look for which the meaning was clear: You've got nothing on me, Anderson.

I shot him one back: Wanna bet?

Wes was one of the few people I liked well enough not to hate.

"How do you know his name and why do you sound so upset about it?" Nick asked, interrupting our mental conversation.

Wes scowled and opened up his binder. "Because as soon as he signs this, Kurt E. Hummel is officially our newest Warbler," he said, pulling out an unsigned contract with Kurt's name printed in bold at the top.

Everyone started talking at once.

"*WHAT?*"

"What do you mean he's our newest member?"

"But... he doesn't talk. How can he sing?"

"Sebastian—"

"Finish that sentence and I'll kill you." *Finish that sentence and I'll sit here and glare at you.*

"You mean without auditioning first?"

"That's not fair!"

"Seriously, I'm quitting if he gets in for nothing." *I'd never quit.*

If I hadn't heard so many truths in rapid succession earlier, this probably wouldn't have been all that bad. As it was, however, both boys had *those* kind of mental voices and they both shot through me like a high voltage jolt.

My hand flew out to wack the nearest thing—Jeff's soda can. The can went like a shot. Pepsi flew everywhere.

Everyone at the table froze. With their mouths hanging open and shock in their eyes, they stared at my face, then my soda covered hand, and finally the wet table.

Greg spoke first, an appalled look on his face. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

"I..." For a second, words failed as countless memories surged up. Each of them involved the same things: a terrified little boy, feelings of helplessness and embarrassment, and a look in Cooper's eyes I wished I could forget.

My eyes sought out Kurt and I found him looking back at me with the most indescribable expression on his face. This expression was new. It was less like he was examining me with the interest of a supreme being studying someone not quite worthy of his attention and more like he was *really* looking at me for the first time—like he was desperate to see inside. I immediately disliked it.

I quickly broke eye contact and shoved the memories down and away. With quick precision I forced myself back into the Blaine I wanted to be and pushed that scared little boy from so long ago back in the dark where he belonged.

I glared at them all. "You're all being fucking loud and annoying and it's making my head explode."

"Migraine?" Wes asked, because they all knew I got them.

"Yes," I forced out, keeping my eyes on bubbling soda on the table.

Wes looked at Trent. "Can you get some napkins for us please?"

"Yeah. Be right back."

Trent walked off and Wes got some Tylenol out of his bag. I forced myself not to dwell on the fact that I knew he carried it specifically for me and accepted the two he offered. When Trent returned with the napkins everyone took a handful and started cleaning up the mess I made without comment.

I forced the pills down without taking a drink.

"Sorry," I muttered at Jeff.

Jeff grinned. "No big deal. Seriously, though, you owe me a soda."

"Yeah, man, okay."

"Anyway," Nick announced. "Can we get back to the Kurt thing and why he's got a contract even though he hasn't auditioned?"

Wes scoffed and just like that, it was like the last five minutes never happened. "Bennett's orders. He called me into his office today and said Kurt would be joining, no exceptions. And now I am left with the unhappy task of trying to figure out how I'm supposed to incorporate him into all of our numbers without throwing off the group's entire aesthetic balance."

"Gee, Wes, that sounds serious," I announced with my head tilted down towards the table top. I kept my eyes closed and leaned forward on the elbow of my right arm, my forehead pressed against the groove between my forefinger and thumb.

Wes scoffed. "Don't mess with me, Blaine, not today. You tell me how I'm supposed to have you in the front line with seven Warblers flanking you on either side when there are sixteen people in the group. Because if you can tell me how to do that, then consider me your new boyfriend."

"You're straight, Wesley," Jeff reminded with a smirk.

"Exactly." Wes started pulling out his formation sheets. "There is a reason why we have always had fifteen people. That number is *sacred*."

"Just get rid of someone else," I suggested, flicking my wrist in Greg's direction. I didn't have to open my eyes to know he flipped me off.

"Can he even sing?" Nick wanted to know.

"*Sebastian*," Jeff began dramatically, shooting Nick a silencing look, "says that he does. They're roommates."

"That doesn't mean he's good," Thad spoke up.

"Doesn't matter," David said. "He can just mouth the words."

"Which *still* doesn't help me to place him."

The conversation continued without any more input from me. The Tylenol wasn't really doing anything (two wasn't ever enough for my kind of crazy). I felt physically and emotionally drained and Kurt was *still* looking at me, but now that I had his attention I refused to give him mine. It was hard, but I managed it, my annoyance at the ringer he had been putting me through all day fueling my resolve.

When the bell rang I decided there was no way I was going to my last four classes. I wasn't going to follow Kurt around like a lost puppy either. I was going to my room and I was going to sleep.

But even with my head pulsing so hard that it felt like my brain was contracting and expanding repeatedly in its skeletal incasing, my body recoiled the idea of leaving him; when I got up from the table to put the idea to action, alarm slammed into me like a freight train. It felt like every single cell in my body needed to be close to his and the mass panic at the increasing distance was *not* appreciated. The farther away I walked, the faster the adrenaline coursed through my veins, urging me to stay, urging me not to lose him.

I didn't make it to the dorm. It got to be too much and I ducked in the nearest bathroom, shaking and terrified out of my fucking mind. Was this supposed to be my life now? Prisoner to a boy who hadn't so much as spoken one single word to me? Who never spoke to anyone? I could see myself following him around everywhere he went while he read his stupid book, only giving me attention when I did something that intrigued him. It was sick.

And it just figured. It was so typical that I nearly laughed. Kurt Hummel was just someone new to add to the list of somebodies who I needed to be close to but couldn't.

I curled over a sink and turned on the tap, trying to drown my face and the back of my neck in ice cold water. When it got to be too much I looked up to stare at my own reflection and was bewildered by the defeat I saw. I forced myself to stare at my wet face for about twenty seconds until I couldn't take it anymore. Looking away, I moved to lean against the sink, placing my weight there, and allowed my head to fall forward until it pulled at my spine and hung low between my shoulders. I took a few breaths through my mouth, sucking in air that didn't give me any sort of satisfaction.

"Get a grip, get a grip, get a grip." Two more breaths. "Just get a fucking grip."

I whispered *those* words, the ones from about a thousand years ago. The ones I would say from underneath my bed as I tried to ignore the sound of screaming: "Please, make it stop."

As soon as they came out, I regretted it. Furious, I pushed myself away from the sink. It was time to leave if that was how this was going to go. I was supposed to be done with that shit and now it had crept up on me twice in one day.

With my hair dripping wet and the memory of my ashen faced reflection in the process of being pushed from my conscious thoughts, I walked out of the bathroom and nearly jumped out of my skin. *He* was standing there, just outside the door, looking at me with all the desperation I felt in his blue colored everything eyes.

My heart stopped when he opened his mouth. For a wild second I thought he would actually do it. Sheer anticipation rocked through me and I lost control of my poker face, leaving my excitement bare for him to see. The effect was almost instantaneous. His eyes grew cold and guarded once more and he closed his mouth, but there was enough emotion left for him to look at me like I had personally offended him.

He held up his arm. Without using words, he ordered me to take the paper he held between his fingers. When I reached out to take it, his fingers shied away from mine in a display of obvious retreat. His arm dropped back to his side like stone. I didn't watch him walk away, but I noticed that the desperate need to follow him was gone, as if having something that had once been his—a yellow post-it note that looked impossibly old, frayed at the edges and faded to near white—made every difference. Unlike the paper itself, the writing on it was fresh, delicate, and beautiful: *Whatever you're doing to me, please stop.*

CHAPTER SIX

The Proper Way to Confront Kurt Hummel

Some advice for this one: Just go for it...

I woke up around 3:00 in the afternoon feeling like absolute shit. I was lying on my bed with my shoes still on, my uniform wrinkled beyond belief, and Kurt's note still resting in my relaxed hand. I had fallen asleep in the middle of tracing my fingers along the frayed edges of the paper and now that I was awake I absently started it up again, the feel and shape of the paper familiar by then. A glance at my phone told me Warblers practice had started almost thirty minutes ago. Wes would be mad.

I briefly entertained the idea of skipping and discarded it just as fast. Singing would probably do me some good. Besides, it was better than going to back to sleep and wasting away.

Getting myself upright was much more difficult than it should have been, but I managed it, however slowly, and got to my feet. I rolled my shoulders to dispel some of the stiffness in my back and grimaced at the dull popping sounds that sounded from under my skin. The action did nothing to alleviate the tension I felt. If anything, I felt more exhausted than I had when I collapsed into bed. Still, I walked out of the dorm and started for the choir room.

As I went I swept two of my fingers across the back of Kurt's note, feeling the slight protrusions Kurt's pen had left in the paper. I had memorized the swoop of Kurt's script; the way his G curled in on itself, the way his cursive R looked elegant in a way I could never hope to make it.

Whatever you are doing to me, please stop.

I had a theory about his little message that both answered some questions and created new ones.

My theory: Kurt had an ability.

It was the only explanation for my reaction to him—for *his* reaction to *me*. Somehow both of us sensed the otherness in one another and we were drawn to each other because of it.

It was a pretty solid theory but for one problem. I had met people with abilities before. None of them had ever had any sort of effect on me. Not even a toned down version of my reaction to Kurt. I had never followed anyone around like a lost puppy, or watched their every move, or tried to drown my misfortune in a bathroom sink shared by a bunch of prep school boys.

So what was so special about Kurt Hummel? Maybe it had to do with his ability. Or maybe it was just him in general. The list went on, really.

With all the possibilities circling my head, the gentle sound of a song snuck up on me as I neared my destination. The song washed over me, but didn't quite penetrate the fog in my head until I was already stopped frozen in the threshold of the choir room, listening. It took a few seconds of shocked staring, but eventually I became aware of what, or who, exactly I was hearing instead of simply knowing with all my heart that it was beautiful.

Kurt Hummel was singing. He had one of those voices that snuck deep inside your chest and made your stomach ache from the unexpected beauty.

I have this thing about standing in the rain whenever it's warm enough to allow for it. Something about the water hitting my skin is relaxing. Kurt's voice was like that, relaxing like warm rain under blue-gray clouds.

He had everyone in the room captivated.

"I can finally see that you're right there beside me."

Some of the boys had started humming the melody, and the soft undertones of "Meteor Shower" filled the room, a nice accompaniment to Kurt's voice.

"I am not my own, for I have been made new. Please don't let me go..."

He wasn't singing to me. He wasn't even looking at me, but the words struck home like they only applied to the two of us and need to be closer drew me in the room and into a chair. I put myself into his line of sight, looked into his storm cloud eyes, forced him to notice. He didn't look away.

"I desperately need you."

When Kurt finished, Wes stole the words out of my mouth. "Kurt, that was amazing," he said in an awe struck tone, and several others nodded, their mouths still hanging open.

Kurt smiled sweetly in response and I could have kissed Wes for being the reason why I was able to see it.

"All that's left for you to do now is sign this and everything will be official."

As he signed, Wes grinned at Kurt with a slightly greedy expression on his face, no doubt pleased with the turn of events. Wesley Montgomery was nothing if not a perfectionist and Kurt's voice was perfection.

Wes looked like he might actually cry when he took the signed paper up in his hands and gingerly tucked it in with the rest of the contracts, right at the very back where it wouldn't get damaged. David was looking at him like he had lost his effing mind, and I might have joined in had Kurt's song not still been echoing in my head. It made breathing a bit difficult.

We all listened as Wes went through the rundown of Warbler rules and expectations, making it a point to glare at me when he got to the bit about showing up on time for practices. I ignored him.

"Last thing then," Wes said, waving over Greg, who held Pavarotti's cage in his hands. Wes grinned at Kurt and began the introduction once Pav was set on the desk. "This little guy is called Pavarotti. It is Warbler tradition that the newest member of the group takes care of him. Do you think you can do that, Kurt?"

Kurt smiled at Wes and opened his arms to receive the cage. Wes handed Pavarotti carefully over and Kurt dropped his eyes to smile at the little bird.

"Warbler Kurt, you may take Warbler Pavarotti and have a seat."

"Now," Wes addressed the group once Kurt was seated, "we still have fifteen minutes left, but I think the council has quite a bit of reorganizing to do before we can actually start rehearsals." Wes continued once David and Thad nodded in agreement. "So I don't see anything wrong with ending a bit early just for today." He knocked his gavel against the wood plank on the desk. "Practice is adjourned. See you all tomorrow."

Everyone got up, too excited to hide their happiness at being released early, but Wes didn't notice. He was in the middle of an overexcited conversation with David and Thad, his eyes wide with possibility and the promise of something the Warblers hadn't had in a long time: a countertenor.

But I wasn't concerned with Wes' excitement. I merely noticed it on my way to Kurt, who was curling his long fingers delicately around the carrier handle on Pav's cage. In the other hand he held his book—the one with no identifications of any kind, just a rich brown cover made of smooth leather.

The serene look on his face vanished when I blocked his path. He didn't quite glare at me, but he certainly didn't look happy to see me either.

I reflected his own annoyance back at him and held up his note which I had forgotten was still in my hand. "You are going to explain this to me."

He looked at me as if I was being intentionally stupid and touched the back of his hand to his throat—a reminder of his "condition." I noticed for the first time then that he was taller than me by a few inches; two, maybe just about three, but no more than that.

I huffed at him. "Then I'll ask questions and you can either nod or shake your head no."

He looked offended by the mere suggestion and anger that I didn't understand began to swirl in his eyes. He pushed past me and headed to the exit. I pivoted without a second thought and followed him into the hallway.

I grabbed his shoulder and spun him around. This time there was no question that he was glaring.

"You don't get to do this," I told him, holding up the paper so close to his face that he wouldn't be able to read it properly. "You don't get to fuck with my head all day and then do *this*, whatever the hell *this* even means. You owe me an explanation." Then, on a whim, I added, "You have an ability, don't you?"

The way he looked around nervously at the mostly empty hallway before scowling at me with an accusation in his eyes implored me to *Shut. Up.*

More importantly, though, he didn't appear confused by my question; just alarmed at the idea that the two boys at the other end of the hall might have overheard. I took that as confirmation.

I wasn't above using it against him, either. With my eyebrows raised and a matter-of-fact expression on my face, I folded my arms across my chest and lifted a shoulder in a half shrug. "I can be louder if you want."

The look on his face told me I could go to hell, but he opened his carrier bag and placed his book carefully inside before grabbing my hand and pulling me forward. Not one to be dragged about like a child, I sped up until we were walking side by side. He tried to let go of my hand then, but I held tight and after a moment of clear confusion he let me hold it.

Though he was no longer dragging me, I still let him lead the way and he took me to the student lounge, somehow knowing despite it being his first day that it would be empty.

"How full circle of you," I commented, reminding him of our meeting the night before, and he huffed, letting me know that apparently I was being annoying.

I let go of his hand and dropped into one of the chairs, arranging my legs in a haphazard way my father would have frowned disapprovingly at. *Andersons don't sit like moneys, Blaine, straighten up.* The thought made me grin and was a nice distraction from the way my hand tingled with emptiness. I stuffed it in my pocket.

"So. You gonna tell me what your ability is?"

He took his time arranging Pav's cage on the desk before he got out a notebook and pen. *What's yours?* he wrote in the now familiar script.

I lifted a brow at the lined paper. "You can quit it with the smoke and mirrors, you know. Obviously there is nothing wrong with your vocal chords and that," I nodded at his notebook, "is killing trees. The environment is very important, Kurt." It sent a little thrill through me to be using his name.

He scowled at me and turned back to his bag. He pulled out a white board and a dry erase marker. He rewrote the question and held it up for me to see, a deadpan look on his face that was easily translated to, *happy now?*

I wondered why he hadn't just used that in the first place if he had it, but figured it would be a waste of time to ask.

"Hmm," I hummed, miming thoughtfulness as I rubbed my chin. "What's my ability?" I asked as if I had to think about it, just to annoy him. He didn't disappoint either. He huffed impatiently at me and I grinned. "What makes you think I've got one?"

He looked at me, exasperated, and let the board fall back on the table with a thunk. Folding his arms on the table, he redirected his gaze to Pav, who fluttered and tweeted softly in his cage. His lips stretched into the ghost of what could have been a smile. I let eyes trail the slight curve of his lips.

"I'm a human lie detector," I told him.

At my admission, he turned to look at me with wide eyes, his lips parted in surprise.

I shrugged, going for aloof. "Whenever someone lies, I hear the truth in my head. Only when I hear them lie out loud, though."

Only a very small number of people knew about me. Four, to be exact.

Now it was five.

I cleared my throat to get rid of the tightness there. "What can you do?"

His hands tightened around his marker, but he didn't uncap it. He left the board untouched on the table. His mouth fell open a touch, and I could see he was struggling with himself. I settled back in my chair, trying to convey through body language that he could take his time.

He studied me silently for a few more seconds before taking the tiniest breath.

"I can't lie," he said quietly in a voice that was just as pleasant as his singing voice, and almost beautiful enough to distract me from the whisper of truth in my head, *I can't tell the truth*.

Kurt's truth was gentle, its touch comforting. It reminded me of how it felt when my mother used to play with my hair when I was a child, only infinitely better.

I hadn't been expecting it, though, and no matter how pleasant it was, it still made me visibly start in surprise.

Everything became explicitly clear then; the reason why I felt so drawn to him, why he refused to speak, why Bennett ordered Wes to let him join the Warblers.

Kurt was my opposite. I was the only person in the world he would never be able to lie to. We were two different sides of the same fucked up coin.

We stared at each other and I noticed that he was flushed and breathing a bit heavy, his eyes wide with some emotion I couldn't identify. Or maybe there were just too many emotions there for me to decode.

Had he ever been able to tell the truth before? What did it feel like to be able to do it now, even if he couldn't hear it for himself?

I'm the only person in the world he'll never be able to lie to, I thought again and this time the gravity of it really hit me. I wondered what he thought about all this, about his inability to be anything but absolutely honest to me. I didn't know him well enough to be sure whether he would see it as a good thing.

The silence ticked on as he waited and I thought. Eventually his complexion lost its red color and went back to normal. He narrowed his eyes at me, searching, and I realized he was waiting for some sort of confirmation that I hadn't lied to him. The irony of it made me want to laugh, but I didn't.

"Well, that sucks," I said as I leaned back in my chair, displaying false relaxation. My entire body was tingling with the unknown. How would he react once the realization of what our meeting meant settled in?

Aloof, I told myself. You need to be aloof. Even the nicest people can turn vicious when backed into a corner.

I forced a grin. "I guess I would take a vow of silence too if everything I said came out as a lie."

His eyebrows shot up and I swore I saw his lips twitch with a smile.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Proper Way to Fall A Little Bit In Love With Kurt Hummel

Usually, just talking with him will do the trick...

The next day I made sure to wake up with the bell that signaled the end of second period and grinned openly at Kurt when he walked into the room. He walked stiffly towards the seat he had sat in the day before, eying me the whole way as if he expected me to suddenly jump on top of my desk and proclaim his secret to the class.

"Someone's jumpy," I said once he was situated at the desk directly to my left.

He bit his lip and ran his fingers somewhat nervously over the cover of his book, but otherwise said nothing.

"Relax, it's not like I'm going to say anything."

He looked around a bit frantically at that, searching for eavesdroppers. When he found none he shot an angry glare my way.

I couldn't help it, I laughed and he haughtily turned away from me to read his book.

Class started and I settled back in my chair, making myself comfortable. I didn't fight the allure this time and studied him with unabashed interest. Now that I knew why I felt so drawn to him I was able to look my fill without greatly disturbing myself. I checked him out like I would any other guy I found attractive, with a shit eating smirk on my face and a thick air of confidence.

Somewhere at the back of my mind I wondered what I was doing. For the sake of keeping my head above water so that I didn't completely drown myself in all things Kurt, our relationship had to be kept strictly platonic. Despite my casual sex only relationship rule, I sensed that the second I got involved with Kurt, even if it was just physically, I would be following him around like a lovesick puppy for the rest of my life. Therefore, there would be no one-time-only-but-still-hot-as-all-fuck sex with Kurt bent over the headmaster's desk for me, no matter how appealing that was. I had to keep my distance.

But teasing him was ridiculously amusing, so I indulged against my better judgment, purposely being obvious about the fact that I was leering at him.

It didn't take too long for him to sense that something about the way I was looking at him was different that way it had been from the day before. He lost focus on his book, shooting glances my way every few minutes and blushing at the obvious admiration in my eyes.

I quickly became addicted to the rise I was getting out of him, which was both adorable and entertaining as hell, so I upped the ante by biting one side of my lip as I smirked at him. As I stared into his eyes I slowly pulled my lip free of the hold my teeth had on it, dragging skin against bone. Kurt watched the whole thing with a slightly blank expression on his face and then took me by surprise. Instead of looking shyly away again, his eyes narrowed in suspicion and annoyance lit in his eyes.

The look on his face made it clear that he didn't appreciate being played with but I found myself chuckling and unable to recall the last time I had had so much fun.

With a vicious glare, he snatched a notebook from his bag and scribbled a quick note. He tore the paper, crumpled it, and it at me, scowling when I managed to catch it before it hit me between the eyes. I grinned at the message once I managed to smooth the paper down enough for the words to be legible: *Will you stop doing that?*

Doing what? I scrawled back before tossing it back to him without any kind of discretion.

The grip he had on his pen tightened and I was surprised that he hadn't left holes in the paper once I had it back in my hands.

Really? That's what you're going to go with? was his reply.

I'm having too much fun to stop, was mine. He rolled his eyes and returned his attention to his book, pretending to be engrossed.

I was just about to ask him what he was reading when Hedley snatched the paper from under my pen. "Passing notes, Mr. Anderson?" he asked in a triumphant tone that grated on my nerves.

I frowned and leaned back against the back of my chair. "Do I really need to answer that, or are we counting that as a rhetorical question?"

A vein in the side of Hedley's neck presented itself. I liked to call it Blaine. "Perhaps you'd like to share what you find so much more important than my class."

"Just about anything, actually," I said dryly, "so that might take me a while." I grinned. "But, hey, if you've got the time..."

Hedley's jaw bulged. "This is a school, Mr. Anderson, not a free for all," he snapped. "Either you pay attention in my class or you can walk yourself down to Headmaster Bennett's office."

I grabbed up my bag from the floor and stood up. "Actually, I could use a good walk." Math was almost over and I wasn't in Kurt's next class. At least this way I had an excuse to skip.

I looked down at Kurt, who was looking at me with raised eyebrows. "Don't go to the cafeteria after next period, alright? Meet me in the entrance hall."

Everyone turned to look at Kurt and he turned slightly red under all the attention. Still, he maintained his icy glare, red cheeks and all, and gave no indication of whether or not he would do as I asked. I grinned.

Hedley pointed forcibly at the door. "*Goodbye*, Mr. Anderson. And you can be sure I'll be checking in with the headmaster to see if went like you were supposed to."

Without bothering to look back I flicked my fingers out in mock salute as I strode to the door.

Bennett's office was a fun time. I sat there quietly and let him give me his usual spiel: my father would be disappointed, blah blah, not even daddy's money can keep me safe from expulsion if I keep it up, blah blah, need to get my act together, blah blah.

I have to say I didn't agree with the getting my act together bit. I liked to think of my 'disruptive behavior' as a benefit towards local society. You see, Bennett liked hearing himself talk, so giving him an excuse to bust out the good ol' soap box every once in a while and blab for an hour about my many atrocities made him feel like he'd accomplished something. Therefore, instead of crabbing around his front lawn later on and spraying unsuspecting kids with the garden hose, maybe he would get someone to sit on his dick and possibly even help him pull out the stick stuffed up his ass. That way, Bennett was happy, the kids were happy, and I was happy since I didn't have to go to class and thinking about all this really sort of amused me, as did the way the three hairs poking out of Bennett's left nostril blew each time exhaled, but that was another matter.

Anyway, in conclusion, my getting sent to Bennett's office was a win for everyone, really. Except for the poor woman who had to sit on Bennett's dick; she got the short stick out of the deal. There was nothing I could do about Bennett's anatomy, though, which no doubt left much to be desired, so that was out of my hands.

When Bennett was done playing authority figure I made my way to the entrance hall and sat down against a wall to wait for Kurt, who was nowhere to be found despite the fact that lunch period was already fifteen minutes in. I waited patiently, knowing he would show up eventually. For all his eye rolls and huffing and puffing, I could tell he was just as intrigued by me as I was by him. The difference was that I was a lot less stubborn about it.

Sure enough, after about ten minutes, he showed up with a frown on his face and his white board in his hands. Once he was a few feet away, he turned it over so I could see the front of it.

What do you want from me? Are we friends now or something?

It was kind of adorable and I couldn't help but grin up at him. "You're not going to talk to me?"

He didn't need to use the board to give me his answer. The *no* was pretty clear on his face.

I shrugged, unconcerned. "Maybe later," I said and stood up. I walked over to him and grabbed his hand, lacing our fingers together so that our palms could touch. (Not exactly platonic, but I couldn't help myself. I needed to be close to him.)

He lifted one eyebrow at our hands, an expression I was growing to like on him, but didn't pull away.

I gave his hand a light tug to get him moving. "Come on. I can only stand this place for so long. We're going for a walk."

We walked silently past the parking lots, the courtyards, and the few students eating outside, towards Dalton's one and only tree—a huge, old oak. Kurt craned his head backwards to look up at the leaves.

"This is the best spot on the grounds," I told him. "As you can see, there aren't rose bushes all over the damn place unlike everywhere else around here." I wrinkled my nose and dropped to the ground, letting go of Kurt's hand at the last second so I didn't yank him down with me. Stretching out on my back, I made myself comfortable. Kurt remained on his feet and looked down at me. "I fucking hate rose bushes. Bushes

in general are pointless—they make me feel claustrophobic and they're creepy in large groups, but rose bushes are just offensive."

His expression told me he thought I was strange and I shrugged. "Roses suck," I informed him. "They're overrated for a flower that can make you bleed if you hold on too tight." I pushed myself up on my elbows and frowned at him. "Don't you want to sit?"

Instead of answering my question, he simply wrote, *My pants*. I noted the fact that he used an incomplete statement instead of giving me a straight answer. It answered my question in a way that wouldn't force him to lie. It also reminded me of something I had been wondering about.

"So how does this whole dishonesty thing work? Are there exceptions? Like, can you tell the truth if you write it down?"

He looked at me and said nothing, his expression guarded.

"You can trust me, you know," I said in a more gentle tone.

He looked at me and I could tell that he didn't entirely believe me, but his lips parted and he spoke anyway. "Yes," was what he said and I heard the resounding, *No*, in my head.

I made a hissing noise. "Rough. What about gestures? Can you nod?"

"If I can't be honest on paper what makes you think I'd be able to be honest by physical means?" he asked and I grimaced at the idea of being so handicapped by your own self. He sighed at the frown on my face. "Are you starting to catch on that this is less like an ability and more like a curse?" he asked and I nodded my agreement.

Still, I had to admit I was impressed by his ability to communicate verbally through questions. It said that he was unwilling to be victim to his own condition.

"You found a loophole, though, I see," I said, referring to his redirection skills.

He glanced down at me and I saw he had that almost smile on his lips again, only this one was a touch devilish. "Did I?"

I laughed out loud. "Absolutely gorgeous *and* he refuses to just lie there and take it." I smirked at his wide eyed glance. "You *are* gay, right? Please tell me you're gay."

"W-Why? Are you?"

"You think I would point out that I find you attractive if I was straight?"

I could redirect, too.

He shrugged, scowling at the ground as his cheeks got a little bit redder. "How should I know?"

I took pity on him. "Breathe, gorgeous, it's just harmless flirting. And, yes, I'm gay."

Perhaps it was even a little too harmless. I was beginning to feel like I was on a date.

I looked up at Kurt. He wasn't just beautiful. He was cute, too—adorable, even, with his red cheeks and shy sideways glances. That was dangerous, too, I decided—perhaps even more so than getting physically involved with him. My feelings towards him were a little bit too sentimental for comfort.

I liked him. I liked his bite and his sarcasm and his wit. I liked his stubborn refusal to let his restrictions keep him from living how he wanted to.

Again, it was brought to my attention how very easily I could get addicted to Kurt Hummel—especially if I wasn't careful. Those beautiful eyes glanced my way again. *Very* careful.

"So you gonna answer my question or what?" I prompted against my better judgment. I couldn't help it. I needed to know more and he was a fascinating enigma. "You can blink once for yes and two for no," I said with a cheeky grin. He shot me a vicious look.

"I'm straight," he snapped.

"Was that so difficult?" I asked after hearing his truth.

His expression asked, "Do you really want to know?" and I chuckled in response before lowing myself back down.

After that we were quiet for a while. It was unusually hot for the end of September and the shine of the sun through the still green leaves felt nice on my face. Eventually Kurt sat very carefully down on one of the larger roots not covered by the dirt and grass and I smiled at him. He looked back at me with inquisitive eyes.

"How can you tell when someone is lying to you?" he asked softly, leaning forward slightly to wrap his arms around his raised knees.

I shifted onto my side to see him better, propping my head up with one arm. "In layman's terms, I hear the truth in my head."

"And the more complex version?"

"Difficult to explain. It's kind of like hearing someone's thoughts, only more complicated. It's not like I was given a manual or anything, but I don't think I hear what the person is actually thinking when they lie. It's more like I hear in my head what the person would have had to say to be completely honest."

His eyes shifted momentarily to the side as he thought about it. "So, I say after dinner I went straight to bed and you hear...?"

My face scrunched with concentration as I struggled to listen to the rundown in my head and reiterate it at the same time. I missed a few of the more minor details, but got it mostly right. "After dinner I did my homework, listened to Ingrid Michaelson songs while I went through my nighttime skincare routine, brushed my teeth, texted my dad 'I love you and good night' and told him to send my love to Carole and Finn, I wondered briefly if Sebastian's absence at night was going to be a reoccurring thing—keep your fingers crossed on that one—got into bed and..." My eyebrows lifted at the last bit and I trailed off to give Kurt's truth my full attention.

Kurt squirmed. "And what?" he asked nervously.

A devilish grin started slowly at my lips. "And thought about Blaine Anderson until I fell asleep." Kurt turned cherry red and I smirked at him. "Did you really? Something you care to elaborate on?"

He looked away and said nothing.

I laughed. "Didn't think it would be that thorough, huh?"

"What's it like hearing people's voices in your head?" he asked in lieu of a response.

The grin slipped from my face and I turned serious once again. "Depends on whose voice it is."

He blinked. "What do you mean?"

"If the person has a really annoying mental voice... eh, it's hard to explain. Sometimes the voices come in too loud or they just sound inhuman. The inhuman ones used to scare the shit out of me when I was a kid. The worst part is feeling trapped, though." I shrugged. "It's not something I can escape by covering my ears, you know?"

He frowned thoughtfully and after a minute, a worried look settled on his face. "Is my voice one of the bad ones?"

I shook my head. "Your voice is beautiful," I told him seriously, looking right into his eyes and letting the raw honesty I felt shine through.

He flushed again and this time I couldn't bring myself to grin playfully at him, even though I knew I probably should have, just to make light of the situation and release some of the tension in the air. My lips tingled as we continued to look into each other's eyes and for a wild moment I wondered what would happen if I just leaned up and kissed him. I would keep my eyes closed and tilt my head to the right, maybe even cradle the side of his head in my hand, just to feel more of his skin against mine. I wondered if he would kiss me back.

"Thank you," he said quietly.

"You're welcome."

Wes kept us longer than usual for Warbler practice, much to my annoyance, and I wasn't the only one peeved off. It was hot enough in the practice room to make everyone crabby. Even Trent was less bubbly than usual and Kurt looked about ready to pass out.

Wes was relentless. He ignored everyone's angry glares and pleas for mercy and ordered us to toughen up and stop whining ("Correct me if I'm wrong, boys, but did I or did I not say yesterday that practice was *adjourned*? We all know what adjourned means, yes?"). Our groans fell on deaf ears.

Still, despite fifteen more minutes of side-stepping like a robot, it was fifteen more minutes I got to spend with Kurt, even if he did look exhausted. I couldn't blame him. Side-stepping sounded easy enough, but do it continuously for over hour and you start to feel it. The heat certainly didn't help.

After practice I headed straight for the showers, parting ways with Kurt halfway between the bathrooms and the dorms. I had to forcibly peel my uniform from my body because of how much I had been sweating (Wes insisted that everyone be in uniform for practice and I had learned a long time ago that the wrath of Wesley Montgomery was a force with which one did not fuck), so it took a bit longer than usual, but struggle was well worth it once the cool shower water was trailing down my too hot skin.

The time spent alone in the shower forced me to think, so of course I thought about Kurt. There was still so much I wanted to know about him. Like, what kind of a relationship did he have with his family (I kept thinking about the texts he had sent the night before to his father)? What was his favorite thing to do on rainy days? What did he love most? And, most importantly, how had he not been classified as a D4 by SIIPA?

For those of you who don't know, and I'm assuming that's about 99.999 percent of you, SIIPA (pronounced Seepa) stands for Special Intelligence for Individuals with Preternatural Abilities. Upon discovering what our abilities are, SIIPA categorizes us into one of five Divisions.

People classified as D1 are understood to be fully capable of functioning within 'normal' society and are not assigned a handler. Touch empaths, or people with the ability to read the emotions of others through physical contact, are typically classified as D1.

D2s generally consist of the less powerful psychics. Usually you'll find a D2 referring to herself as Madame Something-Or-Other as she wiggles her fingers at a crystal ball she bought on eBay and answers mundane questions about how many children the sap sitting spellbound across from her will have and what letter the name of his one true love starts with.

Everyone classified as D2 or higher is assigned a handler. Handlers are the SIIPA agents who monitor the actions of all us freaks. A lot of Handers are D1s but some 'normal' people are thrown into the mix, too.

A D3 is any individual who has an ability that could *potentially* prevent him or her from functioning in normal society. Us D3s are kept under very close watch by SIIPA. Should any of us step out of line, our classification will be bumped up to D4 and we'll be taken into SIIPA custody.

A D4 is someone whose ability prohibits him from blending in with normal society. D4s are rounded up and sent to live in a facility where they will be 'safe.'

Finally there are D5s.

D5s are considered to be dangerous to themselves and everyone around them. They are institutionalized for their own safety and are only allowed contact with others in very special circumstances. Thinking about D5s and the facilities they are kept in depresses me, so if you don't mind I'm going to move on. If you do mind, I'm still going to move on.

As I showered, I thought a lot about Kurt's condition and how it differed from my own. Usually someone like Kurt who was bound and controlled by his condition to lie (despite his apparent determination not to be) would be classified as D4. I myself was bound by my own ability, but mine was less obvious than Kurt's. I could hide my ability from normal people, which was why I was classified as a D3 (not a D2 because there was always the possibility I could snap under the constant influx of truth in my skull, kind of like the way I freaked out in the cafeteria, only on a much larger scale). For the most part, though, I could make myself look normal and blend in. Kurt could hide the fact that he was forced to lie, but the way he hid it made him stand out because it made him noticeably different. SIIPA didn't like for us to stand out.

And what would happen to Kurt once people began to notice that he wasn't quite normal—not in a preternatural way, but just strange in general? SIIPA didn't like for us to be strange either, and even the most innocent situations were potentially dangerous for Kurt.

For example, Wes might ask me "You're singing 'Teenage Dream' tomorrow, right?" the day before a scheduled performance and it would be my job to say yes. It was the type of question people asked all the time—just to confirm that everyone was on the same page. When a question like was asked, both the asker and the person answering already knew what the response would be. Wes would already know that I was going to say yes. In fact, he would expect me to say yes.

What would Kurt do in that situation? Say nothing? It wasn't like he could lie. Sooner or later, he was going to get trapped.

With that cryptic thought, I turned the cold water tap to shut the water off. It probably wouldn't do me any good to wonder too much about Kurt. I didn't think he would actually share that sort of information with me anyway. At least not yet.

I pulled most of my uniform back on after doing a shitty job of drying myself off with my blazer. Then, with my blazer tossed over my shoulder, and my shirt unbuttoned due to sheer laziness, I walked back to my dorm.

When I got there I found Sebastian splayed across my bed naked as the day he was born. He was stretched out on his back with one leg bent at the knee and his arms folded under his head looking like the picture of ease.

"What the *fuck*?"

Sebastian popped and eye open and grinned at me. "Hey, Blaine. Steven stepped out to get food—we're in between rounds at the moment." He rolled to the side and gripped my sheets, pressing his face in close to breathe deep. "I just decided lay down here for a while. It smells just like you." He grinned.

Nonplused, I walked over to the nightstand by the bed and dropped my carrier bag on the floor. "Get off my bed, Smythe."

Sebastian grinned like a cat and moved to stretch out on his back again, his bent leg falling more to the side so that he was on display. He rolled his hips a little. "I don't think I will."

Pulling my blazer from my shoulders, I whipped the material down so that it smacked against his naked crotch with an audible *CRACK*.

Air whooshed out of his lungs and Sebastian's eyes went wide a moment before they squeezed shut and his hands shot down to cup himself. He rolled onto his side, going into the fetal position, his mouth still wide open and his face screwed up. I rolled my eyes and used my foot to push him off my bed. He landed on the floor with thump and a groan.

I walked around the bed to where he lay on the floor. I bent down into a squat and leaned forward, invading his personal space. "If you ever go near my bed again, naked or otherwise, you won't like what I do to yours."

"Fuck you," was his breathless response.

I grinned. "I don't think you can get it up right now."

The door opened then and Steven's shocked gasp reached my ears. "Oh my god!" he shrieked as he pushed past me and dropped down next to Sebastian. Sebastian pushed Steven away and rolled to his other side as he let out a string of curses. Rejected, Steven turned his accusatory eyes on me. "What did you do?"

I shrugged. "Whipped him with my blazer."

"In the private?" Steven exclaimed, making my eyebrows shoot towards my hair line.

"Yes, Steven," I rolled my eyes, "in the *private*." I rolled my eyes again and stood up, leaving Steven to deal with Sebastian, who still had both hands on his crotch. I snorted to myself. "In the private," I muttered once more, because, really, who said shit like that? I quickly exchanged my dress shirt and pants for the first tank top and pair of sweatpants I could find and got the fuck out of dodge, needing to be away from the offensive idiocy in the air.

Sebastian had been inside my dorm twice now without my permission, so I saw no qualms about heading over to his. There was soft music coming from inside, but it silenced once I knocked. Kurt opened the door a few seconds later wearing white leggings that hugged his legs sinfully and a long tan sweater with a wide neckline that showed the pale skin of his shoulders. It obviously wasn't an outfit made for a male, but fuck did he pull it off.

"Blaine?" he asked, obviously surprised, and I nearly whined at the sound of my own name.

"Hey, gorgeous."

He rolled his eyes. "Did you want something?" he asked, but not before checking to see whether there was anyone else in the hallway who might hear.

"Yeah, for you to say my name again," I answered honestly. He huffed his annoyance and I chuckled, but decided to stop teasing him. "Sebastian is naked in my room—again—and there are only so many times I can take that sort of thing before I get violent, so can I come in?"

Kurt's eyes went wide. "He's..."

"Naked. In my room. Probably going to fuck my roommate once he regains the feeling in his dick."

He scrunched up his nose. "Do I want to know?"

"It might amuse you. But I can't tell you about it unless you let me in."

He considered that for a moment before stepping back and holding the door open wide enough to admit me. I grinned cheekily at him and stepped inside and he shut the door behind me.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Proper Way to Go From Bad to Worse

Generally I'm someone who goes with the flow. The big stuff roles off my shoulders and so does most of the other stuff, but sometimes the little things get to me in a big way. When my mood takes a turn, it makes it count, complete with body pushing momentum, two tires suspended in the air, and screaming pedestrians running for their lives. Cooper used to tell me I was the most over dramatic easygoing person he had ever met. I proved him right that first night I went to Kurt's dorm...

Kurt didn't tell me to but I made myself at home anyway, flopping onto his bed and settling myself comfortably against the pillows there. I had enough manners to toe off my shoes before I stretched my legs out at least.

Kurt studied me with a calculating expression. "Comfortable?"

"Yes, actually," I grinned. "You don't mind, do you?" I probably should have asked that first, but the damage was already done.

He lifted an eyebrow at me. "Does it matter?"

I smiled at him. "If you really wanted me to get up I might contemplate considering it."

On principle, I was a button pusher. My new favorite button to push was Kurt's. Still, if he had asked me to get up and meant it I probably would have done it.

"Contemplate considering it," he repeated slowly, eyebrows draw together. "Should I be flattered?" He sat himself down backwards on the cushioned bench in front of the desk that no longer looked like a desk. He had turned it into some sort of vanity table, complete with a humongous mirror that was bordered on all four sides with light bulbs. In front of the mirror sat a collection of jars that were to my guess filled with lotion or cream or some other crap people smeared on their skin.

I looked away from the jars and back at Kurt. "Oh, very." I grinned and shifted a bit against his pillows. "You don't have to try to entertain me or anything. Just do whatever you would normally do. I'm just here for the bed."

He rolled his eyes, but I could tell he was amused. With a shrug he spun on his bench to face the mirror and I remained still, content to lay back and watch him. He turned his music back on (something in French that I didn't recognize) and screwed the caps back on to the jars that had already been open when I came in. Then he pulled three others forward and opened those one at a time. His eyes flicked to mine in the mirror as he dipped his fingers in one of the jars and smeared it around on his fingers with his thumb. He looked away once he started applying the cream to his cheeks.

It was oddly fascinating to watch. I had never really gotten to know any of the guys I had been interested in, so I really didn't know much about them other than how tight their asses felt wrapped around my dick, but I liked to think that I wasn't into girly men. Before that night I would have put owning a vanity table and globing your face up with a zillion different lotions right up there with putting on a blonde wig and parading around in a dress, which was great and all if that's what you're into, but it wasn't for me.

Kurt surprised me, though. There was nothing feminine about what he was doing. Sure, his movements were soft in the way I imagined most women's would be, but I seriously doubted that a woman's biceps would flex under his rolled up sleeves the way Kurt's did as he moved his hand from the cream to his face and back again. And when he tipped his head back, the way his Adam's apple pressed against the skin of his neck and bobbed each time he swallowed was definitely not girly. And those leggings he was wearing... if that thigh-length sweater hadn't been in the way I was sure there would be a definite bulge there that a woman certainly wouldn't have.

I was transfixed. I was also really turned on.

Kurt's eyes found mine in the mirror again and his cheeks flushed. He squirmed a little in his seat. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

I ignored the pulse of blood between my legs and shrugged. "Watching you do that is way hotter than I thought it would be."

His mouth fell open. I heard him speak, but didn't comprehend the words because I was too busy staring at his lips. I heard the truth in my head, though: *You can't just say things like that. We barely know each other.*

"I know," I conceded his point. "But that doesn't make it any less true."

His expression told me he didn't know what to do with that bit of knowledge, and I didn't really know either, so I broke eye contact and looked up at the ceiling. I took a few breaths through my mouth.

"So," he said, trying and failing to sound nonchalant when his voice came at a higher pitch than what was normal, "what happened with Sebastian?"

"I whipped him in the nads." I grinned at the memory.

Kurt's eyes got wide. "You whipped him?"

"Relax, gorgeous, I didn't do it with a real whip or anything if that's what you were thinking. I had to improvise with my blazer, which was soaking wet because I used it as a towel so it connected a lot harder than it would have otherwise."

"That's not sadistic or anything," he commented dryly at the happy grin on my face and my detector corrected his sarcasm. My condition lumped sarcasm in with lies apparently so did Kurt's. I was learning a lot about him today.

"Hey, I had no choice," I argued. "He wouldn't get off my bed."

He deadpanned at me and I laughed at the look on his face. "Are you serious?" he asked.

I grinned at him. "You can whip me if you want to. I'll strip down for you and everything."

I had to admit, the thought of Kurt whipping me wasn't exactly *unappealing*. So long as he steered clear of my cock and balls, it might not be so bad. I was learning a lot about myself as well.

Kurt scowled at me, unimpressed.

"Just a suggestion, gorgeous. You might like it. Hell, I might like it, which would be a new thing for me."

He opened his mouth to say something but his cellphone cut him off. I was surprised to hear John Mellencamp's "Pink Houses."

Kurt wiped his hands on a towel before answering. "Hey, Dad," he greeted with a smile.

I didn't know if it was the volume on Kurt's phone or if his father just had a voice that carried, but I heard every word. "Hey, kid, do you know where my tie is? The gray one?"

"Which one?" Kurt asked.

"I have more than one gray tie?"

Kurt sighed. "What is Carole wearing?"

"Uhh... that blue dress I think. The one you got her for her birthday."

Kurt nodded. "It's not in your closet," he lied. *It's in your closet.*

"Closet. Right. Where in the closet? Around the bar, looped around a shirt—Kurt, what the hell is this thing? When did I get a hanger for ties?"

"Focus, Dad. Do you see them?"

"Yeah, I see 'em. A gray one and a light gray one. This hanger thing was a waste of money, kid. A regular hanger would have done the job just as good."

"Granite and gray marble, Dad. Wrinkles."

"Yeah, yeah. Which one am I going with here?"

"Granite." *Gray marble.*

"English, Kurt."

Kurt huffed. "The dark gray one." *The light gray.*

"Light gray. Got it. Thanks, Kurt. Wish me luck okay? I'll text you her answer later."

"Night, Dad."

"Love you, kid."

Kurt smiled but didn't reply. He disconnected the call. His smile became apologetic as he looked back at me. "My dad," he said.

I nodded because I didn't trust myself to speak just yet. Jealous was exactly the word to describe how I was feeling. There was an ugly pit right at the center of my stomach and with each word I replayed in my head from Kurt's conversation with his father, the pit got a little bit wider.

They had sounded perfect together, like the poster men for successful father-son relationships. The way they had maneuvered so effortlessly around Kurt's condition made my stomach ache. I didn't even know the man's name, but I knew without a doubt that Kurt's father would never make his son feel ashamed for being conditioned the way he was.

I finally found my voice. "Does he know you're gay?"

Kurt's truth echoed in my head: *Yes, he knows.*

Of course he knew. Suddenly the voice and the perfect conversation weren't enough. I had to torture myself with a face too.

"Do you have a picture of the two of you together?"

Kurt studied me for a second. He looked like he wanted to say something but in the end he pointed to the nightstand beside me and said nothing.

The man in the framed picture matched the gruff voice I had heard over the phone, but was completely different from the image I had created in my head of what accepting fathers with homosexual sons should look like. In my mind, those fathers, the accepting ones, were the more effeminate men, and effeminate Kurt's father was definitely not. He looked like someone who worked with his hands and wasn't afraid of dirt and sweat and grime. He looked like someone who had been on the football team in high school and maybe even college; the guy who had dated the all prettiest girls and expected his son to do the same. That

was the man who had his arm around Kurt. He wasn't smiling, but he looked proud to have Kurt under his arm—Kurt with his head tilted to one side, a ready-and-perfect-for-the-camera smile on his face, hair purposely and perfectly styled, dressed in a gray shirt, black leggings, knee high boots, and a fucking *skirt*. They were standing in what appeared to be a car shop.

"What's his name?"

Kurt couldn't tell me of course, not verbally anyway. My detector had to do it for him, whispering *Burt Hummel* in my head. The picture went slack in my hands and I frowned. "How have they not locked you up?" I asked without really meaning to.

Kurt flinched at the question.

"I mean, SIIPA is ruthless, so how come they haven't put you away in an institution?"

I was surprised when he answered me. I hadn't expected him to.

"I don't know," he said softly. *My aunt is my handler. She protects me.*

My eyebrows shot up. "How is that possible? It's against SIIPA's policy for handlers to be related to their assignments." Well, it was *supposed* to be against policy. There were two exceptions to that rule.

Again, he told me he didn't know. *She's not my blood relative. She was my mother's best friend.*

I nodded and studied the picture of Kurt and Burt in my hands. "You're lucky," I told him, "to have a handler that cares about you."

Kurt frowned at me. "Are you okay?"

I tore my eyes away from Burt's proud eyes and grinned hollowly at the boy in front of me. "Not really, gorgeous, but I'll live."

Kurt stood up from the stool and walked over to sit beside me on the bed. He reached out with his right hand to take my left one and laced our fingers together. The gesture felt familiar by then and I let my body lean against his enough so that our shoulders would touch. We stayed that way for a long time.

I didn't leave Kurt's room until after one in the morning. He said good night to me with a worried frown on his face, but I was in a crap mood and once I got like that I tended to stay that way for a while, so my attempts to reassure him that I would be fine were half assed at best.

I was in one of those shit moods that really had no business being that serious. I mean, so Kurt's father was awesome and mine sucked. So what? I needed to get the fuck over it and stop acting like a fucking girl on her period.

I collapsed onto one of the couches in the lounge scowling and completely annoyed with myself.

I woke up a couple hours later feeling sleep deprived and pissed off. I wasn't a morning person on the best of days, but that morning my mood was especially fowl. It was lucky for Sebastian that he was out of my dorm by the time I dragged myself upstairs.

"There you are," Steven said as soon as I walked in. He placed his hands on his hips. "We need to talk about your penchant towards violence when it comes to—"

"Do me a favor, Steven, and just shut the fuck up. I'm not in the mood."

Steven blinked at me. "What's wrong with you?" he asked, confusion evident in his voice.

Steven and I didn't like each other, but our relationship usually didn't involve me talking to him like that. I would go out of my way to annoy him and get under his skin, but unless he did something to really piss me off, usually I was an ass and not an asshole. I wasn't about to apologize though.

Still frowning confusedly, he turned to look over at his desk. I really just wanted to take a shower and clear my head so I left him to do whatever it was he was doing and started searching around on the floor for a blazer that wasn't still soaked. I realized too late that I probably shouldn't have left the one from the night before balled up on the floor.

I had barely started looking when an obnoxious groan escaped Steven's lips. "Oh my god, forget I asked. I forgot the last Saturday of the month is this week."

I froze bent over one of my larger piles of clothing. "What?"

There was no way. There was just no way I had forgotten.

Steven looked at me like I had three heads. "You didn't know?"

I shoved by him in my hurry to see for myself, completely forgetting that I had a calendar on my phone, which was in my pocket. That pit that had formed in my stomach the night before grew as I looked over month of September on Steven's desk calendar. Steven was one of those narcotic people who crossed off each day with a large black X, and sure enough, the Xs indicated that it was Thursday, two days before Saturday the twenty-fourth, which was indeed the last Saturday in September.

"You seriously didn't know?" Steven asked as he came to stand beside me. "What's got you in such a bad mood then?"

I didn't answer him. My head was a mess. I had *never* forgotten before. The last Saturday of the month was always there in the back of my mind, taunting me with the promise of good and bad things to come.

Guilt settled in and stayed with me throughout the day. I went through the motions of going to class, which mostly consisted of staring out the window. Kurt watched me, looking worried, but I was too busy trying to mentally prepare myself for what I should have been preparing for all week to respond to his worried looks.

I sang like shit at Warblers practice. Wes grimaced often, but bit his tongue and kept pushing us as if I didn't sound like dying cat. After practice, I showered for over an hour. When I got back to the dorm, I pulled Sebastian off of Steven and propelled him into the hallway before slamming the door in his stunned face. It was way too early to try, but I struggled to force myself to sleep. I managed it eventually but woke up several times during the night.

On Friday, Kurt kept giving me odd looks in class but otherwise didn't try to communicate with me, which I was grateful for. My singing at practice was even worse than it had been the day before and Wes ended practice early.

I didn't avoid Kurt that night. I couldn't. There were some things I had to do to get ready for the next day, but I couldn't face the thought of going by myself despite the fact that I had always gone alone before.

I knocked on Kurt's door dressed in jeans, a black hoodie, and my nearly worn out converse. My hair was still soaking wet from my shower; the chill I would feel once I was outside would help unscramble my

thoughts. Kurt answered the door in his white leggings, but his sweater tonight was green and it fell off one shoulder. I noticed Sebastian sitting on his own bed for a change, and he glared when he saw me. It was strange to see him fully clothed outside of class.

"Go away," Sebastian said, obviously still upset over the night before.

I ignored him. I didn't want to go inside anyway. I wanted Kurt to come out. "I have to go somewhere. Will you come with me?" I asked softly enough that Sebastian wouldn't be able to hear. Not because it was a secret, or anything. I just wanted to annoy him.

Kurt gestured to his outfit.

"I can wait for you to change."

I waited Kurt to get changed sitting in the hallway against the wall opposite Kurt's dorm with my head tilted back. I tried not to think too much about the next day. It was going to be one of the really bad ones.

I looked at the clock on my phone. Less than twelve hours now.

Kurt came out looking perfect and beautiful, like always. His jeans were almost as form fitting as his leggings, but it was the shirt that caught my attention and held it for a few seconds. The sweaters he wore with his leggings were long and loose, more for comfort than style in my opinion, though I was pretty sure each one of them cost more than my entire outfit. The button-up shirt he was wearing wasn't loose or long. It was tucked into his pants to show off his long legs and it clung nicely to his chest. Not too tight, but tight enough to prove that his upper body was definitely nice to look at. His shoulders were broad and looked powerful and I felt the truly strange desire to curl my arms around his neck and rest them there. I was turning into such a fucking sap.

I stood up. "Come on. We'll take my car."

CHAPTER NINE

The Proper Way to Do What Needs to Be Done

My motto is Just Do It when it comes to doing the things that need doing. Just like the Nike ad... Just do it... If you repeat it to yourself enough times, those words become law...

Kurt stopped dead in his tracks when I pointed to my car in the lot. It was a common reaction when people saw my car for the first time. I twirled my keys around my forefinger and walked around the car to the driver's side. I was just tall enough to see over the top of the car to look at him where he stood frozen on the other side. "Coming?" I asked in an overtly bright tone.

Kurt looked away from the car to stare at me and remained where he was. "Is that safe to drive?"

"Of course," I grinned, pressing the unlock button on the remote. I pulled open my door and perched myself up on the lip of the car to see him better. "It's safer than safe. Like a tank." I pounded twice on the top with a fist to prove my point.

Kurt looked doubtful but slowly walked to the passenger door, which was a bright cotton candy pink, unlike the rest of the car, which was painted dull black and dented in several places.

I laughed when Kurt grabbed the handle too delicately, looking for all the world like he'd rather do anything else than touch my junker of a sedan. Once the door popped open, he maneuvered it with only two fingers. I dropped from my perch and swung into my own seat just in time to see him sit himself gingerly down on the lime green colored passenger seat (my seat was a repulsive shade of orange).

"You know you like it," I told him, smiling. His answering look was priceless. I figured that it was probably best that he hadn't been able to see the driver's side of the car, which had HOMOBILE spray painted along the entire length of the car in neon yellow. I was pretty proud of it.

Anything to piss my father off.

"Would you believe it only cost me three hundred bucks?"

He looked at me with a lemon sucking expression on his face, one that clearly asked, *that much, huh?* and I laughed.

It got quiet after that.

Kurt didn't speak again until Dalton had long since disappeared from my rear-view mirror and I had gone quiet too. The farther away from the school we got, the more I was reminded of what I would be doing the next day.

"Where are we going?" he broke our near fifteen minutes of silence, raising his voice a little to be heard over the rush of the wind. I had rolled the window on my side about half way down. I had been right about the feel of the cool air on my sopping wet hair, it felt amazing.

"Wal-Mart," I answered and saw his eyebrows shoot up from the corner of my eye. "Not what you were expecting, I take it?"

"Why... Wal-Mart?" he asked neutrally but he stumbled over the word *Wal-Mart* as if it was a hard word to conjure to his tongue. I went out on a total limb and guessed that Wal-Mart wasn't Kurt Hummel's favorite store in the world.

Kurt's question settled between us and I debated on how much of myself I was willing to share with him. I shut the window, the flickering blare of the wind suddenly grating on my nerves. I knew in another five minutes I would probably open it again. I was indecisive like that when I was on edge. "I'm going out tomorrow and I have to get some stuff," I said, going with the little-as-possibly policy.

When I didn't say anything else, he twirled his wrist in my direction to urge me to elaborate. I caught the motion in the corner of my eye.

"What?" I asked, playing dumb.

He folded his arms and stared at me, letting his actions speak for themselves.

I couldn't help it. I chuckled. He was just so hot and cold it was hilarious. One minute he was shy and blushed at the slightest effort on my part and the next he was pushy and demanding and more sarcastic than anything. I decided a little more wouldn't do either of us any harm. "Gum and crappy movies."

His chin dropped towards his chest and he deadpanned at me through his lashes. "Seriously? That's what we're getting? Gum and crappy movies?"

"Well, no. *We* aren't getting gum and crappy movies, *I* am getting gum and crappy movies. You are here to keep me sane and look hot."

He rolled his eyes and changed the subject. "Can we listen to music or something?"

"Sure," I agreed easily. "My iPod is in the glove compartment if you want to look through it for something you like. Or if you have yours just plug it in. The wire should be in there too."

"In the glove compartment?"

"Yessir."

He opted to play his own music, which didn't really surprise me. The music from *Chicago* came on, which was a play I didn't particularly care for but I didn't hate it either.

When I got on Route 33 Kurt lowered the music so he could be heard over the first chorus of "We Both Reached for the Gun."

"How far is this place?" he asked, confusion evident in his tone.

"Bellefontaine," I told him. I probably should have mentioned that before we left.

"Why there?"

It was a valid question. Bellefontaine was an hour away, give or take some time, which made little sense when we would pass by quite a few Wal-Marts on the way. There was one in Columbus that was less than fifteen minutes away from Dalton.

"This one is special," I told him with finality and he let the subject drop.

We pulled into the Bellefontaine Supercenter just as *Chicago* finished and the music from *Wicked* came on, which was just as well because I hated that play and its music with a passion.

I lead us to the candy section first and examined the selection of Bazooka Gum before picking up the biggest tub I could find and tucking it under my arm. Kurt was frowning at me when I straightened from my crouched position and I grinned sheepishly at him. "Thought I was kidding, didn't you?"

When he didn't respond (not that he had to because the answer was pretty well obvious) I started for the electronics section. Kurt followed beside me and I grabbed his hand, locking our fingers together. He jumped a little at the contact and glanced nervously around the aisles as we passed by for people lying in wait with their disgust. He didn't pull away, but everyone was too wrapped up in their own shit to notice the two boys who holding each other's hands. I wondered what he would have done had they been looking. I liked to think that he wouldn't have pulled away but I wasn't sure.

When we got to the electronics section I let my fingers go lax and gave Kurt's hand a little shake. "Need this back now, gorgeous."

He snorted and pulled his hand away to fold his arms against his chest. "Because I'm the one who grabbed it in the first place," he snarked. His truth fired off in my head as soon as all the words were out of his mouth and I chuckled at him before fishing my phone out of my pocket.

I pulled up the name Bitches in my contacts list and sent a quick message: *Get out here.*

When I'm good and ready, fuckhead, was her reply. I grinned and stuffed the phone back in my pocket.

Bitches' real name was Santana and she was my kind of best friend. She knew more about me than most people did, anyway, and I liked her. The name Bitches was a private joke between the two of us—it was a reference to her boobs, which we decided to refer to as Bitches after she got her boob job because we had both been completely fucked up drunk at the time and it had seemed truly hilarious to discuss how bitchin' her new bitches were. The humor of it wore off with the effects of the alcohol, but the name stuck.

"Define crappy movie," Kurt's voice reached my ears. He was looking through the movies in the five dollars and under box. He held one of the DVD cases between his thumb and forefinger and was using it to push the others aside. I smiled, shaking my head at him, appreciating how adorable he was, and slipped my arms around his waist from behind. He tensed, but instead of releasing him I moved closer until my front was flush against his back. I reached up on my tip toes to put my chin on his shoulder. I kind of loved how tall he was—tall enough to have those long, sexy legs, but still short enough for me to trace the shell

of his ear with my tongue if I wanted. I wondered what he would do if I actually did it. Flip out, most likely. I grinned at the thought.

"They won't bite you, gorgeous," I whispered to him, but kept my tongue to myself.

He shivered a little and removed my arms from around his waist and stepped away. He pinned me with a narrow look when I laughed at him and I held up my hands in surrender to keep him from clawing my face off. "Sorry, sorry," I lied, because I was anything but.

He rolled his eyes and held out the movie that he was holding in his hand for me to see. "Will this suffice?"

I lifted eyebrows at his choice. "*Ferngully*?" I asked, taking the animated children's movie out of his hands. "No way. This movie is a classic."

Kurt studied me as if he was considering having me committed somewhere and I couldn't help but laugh again.

"Don't give me that look, Hummel. It *is*," I insisted as I tossed the movie back in the pile. "Besides, *Ferngully* wouldn't have worked anyway," I told him. "Only movies that have been black listed apply, and movies that the store has in stock or has had in stock in the past won't be on the black list." I shrugged at his questioning look. "It's a thing."

Kurt opened his mouth, presumably to ask how we were supposed to find a movie the store didn't have available for purchase, when something behind me caught his attention. I watched his expression turn annoyed and unpleasant as he stared at whatever it was. Curious, I turned and saw Santana walking towards us, and it took me a couple of second to realize that she wasn't looking at me and that she was the one Kurt was looking at and not the bag lady with frizzy hair and hot pink slippers.

I noted the *How May I Help You* written in crisp white on the front of her blue Wal-Mart vest and got momentarily distracted by it. The fact that it actually said *How May I Help You?* meant that her boss had finally noticed that she had changed the slogan to a simple, but elegantly written *Fuck You* on the two vests she been given by the company and had replaced them new ones. I figured by next month it would be back to the way she liked it.

"Well if it isn't Lady Lips," she said, looking at Kurt with amusement in her eyes. "Finn told us that you go to Dalton Academy for Homos now, though I can't say I expected you to get friendly with poster boy Blaine. You must be better on your knees than I thought, Hummel."

Kurt glowered at her and I was surprised to see him immediately flip her off.

Santana's answering grin was less snarky and more seductive in a way that probably would have had me popping an instant boner had I swung that way.

"How do you two know each other?" I asked, glancing from one to the other. I wasn't sure who to direct the question to. I'd had it set up in my head that Kurt didn't talk to anyone outside of his family (excluding myself, of course), but he and Santana seemed pretty familiar with each other. Santana even seemed to like him and she hated pretty much everyone on principle.

But Kurt remained silent and it was Santana who answered. "Hummel went to my school. We were on the cheerleading team together."

I grinned at that, turning to Kurt to look him up and down, picturing him in a tightfitting polyester uniform. It was an inviting image. "Re-e-eally?" Now *that* I could get it up for. Kurt went a little red but maintained his annoyed expression.

Santana rolled her eyes at me. "If you pop a boner in my store I'm kicking your hobbit ass out."

I widened my lips with a shit eating grin. "Better make this quick then."

She snorted and turned away from us to head for the cash register in the photography section. Kurt and I followed.

"I've only got one this month," she said as she bent down to grab something from a shelf unseen behind the register.

I frowned at that. "What do you mean you only have one?"

She poked her head up and shot me an impatient look. "Means I have more than zero and less than two."

I mirrored her expression, but she was back to poking around down below and didn't catch it. "Why don't you try that again without the claws?"

"Suck my dick, Anderson."

"Baby, if you *had* a dick, I'd be all over it," I said and she snorted again. I glanced over at Kurt to see how he was fairing through all this. He was still standing next to me, so better than most other people, and that was despite the slightly skeptical look he had on his face, as if he couldn't really decide what he ought to do with our behavior.

Santana stood up finally and slapped a DVD on the counter. I looked at it dismissively before looking back at her. "How am I supposed to make a choice if there's only one movie to choose from?"

She rolled her eyes. "You would have picked this over anything else anyway, so giving you choices would have been a waste of my time. This," she jabbed a finger at the DVD, "is gold."

Leaning heavily on the counter, I picked up the DVD to inspect it. Kurt peered over my shoulder and wrinkled his nose at it. I had to agree that the cover certainly looked awful, but it wasn't anything I hadn't seen before. "*Troll 2*? What about this is gold?"

"Okay, first of all, it's blacklisted in stores all over the country, not just here. Seriously, *nobody* stocks this shit except in warehouses, and even they they probably stock it way back in the janitor's closet so he has something other than the floor to sit on when he jerks himself off for kicks. Also, there is no *Troll 1*."

That caught my attention. "You're kidding."

"Do I look like I'm kidding, Curly Sue?"

I stared at her. "That all?"

"Do you think I'm an amateur?" she asked, offended. "No, that's not all. Jesus." She snatched the DVD out of my hands. "Here's the run down on this shit: there aren't actually any trolls in the movie. These guys"—she pointed to one of the wrinkly faced creatures on the front cover—"are vegetarian goblins who eat people."

"Okay, what? Vegetarians who eat people. Explain that one to me."

"The goblins don't eat the people until they turn them into plants."

Oh my dear god, I thought, beginning to get excited. "Oh, of course not. Continue."

She grinned triumphantly at having captured my interest.

Kurt's wide eyes darted back and forth between the two of us in rapid succession, looking disturbed beyond all reason.

Santana continued. "So the main character is this little kid named James or Jonah or— something with a J—and what's his name goes around trying to defeat the goblins with the help of his dead grandfather's ghost, because why the fuck not, you know? And that's really just minor stuff. I mean, the town in the movie is called Nilbog, if you can believe that, and this chick named Creedance seduces a guy with an ear of corn, which bursts into popcorn when two of them start fucking—" she cut herself off with a hand. "Just—I cannot stress to you how hard this shit sucks. It's so bad it's hilarious."

I grinned dopily at her. "Have I ever mentioned how much I love you?"

She wrinkled her nose in disgust, like I had known she would. "No, and don't start now, or I'm keeping this." She held the DVD away from me.

"Relax, Bitches," I said, grabbing my wallet out of my front pocket with one hand as I pushed the tub of gum to where she could reach it with the other. "How much was the DVD?"

She snorted. "Please. It was like 2 bucks with my discount. Just give me the sixteen-oh-five for the gum," she said before scanning the barcode on the tub's cover.

When everything was bagged up and paid for, I turned to Kurt with a saucy grin. "Wasn't that fun?"

With that disturbed look still on his face, he made a small, barely there humming noise at that back of his throat as if to say, *Loads*. I laughed.

"C'mon, gorgeous, we're done." I grabbed his hand. Santana lifted an eyebrow at the gesture. "See ya, Bitches," I said before she could open her mouth to comment. She kept frowning at us with her sharp eye, but waved her goodbye just the same.

Kurt and I walked back to the car in silence and once again Kurt stopped short when he saw it.

"Oh my god," he moaned.

I watched him read and reread the painted words on the side, studying the look of sheer disbelief on his face. "Awesome isn't it?" I asked.

Kurt whipped his head in my direction so fast it was a wonder he didn't hurt himself.

"Close your mouth, beautiful," I said with a smirk. "Unless you want me to put something in it, that is."

Kurt shut his mouth with an audible snap and scowled viciously at me. "Are you trying to get us killed?" he asked, glaring narrowly at me.

"Nah," I said simply as I grinned and climbed in the car. Kurt followed my lead after a moment's hesitation and long, put upon sigh.

My carefree attitude began to fade as we got farther away from Bellefontaine and closer to Westerville. Once we got back to school Kurt would go to his dorm and I would go to mine where I would spend the rest of the night staring at the ceiling as I tried to force myself to sleep. The thought wasn't an appealing one.

I started to wonder why I put myself through this every month.

"Do you like stars?" I asked suddenly.

We hadn't spoken since we had gotten back in the car and Kurt abruptly stopping humming to West Side Story to look at me, clearly taken aback by the oddity of the question.

"When I was little my brother and I used to look at them for hours." I kept my eyes straight ahead at the road in front of me and gave myself up to the memory. It was also the perfect reminder. "We have this sunroof thing in my kitchen and sometimes, when the sky was clear enough, Cooper would wake me up in the middle of the night and we would lie on top of the island in the kitchen and look up at them." I remembered how his legs used to dangle off the side because he was too tall to fit.

Kurt was looking at me intently. I could feel the heat of his attention on the side of my face. "Why not just go outside?"

I snorted at that. The idea was laughable. "Anderson boys don't lie around in the dirt," I said, imagining my father's voice instead of my own. My father never found out about our midnight stargazing, so he never actually said those words, but if I hadn't known my father better and had been stupid enough to ask for permission, there was no doubt in my mind that he would have said something similar.

I did ask Cooper once why we couldn't just sneak out, though. He said it was impossible to sneak out of our house and that I should never, ever try unless I wanted to get caught. For a long time I had considered those words to be law—until I became desperate and couldn't stop myself. I got caught, just as Cooper had warned me I would.

I've never really looked at the stars, so I wouldn't know, Kurt's truth told me after his soft spoken lie.

"You should. It's nice."

Kurt shifted a little in his seat. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"It," I mimicked softly. "You mean, what's been bothering me these past few days."

"Are you going to tell me?" he asked, letting me know in that clever way of his that I guessed right.

"No," I shook my head. "It's nothing you need to worry about."

"What if I'm worried anyway?" he asked and I couldn't help but pull my eyes from the road to smile at him.

"Getting attached to me, huh?"

He rolled his eyes, but smiled too.

"I'd have to say that it's nice—having someone who worries about me."

I am, his truth told me after he spoke. I don't know why, but I'm worried.

I tried to ignore the knot of feelings hearing that particular statement created in my stomach. "Thanks."

Neither of us spoke again, not even when I waved goodbye to him as we separated to go to our respective dorms. The way his hand slid slowly from mine as we parted, as opposed to him immediately dropping it and abruptly cutting our connection, was more intimate than words would have been anyway. It made me feel like I mattered without forcing me to acknowledge directly that he mattered just as much to me.

Each time I woke up that night I thought about Kurt's smile to guide me back to sleep.

It was 6:17 in the morning when I got the call from my father.

"We are ready for you now," was what immediately followed my unenthusiastic *hello*? He was predictable like that, more reliable than clockwork—in that aspect at least. He was reliable in a few other aspects too, none of them good.

"Right. I'm walking to my car now," I told him, shouldering my backpack with the gum and *Troll 2* inside.

"Good. We have Ms. Knox in an interrogation room," was his reply, like it was nothing. Like he was telling me the sky is blue. Like it was something people said every fucking day.

The grip I had on my phone tightened. "Is that really necessary?" I spat as I began walking faster, though I knew it wouldn't make one bit of difference. "I won't be there for another two fucking hours."

"It's not up to me when they get brought in. And honestly, Blaine, you really don't need to use that kind of language."

I wrenched open the door to my piece of shit car and threw my backpack inside, not caring where it landed. The car roared to life with a vicious twist of my wrist that probably wasn't good for the ignition, but I didn't care about that either. "You could have called me soon as SIIPA left for her. Or once she was in custody," I growled the reminder as I sped out of my parking spot.

"I could have," was what he said and I imagined wrapping my hands around his neck when I saw him. Instead I wrung my left hand around the steering wheel and I disconnected the call with my other without saying goodbye. I forced myself to place the phone down on the passenger seat rather than throw it with all my might at the windshield like I wanted to do. I did my best to ignore the name Warren Anderson flashing across the screen and tried to focus on the road instead of how much I hated my father.

It was a long drive to Dayton, almost two hours, and if I hadn't known better I would have thought my father had purposely chosen the location just so I could key myself up on the drive. Some things, however, were out of his control. It didn't seem like it often, but it was true.

I drove in silence. Not the healthiest thing because that left me to my thoughts, but music would have made me cringe. Usually I thought about Cooper on the way to remind myself why I had started doing this in the first place, but that tended to make me feel guilty because while I *was* doing it for my brother, I was also doing it for myself—because I needed him, because I couldn't give him up.

This time, though, I had Kurt to think about, and I let myself fall into the comfortable rose-colored spot my mind had created for him. I thought about him with a tingle in my stomach; about his too few smiles, about his snarky attitude, about how euphoric it made me feel to hold his hand in mine. I wished I had his hand to hold right then, just to remind myself that there were still good things in this shit world, but that wasn't possible, and it never would be. The last Saturday was a day I would never share with someone other than the people who were already involved. There were some things people shouldn't ever see.

The drive felt a lot shorter than it normally did, which messed with my head because I couldn't decide whether that was a good thing or a bad thing.

I parked in my usual spot and walked up to the impressive building with my backpack slung over my shoulder and my keys clanking together in my hand. The sun in my face made me squint, but I would have been scowling up at the tall building no matter what. I hated how beautiful it looked with its white stone walls, stadium green grass, and pretty flowers. The sidewalks and walkways sparkled in the sunlight. Birds sang in the trees that grew in the grassy lots. It even had a fucking fountain, huge number that lit up at night. The building and everything around it was so beautiful and inviting that anyone who passed by would look at it and be impressed by its aesthetic charm.

When I was little I asked my father why the Ohio State SIIPA agency looked so inviting if we didn't want regular people to know that SIIPA existed. He told me that its beauty was its camouflage. Creepy warehouses with barbed wires and electric fences drew the wrong kind of attention, a kind of suspicious intrigue that led to even more suspicious questions; who is in there, why are there fences, what is it for? A beautiful building on the other hand, which was surrounded by more beautiful buildings, drew just enough attention to make people smile at its charm and continue driving on by.

Looking at it made me sick. I hurried inside, though the inside was just as much of a farce as the outside was—marble floors, polished everything, and all the right kinds of smoke and mirrors to make people think the agency was a computer company.

I walked over to reception and Jenifer smiled brightly at me from behind her computer. I didn't return the gesture.

"Hi, Blaine," she greeted brightly. "End of the month already?"

I nodded.

She continued on smiling like a programmed automaton. "Your father is just upstairs on the fifteenth floor, room 2B. Here is your access card. Just be sure to drop it off here before you leave for the day."

I took the card from her and walked through the arch that would lead me to security check.

Cain, the security guard, didn't smile when he saw me, but he did greet me with his familiar, "Hey, man," in that somber tone I was accustomed to hearing from him. It was the kind of tone I imagined most soldiers would use with their fellow comrades before going into a battle that was expected to have less than favorable odds. Cain was one of the few people in the building who understood that the agency wasn't a nice place and bright smiles didn't belong there. It wasn't a place for dimwitted receptionists with bubbly personalities and too bright teeth.

Wait. Correction: It *shouldn't* have been a place for dimwitted receptionists with bubbly personalities and too bright teeth. But then, the agency shouldn't have been a lot of things that it was.

But back to Cain.

He was another one of those people I liked well enough not to hate. He spoke to me like we were part of a united team despite the fact that when we had first met I had spent most of my time trying to get him to have sex with me. I had been fourteen, stupid, and quite taken with his well-muscled form and the exotic blend of his features that came from having a Japanese mother and a black father. Cain, who was as straight as they come, thankfully chose to be amused by my sad attempts at seductive flirting rather than offended. He was an okay guy.

"Hey," I greeted back as I held my arms up so he could scan me for weapons, though he already knew I didn't have anything on me. Not because he knew I wouldn't bring a weapon with me, but because all Cain had to do was look at a person once and he would be able to tell instantly whether or not they had any hidden weapons. He was a D1, and his security check was just another mirror SIIPA used to keep people from knowing the truth.

Normally I would have been a bit more talkative but I kept picturing that poor woman sitting for hours in an interrogation room.

He peeked inside my backpack quick and prodded the insides with a wooden stick to complete the security check and clapped me once on the back. "Tell him hey for me."

"Yeah," I promised.

It's not really important to go through the layout of the building in any great detail. Just know that the interrogation rooms and holding cells are all above ground on various floors. You would expect those rooms to be located somewhere deep under the dirt, but they're not. The reason for that is that there were far uglier things that happened in the agency than locking up a woman whose only crime was protecting her child, and *those* were the things that were hidden down below where no one would see, not the desperate mother.

Actually, wait again. Before I continue I should tell you about the woman in the interrogation room, whose name is Marissa Knox. Knox is an ex CIA agent with one of the slimmest files out there. For those of you who don't know, a slim file in any government agency pretty much translates to Badass.

Before that day I had never met Ms. Knox, but I had heard her name several times. She had been a particular interest of my father's for months—not because she had an ability, because she didn't, but because her fourteen month old son did. Logan Knox, the fourteen year old son, was IDed as a telekinetic less than an hour after his birth, which immediately brought him under the classification of a D3.

Telekinetic ability is linked to emotion. If a telekinetic is feeling a strong emotion, whether it be anger, sadness, fear—usually something negative—that person's control over his or her ability tends to weaken, and if a telekinetic loses control, it's going to be obvious to everyone around them that they aren't human. Therefore, until it can be determined whether a telekinetic is a possible threat to the exposure of our kind,

they are all placed at D3 level classification. Once SIIPA learns more about the individual, their classification may go up or down. Usually they went up.

In the case of little Logan Knox, it only took him three months to make the whole house shake when he was under strong emotional stress. He was immediately bumped up to a D5. SIIPA was sent out within minutes to collect him, but Knox had been more than capable of incapacitating the three agents and then making a run for it with her son.

Now Logan Knox was missing and Marissa was in SIIPA's custody. Logan needed to be found, and I was the one whose job it was to find him.

We'll continue on with the story now.

I passed 2A which was where Ms. Knox would be sitting in a too bright white room with a single table and opened the door to 2B. There were several people in the room and all of them sat in front of a large television screen that was hooked up to the cameras recording Marissa Knox in 2A. The cameras showed that she was sitting quietly at the table in the other room with her hands folded neatly together on top. The metal of her handcuffs glinted in the light. One of the people in the observation room was my father and I placed all of my attention on him, choosing to ignore Knox for the time being.

My father looked up when I entered and smiled in a way that most people would have deemed kind and warm. "Ah. Blaine. Finally we can get something accomplished." He stood up from his chair and came towards me. He placed a too warm hand on my back in what probably looked like an affectionate greeting between a father and his son to the other occupants in the room. In his other hand was a manila file folder. He would give it to me eventually, but I wouldn't need to open it.

"She's been feeding us nonsense for the past two hours. We think she managed to pass the boy off to someone, a relative maybe. I need to know who has him and where." He put the folder in my hand and clapped me on the back. Unlike when Cain had done it, the action felt cold and indifferent. "See what you can get out of her, hmm?"

I gripped the folder hand and started to walk to the door that would take me to Knox, but my father stopped me before I could get too far with a heavy hand. His fingers curled cruelly into my skin through the fabric of my shirt and I turned quickly in response to the pain. The expression on his face was calm

and pleasant. He looked like he was having a grand old time. "If she doesn't talk after five minutes, get it by omission."

I had been expecting him to say that, but my stomach dropped at the command anyway. Still, I jerked my head down once in a nod, and focused most of my effort on keeping the *Fuck you* that was teetering on the tip of my tongue locked behind my lips where it belonged.

After a few seconds he released me, that damn smile still on his face, and I walked stiffly to the door. Before I twisted the knob I gave myself one last reminder:

Get it done. Cooper needs you.

Marissa Knox looked up at me with red rimmed eyes when I entered the room, and no, her eyes weren't red from crying. They were bloodshot red and dried out as if she had made it a point to stop herself from blinking for a week. Her face was the color of paste and she had several angry red scratches on her cheeks that made her look like a sick patient. Her blonde hair was dirty and falling out of its severe hold in the back. I wondered when the last time she fixed it was. Though she was still beautiful, she looked much older than her thirty-five years.

She straightened up in her chair and pinned me with a cutting expression. "Who are you?"

"Blaine," I told her as I sat down in the chair across from her. I got right to the point. "I need you to tell me where your son is."

Surprise flashed in her eyes before she snorted out a flat, humorless laugh. "You've got to be kidding me. How old are you? Nineteen? Twenty?"

"Sixteen."

That time the surprise stuck, frozen on her face like ice. "Sixteen," she repeated like she had never heard the word before in her life.

"Where is Logan?" I asked again and my voiced seemed to force her to remember the situation she was in and she quickly regained control of her poker face, which was a sight to behold. Like flicking a switch, she had wiped herself completely clean and free of all her feelings. It was interesting to watch, but not a surprise. I had already known that she would be capable of letting this entire interrogation process roll

right off her back. She wouldn't tell me anything. A woman who had the balls and skill to evade SIIPA for months wouldn't just give up her son, not to me or anyone else, not under hours of questioning or hours of torture. She would take whatever she knew to her grave, and she would do it gladly, with a smile on her face and a twinkle in her eye. Knox was a fitting name, I decided.

When she spoke, her voice was just as void of emotion as her face. "Do you think I'd be stupid enough to know that information if I truly wanted to keep him safe?"

"I don't know," I shrugged. "Would you be? The fact that you just evaded the question instead of answering it makes me think that you know exactly where he is and who he's with."

She snorted out a curt, disbelieving laugh that was both sardonic and amused at the same time. "This is unbelievable. You're just a kid."

A kid whose five minutes were up.

I haven't mentioned this to you yet, but there is one other way I can detect lies, and that is by omission. Lies are lies, whether they are intentionally kept secret or spoken out loud with a silver tongue. However, the act of lying by omission is very different from lying out loud, and it costs me to be able to detect omitted lies.

Omitted lies are on the very cusp of my lie detector's ability. It's kind of like reaching for something that you can only just barely touch with the very tips of your fingers; you can *almost* feel the thing you're reaching for, but not quite. So what do you do? You strain to reach it even though the attempt makes you feel restless and trapped inside yourself and hurts like hell. So, yes, I can detect omitted lies, but at a price. On any given day, I can detect one, maybe two if I'm pushing it—any more than that and I risk putting myself into a coma, which happened to me once when I was nine, back when I hadn't known how dangerous it was despite the head splitting pain it caused in my head. But I'm not going to get into that right now. Another time, maybe.

Right now we're talking about me and Knox in the interrogation room.

Just get it done, I told myself.

"I need to know where your son is, and you are going to tell me, or I'll force you to tell me." I clenched as many muscles as I could in preparation. I took a breath. "One last time; where is Logan?"

With that one question, it was done, like breathing in carbon monoxide. The doing is effortless; only the end result is fatal.

Every muscle in her face went tight and suddenly every bit of the rage she felt was clear and evident on her face. Her features painted the picture of a woman who was backed into a corner, not in fear, but in preparation for the fight to come. The determination to come out of the fight alive and victorious was there to see in her blazing eyes. I knew my own face looked the same, and wondered if that was what had prompted her to drop her poker face rather than the threat I had made.

"I don't know what they have on you," she said in a low, dangerous tone. "I'm sure whatever it is, is very bad but believe it when I say I won't give up my son."

Her voice shook with conviction and split into my head. My fingers curled at the pain and my whole body tensed with it, but I rode it out and let her unspoken truth fill me up.

He's in Maine.

It wasn't enough. I needed something more specific. Logan was too young to care for himself. Someone was with him. I needed a name.

I gripped my head with a hand as if that would make it all stop. Over the roaring agony in my head, I struggled to say what I had found out for the camera. "M-Maine. Logan... in Maine."

Knox had me pinned against the wall only seconds later, her forearm tight against my throat.

"You're one of *them*."

She might have said something else, maybe about me having an ability and selling out my own kind, but I could hardly focus over the whirling in my head.

"Who is Logan with?" I forced the words out, setting a second trap, and my nose started to bleed a steady stream of red that trailed over my lips and got into my mouth.

She grabbed my head and bashed it against the wall. Again, she said something, but the words sounded like nonsense that my fucked up brain couldn't decode.

Her truth, however, was perfectly clear and lapped at the inside of my mind like acid.

I'm pretty sure she bashed my head against the wall again, harder that time, but she didn't make good on her threat to kill me, which I didn't find out about until much later. Apparently, as soon as the words left her lips, SIIPA had swarmed in under my father's orders to come to my rescue. They pulled her off of me with some difficulty, but I don't remember that. I don't remember dropping to the ground like a rock either once Knox was no longer there to hold me up.

I remember my father's hands on my face though, forcing me to look at him and demanding that I respond to the questions he was near shouting at me despite the intense ringing in my ears.

He looked half crazy, and I had to read his lips to figure out what we wanted from me, though even that was a challenge because he kept shaking me, as if that would make me talk faster. "Did you get it? Did you get the name?"

Somehow I forced out the name Norman Wilkes.

He let me go once he got what he wanted, rushing off to a place I didn't care to follow. At that point I didn't care about anything but the burn in my skull and one other thing: breathing.

In

Out

In

Out

That was my only reality.

As I fell unconscious, my mind focused on one last thought: *Please let me wake up.*

CHAPTER TEN

The Proper Way to Be There—Because He Needs Me

For once, the title has nothing whatsoever to do with Kurt...

Not for the first time in my life I woke up somewhere I hadn't taken myself to, though the room itself was familiar by then.

I went through all the familiar motions: pick myself up from the cot, walk to the sink in the corner, splash some water on my face until I no longer looked like a murder victim, dry my skin with a cheap paper towel that was too rough for comfort, grab my backpack off the floor, leave to find my father.

Well, find isn't exactly the right word. I knew exactly where he would be. They called it the Big Computer Room, or the BCR, which was exactly what it was; a bigger-than-fuck room with hundreds of computers used for surveillance and information gathering. It was the room where Logan Knox's first big telekinetic outburst had been documented for all to see. The footage had been taken from the surveillance cameras SIIPA had placed all around the Knox's home, permission for which had been granted by Marissa Knox herself. Just hours after she had given birth to Logan, Knox had been given two options: either agree to have the cameras installed or lose custody of her only son and child. I could see why she had agreed to the cameras.

The entire facility ran from that room, which was why it was crawling with people. Picture one of the Houston-we-have-a-problem rooms in the space travel movie of your choice—you know, the room that looks like a giant amphitheater for computers, each one of the computers manned by a little bald guy with thick glasses, and that's almost exactly what the BCR looks like. Only, I like to call our mousy computer guys zombies because unlike in the movies, they look skittish and have circles under their eyes that are dark enough to look fake.

My father smiled when he saw me, a triumphant look that meant he had found Norman Wilkes. He was standing at the highest level of the room, facing the giant screen in the center of the room, which showed a picture of a kind faced, silver haired man, probably in his late sixties—sure enough, the name NORMAN WILKES stood out in bold red at the bottom of the screen, directly under the man's picture.

"We've got a lead," my father told me, looking excited as he gestured to the screen. "The agency in Maine is sending two teams to investigate. If they find the boy, they'll have to send him to our facility on account of him being a minor, so the case is still well within in our jurisdiction."

I didn't respond, because what was the point really? Nothing I could say would change the fact that in less than twenty-four hours, SIIPA agents would storm into wherever Wilkes was hiding and steal away the child he had been given to protect, probably killing the man in the process if he put up a fight. I couldn't envision a scenario that didn't end up with Wilkes dead. Undoubtedly he would put up a fight—Marrissa Knox wouldn't have left her son with just anybody, but no one was a match for fourteen trained agents with guns, most of them probably with an ability that was useful in combat. They would point their guns and yell our demands and blood would flow. They would traumatize little Logan Knox even more than he already was, ensuring that he grew up to be more fucked-up-crazy than a bag full of cats. And I had helped make it happen.

One day, in the future, some poor soul would find me dead in a dumpster with a bullet between my eyes or worse.

But not today, I told myself.

I swung my backpack forward and unzipped the front pocket. I took out the access card Jenifer had given me and the smile slipped from my father's face. With his neck muscles taught with tension, he took it and handed it off to the computer zombie closest to him. "Grant him access."

The zombie floundered at the command, his hands frozen over his keyboard as he gaped up at my father with wide, panicked eyes. He looked like he might piss himself. These guys weren't known for their kickass social skills. "I—uh... to where, Sir?"

My father smiled kindly at him, looking like the poster boy for patience. "Relax, son. To Level 5."

The man didn't relax. "I... I don't—I'm new."

My father dropped a comforting hand on his shoulder. "Hey, calm down. Let's see if we can get someone to show you how it's done..." He scanned the crowd and signaled to a woman with a clipboard overseeing the workers. She caught the signal and immediately began making her way over. "There now, see? No harm

done. I would show you myself, but I doubt your computer would survive the attempt." He chuckled at himself and the man followed his lead, laughing nervously.

"Something I can help you with, Mr. Anderson?" the woman with the clipboard asked once she was only a few feet away.

"Yes, Susan. We have a computer issue... What's your name, son?"

"Denson, Sir."

My father gave him another reassuring pat on the shoulder. "Do you think you could show Denson here how to alter the access codes on a visitor card? My son, Blaine, needs to get to Level 5."

Have you ever heard of Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences? If you haven't, it's not a big deal because I'll explain. My father has what Gardner calls *intrapersonal intelligence*. Generally, people who have strong intrapersonal intelligence have exceptional charisma; something my father has an abundance of. He knows how to charm people into liking him; how to get a positive response out of them by molding himself into the shape of someone they would gladly follow. He is a natural born leader—a dangerous talent for a man like my father to have.

The drone turned shyly back to my father to hand him the newly altered key card.

My father smiled as he took it. "Perfect. Thank you both for this."

Denson looked at him with relief in eyes, and something else that bordered on admiration. All in under five minutes. It was pathetic.

"Come on, Blaine. I'll walk you to the elevator." He led the way without waiting for a reply. Because he still had my visitor's card in his hand, I had no choice but to follow him obediently. He enjoyed controlling me in small ways, just like I enjoyed pissing him off in others. It was a completion that we had started a long time ago, both of us constantly trying our hardest to remain one small step ahead of the other. We were alike in that respect.

"I don't know why you insist on doing this to yourself each month," he said when I had finally caught up to him. We walked side by side, both of us staring straight ahead. He smiled at everyone who passed by, open and friendly. The tone of his voice was just as friendly and cheery as his easy smiles, but there was a very

slight, very subtle pull, one that strained to exert power I would only grant him in the figurative sense. "It's a waste of your time. You're only setting yourself up to be disappointed. You would do a lot better to return to Dalton once your work here is done for the day."

"Work." I snorted. "That's rich."

He sighed in that condescending way adults reserve for children and shook his head, telling me he thought I was being *silly*. "What else would you call it, Blaine? It *is* work, and important work at that. You're working to keep people safe. You should be proud."

"Proud that I just ruined two people's lives forever. Right. And work implies the opposite of what this is."

"Really," he said, sounding a fraction annoyed that time. "And what would that be?"

We had finally reached the elevators, the ones that only went down from this point, programmed not to stop at any floors that were above ground. The little red light on the scanner blinked as if begging us to swipe the card that would turn it green, but it would have to wait. He still had my clearance card in his hand and he didn't look like he was ready to hand it over.

He stood looking at me with his arms folded; his body and facial features arranged into a neat, clean cut, *I'm waiting* expression.

I gave him the truth. "Blackmail. Extortion. Take your pick."

At first he did nothing and we simply stared at each other. Then without warning, his hand was wrapped around my bicep in an instant, squeezing the muscle underneath my skin tightly in his fist.

A tid bit about my father: he and I look nothing alike. He's tall and large, I'm not. I take after my mother, who is soft and petite. I was short when I was sixteen (not that I'm very much taller now) and my father towered over me with an enormity I knew I could never hope to achieve.

"Careful, Blaine," he warned. "I have the power to lock Cooper away in a hole so far down that even the bugs won't find him, much less you."

He yanked me closer to him and I went without a fight and stared into his eyes, but kept my mouth locked tight. He stared back at me with amusement in his eyes at my refusal to drop mine. "Don't forget who's in control here."

"You do realise you've just proved my point," I said in a bored tone.

His answering grin was snide; like how a giant might look at an ant he was about to step on. I was glad he found me so entertaining.

Without looking away from me, he held the card over the detector until the red light turned green and then pressed the card into my hand. He released my arm with a slight push but I managed not to stumble back. I backed slowly into the elevator, refusing to break our stare until the closing doors forced me to.

The pissing contest over, I slumped back to rest against the wall and did my best to ignore the swooping sensation in my stomach as the elevator went down. The back of my head hurt. The inside felt worse, but only minimally so—not an easy feat. Knox should be proud of herself.

I forced myself to think about something else.

I hoped the movie turned out to be as awful as Santana made it sound. I was at the point where it would take something truly spectacular to amuse me.

When the elevator came to a stop I got out and began the familiar stroll through Level 5.

For those of you who are wondering, Level 5 is like a mad house. There are science-y types running around all over the place with clipboards in their hands and lab coats hanging off their shoulders. Personnel people rush from one place to another to put a stop to whatever catastrophe there was that was taking place that day. For those of you who haven't guessed it, Level 5 is where they keep the D5s, or the preternaturals whose abilities are considered to be so dangerous that they have the institutionalized for safety reasons.

As I said before D4s are institutionalized as well, but on reservations. D4s are allowed full mobility so long as they stay within the confinements of the reservation they are assigned to. D5s, however, live in holding cells that are designed to look like small studio apartments, only sans the kitchen aspect of studio apartment living because all meals around brought to their rooms.

Level 5 itself is huge. After going down a long corridor, I had to take a second elevator down to Block E, which was where I would find Cooper.

When I got there, I stopped at the reception desk, where a man I had never seen before sat.

"I'm here to see Cooper Anderson in Room 7F," I told him.

He didn't look up from his computer. "Card," he said, holding out his hand.

I handed it to him and he swiped it and read over the information that came up on his computer, nodding to himself. "I see that it says here you've visited this D5 several times before, but I am required to go through some specifics regardless. According to your card you've got four hours, but you may leave any time before that should you wish. Also, should the D5 in that cell need to be restrained by our staff for any reason, you will have to leave for the day, even if it is before your four hours are up." He handed me back the card. "Go to the door there and swipe the card when I tell you."

I nodded silently and waited for his signal, though I already knew the procedure. The door buzzed to signal the lock's release and slid open. I walked through.

Coopers room was on the right, third door down. One of the two guards let me in—I recognized neither—but only after instructing Cooper through the glass to stand on the opposite side of the room, which he did immediately. I walked inside, the guard closed the door behind me, and I saw my brother for the first time in 30 days. Standing with an easy going smile in a crisp, cool-gray, three piece suit, he looked completely out of place in the small, boring room I had stepped in.

"Hey, little brother." Cooper grinned easily at me, as if we weren't surrounded by locks and guards and white washed walls, standing in a room with zero personality.

Cooper shook his head, chuckled. "Okay, that's just not true." His grin widened. "We me standing in it, this room has all the personality it can handle."

I grinned despite myself and rolled my eyes. "Yeah, yeah."

He laughed and pulled me in for a hug, easily tucking his chin over the top of my head. He grabbed a fistful of my T-shirt in one hand and hugged me tight with the arm attached to the other. "I missed you."

Missed you, too, I thought, partly because I didn't trust myself to speak at that moment and partly because I knew he would just read my mind anyway, whether he wanted to or not. He didn't have the choice.

He let me go with an audible sniff. "So. What did you and Santana find for us to watch this time?" he asked with his back towards me and his voice a little thick as he fiddled with the television that was bolted to the wall, like everything else in Cooper's room—the bed, the desk, the furniture, everything.

I didn't bother answering because he undoubtedly already knew, having heard my automatic mental response to the question as soon as he asked.

He turned to look at me confusedly. "Have we seen Troll 1?" he asked. Then a second later, "Ah." He nodded. "Interesting. Can't say I've ever seen the sequel to a movie that doesn't exist. Make sure you tell Santana the next time you see her that she's amazing." He paused. "Well, tell her again, then. This time tell her it's from me, of course."

Talking with Cooper was exactly how you might imagine talking to a mind reader would be. It felt a little pointless because he instantly knew exactly what you were thinking, which was extremely frustrating sometimes because eventually you got to the point where you just wanted to scream JUST LET ME FUCKING TALK ALREADY in his face, but Cooper had never been one to apologize for himself. He was a lot like Kurt in that way, which was of course a very stupid thing to think about in that moment.

"Kurt? Who's Kurt?"

My mind gave Cooper a very extensive answer as to who Kurt was and Cooper's eyes widened. "You told him that much already?" he asked, surprise all over his face. "How long have you known—*four days*? Jesus, Blaine. You're like the most socially handicapped person I know. You never open up to people that fast."

I shrugged and refused to meet Cooper's eyes. I busied myself with unzipping my backpack and pulling out the DVD inside.

Cooper studied me closely as he took the case from my hands. "Do you... *like* him?"

I sighed and Cooper's eyebrows went skyward at the onslaught of mental images I couldn't stop myself from picturing. Each and every single one of them was sappy, right down to how beautiful I thought each individual color of his eyes was. It was pretty mortifying.

"Wow... I—Blaine, I really don't know what to say to..." he struggled to find a word, "...all of that."

I sighed again. "Don't make a big deal out of it, alright? I'll get over it eventually. Like you said, I've only known him for four days."

"Hey, don't knock love at first sight, little brother."

I scowled at that. "Don't be stupid."

"Who's being stupid? I'm completely serious."

"I know—that's what's stupid."

Cooper scoffed. "Love at first sight is *real*, Blaine. It's in the movies," he said with a straight face, but I could see the amusement in his eyes.

I snorted. Typical Cooper Response.

"But seriously," Cooper said. "I've never seen you picture someone that way before. For once, it sounded calm and content in that crazy mind of yours..." He smiled a small, sad smile. "It was a nice change."

I didn't know what to say to that.

He sighed. "You don't have to say anything. It's just..." He frowned and looked down at the DVD case he had staring turning over repeatedly in his hands. "I—I need you to be happy..." he said softly. I opened my mouth to speak, but he cut me off. "'Alright' isn't happy, Blaine. Alright is just alright."

I didn't say anything. There wasn't any way for me to argue.

Cooper let out of soft huff, shook his head at himself. He looked up at me finally. "How's your head by the way?"

I shrugged. "It hurts."

"A lot?" he asked and I winced, wishing there was a way to keep it from him.

He nodded sadly and suddenly it was his turn to stay silent.

"So, uh, we gonna watch that, or what?" I asked, trying to get us out of the hole we had dug.

"Y—" he stopped, took a breath, tried again. "Yeah."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Proper Way to Make the Leap

In my own experience, alcohol helps. A lot...

"Okay, this is just uncomfortable," Cooper said as he stared horrified at the television screen, watching as the woman on it worked her hand over an ear of corn. I couldn't help but agree.

As Santana promised, it got worse.

The music that came on was bad enough. Some kind of elevator music crossed between whatever music you might play to accompany a 900 pound woman making a show of hiking her skirt halfway up her thigh while licking her lips, which we'll say are covered in canker sores. That's really the best way I can describe it because, honestly, I don't even know. It was just *that* bad.

And as far as the image on the screen, if forced to choose between the 900 pound woman from my audio analogy and the two shit-terrible actors on screen moaning like porn star wannabes and tonguing at each other's mouths around the ear of corn while popcorn exploded everywhere, I honestly don't know which I would have picked.

Cooper waved his hands in front of his face like a maniac. "I pick the woman, *I pick the woman!*" he shouted, his face all twisted up.

I rolled my eyes. Take that as evidence that I was *not* the drama queen in the family.

He covered his eyes with both hands. "It needs to be over now. I can't take it, oh my god, I can't take it. God, Blaine, turn it *off!*"

I ignored him and let it continue playing, knowing that in five minutes he would change his mind, which he did eventually, cracking himself up so hard at particularly bad show of acting that he had tears rolling down his face. "Ohmigod. Best. Movie. *Ever,*" he declared, sounding breathless and wiping tears from his eyes.

Without taking his eyes off the screen, Cooper reached in the tub of Bazooka gum to grab a new piece and spit out his new one. "So, this is a tad random but, about Kurt..."

"Cooper," I started but he spoke over me.

"...his ability—well, okay, you're right; ability isn't the right word—his *condition* is interesting."

I sighed. He wasn't going to let this go.

"Nope," he said, "so you might as well humor me."

"*Fine*. What about it?"

He shrugged. "Nothing, just that..."

The second the word 'nothing' left his lips, his truth fired off in my head, correcting the unintentional lie and mixing with his spoken words so that it was impossible to hear anything specific over the jumbled cacophony of sound. Cooper's truth wasn't exactly unpleasant, but it was damn loud and the sheer volume of it made my face screw up.

That was Cooper for you, always needing to make sure he was heard. At least being a mind hearer meant that he was forced to listen to his own loud mouthed truth too.

He grimaced when it was over. "Sorry."

I snorted. "Sure, you are."

In a spectacular show of maturity, he stuck out his tongue at me. "It's not like I can control what my truth sounds like."

"Yeah, yeah. What were you saying before you decided to give me a migraine?"

"Please," he scoffed. "You do *not* have a migraine." He held up his hands in surrender at my less than pleasant mental response. "Alright, alright. Sheesh, Blaine, don't have a cow. I was just saying that I've never heard of someone having an ability that took something away from them."

"Your point?"

"Noth—sorry, sorry," he stopped himself from making the same mistake twice when I glared viciously at him. "I didn't think that was possible. It's really interesting, though. It's like you were made for him or something."

"You've got to be fucking kidding me."

He rolled his eyes. "Relax. I didn't mean it in the literal sense; just that he's really lucky that you two met. It must be a relief for him to be able to communicate with someone without having to worry about whether or not he'll be understood."

I sent him a sideways glance. "I guess..."

He laughed. "Okay, I'm stopping. That was my last sappy sentiment for the day. God, you're so touchy."

Unable to help myself, I grinned. Then I stuck my tongue out, pulling up my nose for a good measure and crossing my eyes, figuring he would appreciate it.

Cooper snickered. "Nice."

I have to admit I enjoyed myself. I always did when I was with Cooper. I was able to let loose when I was with him and just, for a little while, forget that I was sixteen going on forty-five. And despite everything, I was able to have fun; even though we were watching a movie that was just about tied with *Santa Claus Conquers the Martians* as far as complete and total suckage went. It didn't matter how terrible the movie was though because crappy movies and incessant gum chewing was all we had left—less than half the relationship that used to be whole.

So I chewed Bazooka gum, piece after piece after piece, despite the fact that it was the worst tasting shit I had ever had the displeasure of putting in my mouth, because it was Cooper's favorite.

And Cooper sat with me and watched the movie, rolling from his back to his stomach and back again as he laughed himself stupid, looking for all the world as if watching *Troll 2* was the best experience of his life when the truth was that every movie we watched was a reminder of the things he wanted most that he wouldn't ever get to have—how could he possibly try his hand at acting when he couldn't so much as leave the room? He would rot in this cell for the rest of his life.

And I showed up to see him, just like I did every month before then and continued to do after, despite the way it tore the both of us up when it was time to leave. I did it because he was my brother. He was my brother and he needed me.

"I've got to go, Coop," I said softly when it got to the point where I couldn't stall any longer. We had six minutes left. The movie had long since ended and the main menu was on the screen, the creepy music playing over and over as we sat in silence, listening as we tried to prolong each second into something more.

"I know," he said, sounding lost, and I hated it because leaving was always the worst part. I could already see the dread of being alone once again, locked up in that tiny room with nothing to do, start to close in on him. His breathing began to pick up.

Here we go.

"Please don't," I said when the DVD case that sat between us, the only something in the room not bolted down with steel (besides the tub of gum), started to twitch. *"Please."*

It wasn't something he could control, so it really wasn't fair to ask, but... my eyes flicked to the camera in the corner of the room. The nearly empty tub of gum started quivering next.

I grabbed his wrist and stared hard at the side of his face. "Come on, Coop. It'll be alright. I'll be back next month." He wouldn't look at me and his breathing was starting to get really rough now, but I could tell he was trying. "I'm not going to leave you here alone."

He looked at me with pained eyes. "You should," he said and I managed to cover the DVD case with my hand before it went flying at the wall. *Keep calm, keep calm*, I thought for the both of us.

Cooper looked brokenly at my hand. "You don't deserve this. *I'm* the older brother. *I* should be protecting *you*, but it's the other way around."

"Coop, please. You need to calm down, or they'll send someone in here."

He lifted his eyes to look at me. No one could manage to look broken like Cooper could. He was so genuine, so unapologetic to whatever he was feeling. He would have made a truly terrible actor.

"You hate yourself because of me," he said and it wasn't fair because he knew I couldn't deny it.

"You try to hide it from me," he said, voice dripping with pain and hurt. "Don't you know how stupid that is, Blaine? I hear *everything*. I know *everything*. I know exactly what you're scared of. Did you think you could keep Knox a secret? She threatened to *kill* you, Blaine, and you know what? She *can*." He shook his head. "And if that happens—if Knox or some other mother or lover or brother or whoever comes after you because you forced them to give up the people they love, it'll be entirely my—*No!* Damn it, Blaine, don't do that! Don't lie to yourself and don't lie to me! That CIA woman threatened to kill you! Don't you get how serious that is? If she does, it will be all *my fault* and we both know it! My fault my little brother is dead because he wouldn't let go of a lost cause! You've pissed off some powerful people trying to protect me. What are you going to do if they come after you? Huh, Blaine? Tell me what you would do, what you *could* do, to protect yourself!"

Deal with it.

He slammed his hand down in frustration, a pointless gesture that had almost no impact because mattresses don't make much sound when you hit them. So he yelled instead, "YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE TO!"

It was an old, familiar argument—almost exactly the same as last month's argument. It was the way we said goodbye.

I missed our old goodbyes when Cooper used to wave to me with a smile on his face as the bus pulled away from the curb to take me to school.

The DVD case flew out from underneath my hand at Cooper's outburst and shattered against the wall. The remaining pieces of Bakooza gum exploded from the tub and shot in all different directions. It made me think of that ridiculous popcorn scene in *Troll 2* and suddenly I wanted to get my hands on the case so I could hurl it at the wall too, but bits and pieces of it were still zooming around the room.

SIIPA came rushing in.

Within seconds, Cooper was unconscious, a tranquilizer dart sticking out of his neck, and everything that had been flying around under the influence of Cooper's telekinetic energy came crashing down.

Gently, I pulled the dart from his neck. "Bye, Coop," I whispered.

It was almost five when I got back to Dalton and going to see Kurt when I still felt so raw seemed like too big of a gesture to make. I wasn't that guy. I didn't go running to people for comfort. So I sat in my car for five minutes, feeling stupid, and *then* I went to find him, just about running to his room.

Sebastian answered the door.

"He left."

The words made perfect sense and none at all. "What?"

Sebastian stared at me. "He. Left."

I ignored him and instead tried to peer over his shoulder into his and Kurt's room, which was just ridiculous. It wasn't as if he could lie to me.

Sebastian huffed and crossed his arms. "Oh, please, Blaine. I'm not *hiding* him." He rolled his eyes.

I took a deep breath. I knew I was acting like a lunatic, but my stomach had exploded with restless, muscle tearing nerves and only Kurt could make me feel okay again. I didn't like that he wasn't there, where I could see him. It made me feel dizzy. It was Monday all over again. "Where did he go?" I asked as calmly as I could.

"Well, gee, Blaine, he went to Alaska to party with the Eskimos and dry hump a polar bear—how the hell should I know where he went? He doesn't talk, remember?"

I turned away from Sebastian with a violent spin before I did something stupid. After his ridiculous statement, his truth was slithering its way through my brain with agonizing slowness and I was feeling crazy enough to take it personally. I needed to get out.

I called Santana as I rushed outside.

She picked up on the second ring. "Whisky or Vodka?"

"Surprise me."

"Whisky it is, then."

"Just hurry up, okay?"

Her voice went soft. "I'm on my way."

When Santana pulled up it was closer to 8 than it was to 7 and I had done a fair share of cursing over how far away Lima was. It was dark out in the back of the parking lot, where the lights from the school were nearly dim, and it was pretty fucking cold too, but I hadn't bothered to turn the heat on in my car, or get my sweatshirt out of the back seat, or even close the driver's side door.

Santana walked over to me after killing her engine. She had the bottle in her hand she yanked out the cork. Wordlessly, she held out the open bottle and I immediately grabbed it from her and took a swig of the fowl tasting stuff. *Whisky sucks*, I thought as I took another swig. The burn felt good though.

"You know," she said as she moved to lean against the side of my car, "I bet Hummel wouldn't approve of this."

I paused mid gulp to stare at her. Slowly, I pulled the bottle away from my lips. "So?"

"So-o-o, I don't know—you seem to like him."

"Fuck, what is with everyone today? First Cooper and now *you*?"

She shrugged in an unapologetic way. "I'm in an advice giving kind of a mood."

I rolled my eyes. "Well, keep it to yourself."

She snorted. "Fine."

After that we were both quiet for a long while. Only the sound of the alcohol swishing in the bottle disrupted the quiet.

Santana broke first. "How bad was it?"

"Saying goodbye to Cooper or the interrogation?"

"Both."

"Pretty fucking bad."

"I heard Knox threatened to kill you," she said softly. Her father worked for SIIPA too—a handler. He and my own father were buddy-buddy, two creeps cut from the same cloth.

"So did Cooper. He didn't take it well."

Santana sighed and bumped my foot with hers. "He'll be okay."

"I feel like I'm going out of my mind."

"That's understandable, Blaine."

"No. You don't get it. Not because of today—not *just* because of today; because of right now."

"What do you—" she began to say, but I cut her off.

"Kurt's not here. He left and now he's not here and I don't know where the fuck he is and it's driving me insane. I mean—fuck—my hands are shaking. They are *literally* shaking just because some guy I met all of four days ago has a life outside of Dalton. I mean, someone threatened to kill me today, someone who could actually pull it off, and I'm here freaking out because Kurt isn't in my direct line of sight. What is *wrong* with me?"

"Nothing," she said, looking up at the sky. "He's your Brittany."

"San, that doesn't make sense. I hardly know him."

"That's the point—the real shit isn't supposed to make sense. Half the time Britt is so out of it that she can't remember who she is, let alone who I am, but I can't let her go. I'll be there for her for the rest of forever, and even if she forgets me completely and can't do anything but stare into space all day and sit, drooling through vision after vision, I'll *still* be there, waiting with a cloth to clean her up. Does that make sense? Of course not, but ask me if I care."

"Do you care?"

She rolled her eyes. "Don't be a prick."

"Sorry," I said, because Brittany was a soft spot for Santana, but I'll tell you more about that some other time. For now, we're moving on.

Because I was beginning to feel drunk out of my fucking mind, I said with as serious a face as I could, "You know you're my best friend, right?"

Santana eyed me with disgust and plucked the bottle out of my hands. "You're done with this now."

"Hey—no, give it back," I said, though I made no move to grab it back from her. "I'm not that bad."

"You just went all sappy on me. How is that 'not that bad?'"

"I haven't tried to make out with you yet, have I?"

"Ugh, don't remind me."

"What? Girls are hot when I'm so drunk that I can't think straight—" I cut myself off when the words coming out of my mouth caught up with my brain. My jaw dropped and I sat there silently for a moment, dumbfounded by the sheer genius of my own drunkenness. Then I cracked up with a loud guffawing noise that probably hadn't sounded human. "Holy *shit*! Did you hear what I almost just said?"

Santana snorted, but I saw her lips twitch with a smile. "I heard," she confirmed.

I snickered. "Girls are hot when I can't think straight. Think *straight*. Classic."

With a roll of her eyes, she shook her head at me, her lips stretched wide with an amused grin. "You're a fucking idiot."

I grinned back, happy to be a source of amusement, but the smile on my lips faded fast as my mood took an abrupt turn when a sudden thought fired off in my head and lodged itself into the forefront of my mind. "...Do you think I'm a good person?"

Santana's smile vanished. "Shit, Anderson, where is all this touchy feely crap coming from?"

"Do you?" I pressed.

"Blaine..."

"*Do you?*"

"Yes, okay?" she asked, sounding put out and annoyed. Then, for some reason, in a softer tone, "I do. Of course I do."

And I waited, listening. She scowled at me for it. "Quit that. I'm not lying," she said, offended.

No, she wasn't.

There was a sudden scratchiness in my throat and I had to work to talk around it. "Thanks, Bitches."

She looked off to the side, her face turned up at the night sky. "Any time."

Hours later, Santana helped me get back to the school without falling on my face. I tried to get her to make out with me, but she refused. So I called her a shit-whore-bag-tease-of-a-fuck (whatever that meant) which had her laughing her goddamn ass off. I took offense to that too and refused her offer to help me to my dorm. I remember her walking away, still laughing.

Not up to making the trip to my dorm, I slept in the student lounge that night and woke up a while later to the truly amazing feeling of Kurt's fingers running through my hair. When I opened my eyes I found him frowning at me with a concerned look on his face. He looked me over with those amazing everything colored eyes of his. God, I wanted to kiss him. Or maybe I wanted to kiss his eyes. Because they were so pretty.

Instead I rolled on my back and buried my face in my hands. "I'm so fucking *dru-u-unk*," I moaned, really loud. Kurt snorted and I peeked up at him through my fingers. "Are you my Kurt or a fake one?"

He rolled his eyes. "A fake one," he said with annoyance. I didn't need to be a human lie detector to know what that was a lie.

I grinned dopily at him. Then I remembered that I still had my hands over my face and I pulled them away so he could see how happy I was. "You're here. You left, but you're here again. Why?"

"Home," he said simply.

"You went home? That's really nice. Your Dad was really nice on the phone that other day when you were in my ro—no, that's wrong. Not the nice, but the room. I was in your room. You were not in mine. So that's really nice."

He sighed. "What are you...?" he began, but trailed off with a distinct frown, looking frustrated. In my drunken state I really couldn't understand why—I'm assuming whatever he had been about to say would have been too declarative. So he tried again, rephrasing the question. "Do you want to go to your room? Do you need help?"

I shook my head. "Nossir, no, I do not want to go to my room. Stevie is in my room and he's a dick." I suddenly realized that Kurt had stopped playing with my hair. "Hey. Hey, Kurt. No. Don't stop. I want more of sumadis," I said, grabbing his hand and laying it back on the top of my head.

He regarded me in silence for a moment, and I smiled up at him, hoping that would make the seriousness on his face go away so he could go back to massaging my scalp with his magic fingers. "Please?" I asked, because, hey, that was polite and being polite got you rewards.

"Okay," he relented softly and I grinned happily when he started working his fingers through my curls.

"*Sogood*," I moaned and he chuckled, which sounded amazing of course because Kurt's laugh was awesome. Now that he was where I could see him I felt better. The tight nervousness in my stomach had gone away and I felt boneless.

"Hey, Kurt?"

"Mmm?"

"What time is it?"

"Fifteen o'clock," he said, whispering as if not to disturb the quiet. His truth followed suit, *Almost three AM*.

"Did you just get here?"

"Uh-huh." *No, I got here about twenty minutes ago.*

I frowned at that. "...So you were at your house, but you came back, not in the morning time when it would make sense to, but like, super, super early in the morning time when people are sleeping. Why did you do that, Kurt?"

Biting his lip, he looked away and said nothing.

But I wanted to know. I wanted to know so bad that the need to have an answer seemed to claw at me with an urgency I couldn't ignore. It burned me—the truly rare occurrence of desperately wanting something that I actually needed something new and foreign to me—and relief was *right there*, just at the tips of my fingers. All I needed to do was reach just a little bit farther, and I would have it. All I had to do was strain. So I did something really stupid that I never, ever would have done had I not been so drunk. No. That's not right. I wouldn't have done it period—drunk or not. Not under normal circumstances, at least. But this was *Kurt* and I *needed* to know.

I took Kurt's silence as omission and his mind opened up to mine.

I needed you. I couldn't stay. I needed you.

The gentle touch of his omission was so soft in my mind that it made tears prick insistently at my eyes. It made my whole body hum. It made me want for things I had never thought I would get to have. It did so many other things, beautiful, wonderful, amazing things that I can't even begin to describe, but it didn't hurt. It didn't hurt *at all*. Not even slightly.

I looked at Kurt, completely blissed out of my fucking mind with awe. He looked back at me, confused by my expression; he was completely lost to gravity of the moment.

"You're *amazing*," I told him just before I leaned up on my elbows and touched his lips with mine.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Proper Way to Kiss Kurt Hummel—The Intoxicated Edition

There was nothing like kissing Kurt. The second our lips touched he made this little gasping noise and his fingers clenched around the fabric of my shirt as if everything was immediately too much and not enough. The intensity of his reaction left me floundering for a moment and unsure. I hadn't expected it. Needing *something*, I lifted a hand to slide my fingers over his jaw and back towards his neck to hold him there. The feel of his skin again mine, even if it was only that tiny, little bit, was as delicious as it was grounding. Leaning into the kiss, I tilted my head and worked my jaw for a more thorough taste of him. He gasped again and pulled just a little bit at my shirt.

And fuck, his lips were softer than anything, so much so that all my prior knowledge of kissing and how it was done went completely out the window. It got to the point where I wasn't kissing him so much as I was moving my lips over his just for the sake of feeling them. With his wide mouth and pouty lips, he was made for kissing, never mind that he obviously had never been kissed before and had no clue what he was doing—it was still delicious. I never wanted to stop.

Just when I realized that if his lips tasted amazing, his lips combined with his tongue on mine would be sensory orgasm worthy, he pulled his mouth away from mine with a soft sucking noise that made me groan for more.

"*Fuck*, Kurt, don't stop," I gasped, not caring even slightly how completely wrecked I sounded. "Come back," I tugged at his neck. How far I had fallen. A fifteen second kiss, *without tongue*, and I was ready to cream my goddamn pants. If I was going to embarrass myself, though, I would have preferred to do it with Kurt's mouth on mine.

Breathing heavy and looking hot, Kurt shook his head at my command; not in a 'no' way, but in a my-mind-has-gone-to-mush-and-I-need-a-minute way. I was pretty much right there with him, only I didn't need a minute—I needed more kissing. Lots more kissing. I leaned up again to let my lips convince him that he needed it too. I got away with the tiniest suck at his bottom lip before he was pulling away again.

"Ku-u-urt," I whined, pouting for a good measure.

"Blaine," he said gently, but there was a warning there, too, one that told me I was not permitted to try for more. It was probably the least fair thing that anyone had ever asked of me. He look so ready for it with his eyes closed, his mouth open, and his face still close enough to mine that I would barely have to move to get his lips back. And *damn* his lips were wet and slightly puffier than they usually were, and after less than half a minute of kissing, too. I could only imagine how delicious they would look after a longer amount of time. I whimpered.

"Please, Kurt? Please?"

"Tomorrow," he said.

"What's tomorrow? You'll kiss me tomorrow? Which tomorrow? Today-tomorrow or tomorrow-tomorrow because tenic—technick—just, it's the early morning time where tomorrow could be today."

"Blaine," he said again, sounding exasperated this time. He reached up to curl his fingers around my wrist, another warning. Apparently I was to stop pulling at his neck, too. Then, just in case I needed more clarification that the kissing portion of the night was well and truly over, "Go to sleep."

His command triggered the far away parts of my brain that weren't completely fogged up by alcohol and I suddenly remembered that I had taken three lies by omission in less than twenty four hours. The last time I did that I had been comatose for almost three weeks. Then again, I hadn't fallen immediately unconscious after the third lie like I had last time, but I didn't know if that meant I was safe indefinitely or just for the time being.

The panic must have risen to my eyes because, even though he couldn't possibly have known what the panic was in response to, Kurt touched me with gentle hands and urged me to calm down with a soft, "Shhh."

He shifted from his kneeling position to one that was more comfortable, sitting on the floor with his legs tucked neatly to the side, and leaned forward to fold his arms on top the edge of the couch. He rested his head down on his arms and looked up at me with a soft, soothing expression on his face and patted a space close to him. "Lay down," he said, voice relaxed and quiet like the rest of him and I could feel my insides start to calm. A small, expectant smile touched his lips, one that was both beautiful and encouraging.

For a minute, I studied him. He looked so peaceful. It made me want to feel that way too.

Without breaking eye contact I relaxed my body until I was curled on my side with my head close to his, my curls brushing his arm. He studied me, looking nervous and shy.

"So..." he began hesitantly, "why am I amazing?" he asked, referring to what I had said just before I kissed him.

For a moment, the question hung there between the two of us.

It was one of those big, life defining moments camouflaged by simplicity. The simplicity, however misleading, was there in Kurt's seemingly innocent question, our relaxed bodies, his soft voice and his shy, innocent eyes. But the moment was so much bigger than just those things. Telling him the truth would take me in a direction I had promised myself I wouldn't go. It was one of those moments where I *should* tell the truth, because Kurt deserved it and I wanted it, wanted *him*, so fucking bad.

On the other hand, I was a glutton for punishment. I got off on fucking up my own life, just to see if I could make it out at the end still alive and standing on my own two feet. It took me higher than any drug ever could. I knew. I had tried a few—always just once because they hadn't done anything that I could already do for myself more effectively.

But as far as that moment with Kurt went, it was the ideal moment to test myself.

I could see it in Kurt's eyes. His question had been anything but innocent. It had purpose. He wanted my words to mean something and he wanted it badly. All I had to do was say something untrue, something arbitrary or superficial and he would be crushed. Maybe bad enough that he would never speak to me again. It would be the ultimate test of survival. Could I live without Kurt Hummel?

Apparently, though, alcohol made me a lot less self-destructive than sobriety did. Good thing, too, because I probably would have kissed Kurt eventually without being under the influence. It was irony at its best I suppose, or maybe the universe was just a huge dick and that was his way of showing that wanted me to become an alcoholic. You decide. Either way, I gave him the honest truth in the way only a drunk person can.

"God, Kurt you don't even *know*. Everything is just so much better when you're here, and when you were gone my hands wouldn't stop shaking. It was really bad. Like, *really* bad." I frowned, remembering. "I didn't like it. You weren't here and they wouldn't stop shaking and I didn't like it. But that's all okay

because you're back." I cuddled closer, made it so that my head was almost pillowed in his folded arms. "I'm okay now. See?" I touched a hand to the side of his face to prove it. "And then there was just all this stuff and I then I kissed you because I wanted to *so bad* and you said you needed me, and *no one* has ever said that to me before and those ones are the reasons why you're amazing."

He looked like he was holding his breath. "How did you know that?"

"Know what? That's your amazing? I just told you." Hadn't I?

"The needing."

"Oh, that." I grinned dopily at him and rolled my eyes. "I took your omission," I said, feeling that should be obvious. "It didn't hurt, though, so it's okay." Then, in a spectacular show of randomness, "Your hair's diff'rnt," I mumbled, noticing for the first time the way it hung down over his face, slightly wavy and free of product. I wondered if he had left his house right after a shower.

"Wait... no. Omission? What didn't hurt?"

"I like it," I said, still on his hair. "It's pretty. *You're* pretty." I wrinkled my nose. "Except you're not because pretty is a stupid word that doesn't work. You're beautiful."

He frowned. "How much did you drink exactly?"

"S-o-o-o much," I said like it was some great accomplishment. Then I yawned. "You're so warm." I closed my eyes. "Please don't let me stay asleep forever. You have to promise that I'll wake up this time, okay?"

"What are you talking about? Blaine?"

He smelled really good—the best. "You're s'posed to promise, Kurt," I mumbled and fell asleep before I heard his answer.

For the second time in my life, the first thing I saw when I woke up was Kurt. He was a pleasant sight to wake up to, but my head felt like it was in the process of being cracked open by a rock and my mouth felt

like a couple fuzzy creatures had taken up shack inside it and then died horrible, tragic deaths that left them decaying slowly in little, bloody pieces. My face scrunched up in disgust. "Shit."

Kurt was still in the same place he had been in when I passed out—half on the couch and half off of it in a mostly upright position. I winced at the thought of how uncomfortable he must have been all night and wondered how he possibly could have managed to fall asleep.

I tried to remember some of the specifics about what I had said to him, but my mind was like a ball of fluff and the only thing I could recall with any sort of certainty was that I had kissed him several times and whined a lot. It would all come back to me once I woke up a bit more and began to feel less like death, but I decided I was better off not knowing for the moment and focused instead on waking up Kurt.

After all the kissing that I had promised myself I wouldn't do, I really wasn't all gung-ho about making any sort of physical contact with him if it wasn't absolutely necessary. I needed the space. But, as I discovered for the first time, waking Kurt up before he was ready to do it on his own was an absolute *bitch* and simply calling his name and telling him to wake up just didn't work. He was part whiny and part absolutely adorable as he scrunched up his face at my command to open his eyes and mumbled nonsense I couldn't decipher.

As cute as he was, I felt like crap rolled up in more crap and I really just wanted to go someplace where the sun was less bright, where I could shower and boil my tongue until it felt normal again, where I could wallow in my own stupidity and maybe spend some time bashing my head against a wall, and Kurt really wasn't helping. So in typical idiot Blaine fashion, I did something that was fucking stupid. I grabbed hold of the nearest pillow and jabbed him with it in the face. "Wake up."

He didn't open his eyes but a truly livid expression blossomed on his face. When I pulled my arm back to jab him again, his hand shot out to catch my wrist. His eyes, when he finally opened them, threatened all kinds of pain. "*Don't*," he said.

"Sorry," I mumbled. He looked absolutely terrifying. I could imagine him strangling me to death with his skinny jeans... it didn't scare me as much as it should have, especially if he had to take them off first in order to do it. Even better if he had that look on his face when he did it—just because I was twisted like that.

As if he could hear what I was thinking, his eyes narrowed dangerously and he glared at me for a few seconds longer before releasing my wrist. I waited until he squeezed his eyes shut as he stretched before rubbing at the abused skin. Damn, he was strong.

He hissed when he moved his neck in the wrong way.

"You probably shouldn't have slept like that," I observed and he shot me a dark look.

"Whose fault is that?" he fired back.

It was on the tip of my tongue to say something lewd, possibly something about him showering with me so I could work out the kinks under his skin. My lips had already begun to twitch in anticipation, but at the last second I realized that he was absolutely right. I had asked him to stay with me, and he had actually done it. He had slept all night on the floor—for me.

It was too much. It was *awkward*.

I needed space.

"Uh... I'm going to go shower and stuff. You can go do—I don't know—whatever, I guess. Go back to sleep or something. I just didn't want to leave you here on the floor." I stood up and headed for the door.

"Blaine," he stopped me.

I turned back around way too fast. The room spun. "Yeah, what's up?"

"Come back when you're finished."

Liquid panic rushed loudly in my ears. "...Sure. I just need an hour. To shower and stuff." I had said that already. "But, yeah, I'll come find you. After I'm done."

His eyes narrowed. "Here," he said, eying me too carefully.

"Yeah, sure." I jerked my thumb over my shoulder in the general direction of anywhere but there. "I'll be back."

Leaving him there felt wrong, but I just couldn't. It was too much. I couldn't even pinpoint exactly what it was that made me feel so wrong—there were too many things to choose from. The awkwardness, the kissing, the grand gesture he had made, the things I was slowly starting to remember saying and doing. Maybe it was a little of everything; it didn't matter. I just knew that I felt messed up and I needed to be somewhere else, *anywhere* else where I would hopefully feel something different, something better. But leaving him felt like the antithesis of right and *better* certainly wasn't waiting for me outside the room. In fact, the distance made me feel worse, as if letting him out of my sight was the most egregious sin against humanity I could commit.

When I went to my dorm to grab my toothbrush, I took a detour to my nightstand to grab the post-it note Kurt had given me earlier that week out of the top drawer. Touching the familiar faded yellow paper made me feel slightly less like a loose cannon and a touch more like I would actually continue to breathe. The downside? It also made me feel like a basket case who lost his fucking basket, which was always a fun time. None of this was normal. Or maybe it was. People sometimes looked at pictures of their significant others when they were feeling insecure, right? This was like that. Kind of. Only Kurt wasn't my significant other and instead of a picture I was holding an old discolored piece of paper like it was my lifeline, so maybe I hadn't quite landed on the saner side of the sanity spectrum.

I stuffed my hand and the note into the pocket of my jeans and left the dorm without sparing Steven a passing glance.

I brushed my teeth four times in the shower, scrubbing my tongue raw. It was really wasn't necessary to continue doing it after the second time, but the memories from the night before had started to come back with a vengeance and I needed something to occupy myself with while I mulled everything over and tried to comb through all the nonsense so that it made sense.

When I loaded my toothbrush up with toothpaste for the fifth time, it really started to hit me for the first time. I had kissed Kurt. I had *kissed* him and I had done it because for some wild reason, taking a lie by omission from Kurt was as easy and painless as blinking an eye.

What did that *mean*?

Had it been a fluke? A one time thing that could be filed away in the drunken stupor section of bad ideas and never attempted again? Or was Kurt simply the exception to the rule?

I wished there was someone I could talk to, an expert who would be able to explain everything to me in a clear, thought-out way that I could understand. There was no one, though. Preternatural abilities were still considered to be highly enigmatic. They couldn't be explained, measured, or calculated by science.

Furthermore, like Cooper who was both telepathic and telekinetic, I was something of an anomaly in the preternatural world. For starters, I was the only lie detector in the entire preternatural community who could hear the truth rather than just being able to sense dishonesty. Also, I was the only one who could detect lies made by omission. So it wasn't as if I could seek out other lie detectors and compare notes.

Also, how the fuck was I supposed to explain to Kurt that I had blatantly invaded his privacy?

In a fit of frustration, I attacked the shower taps, twisting violently until the water was off. *This* was why I didn't do relationships. I couldn't handle the all complications and the feelings and just—ugh. I felt like I was going completely fucking nuts and on top of that, I had to go find Kurt and have a painful conversation with him about how much of an asshole I was.

I took my time getting dressed.

When I finally got back to the lounge I found Kurt looking out one of the windows with his back to me. His hair was different, styled, and his clothes had been changed—black skinny jeans (he loved those things), a white dress shirt and a black vest thing that made his back look masculine and powerful.

He didn't turn to face me, though he must have heard me coming. "Hey, gorgeous," I said quietly when we were finally standing side by side, both of us looking out the window as if a sunny autumn day was a thing of great interest. I hadn't meant to use the nickname. It felt too soon and too personal and I was actually making an effort to be serious, but he *was* gorgeous, absolutely, and it just slipped out. Surprisingly, though, it seemed to relax him rather than irritate him because the tension in his shoulders ebbed some when the word left my lips. I wasn't quite sure what to do with that. He had always acted like the nickname annoyed him before.

Without looking at me, he broke the silence. "Explain."

"Explain what?" I asked, not in a dickish way. Or at least I hoped not in a dickish way.

"Nothing," he said in a stoic, matter of fact way. *Why you kissed me, why you knew that I needed you, what you meant when you said that you 'took my omission,' why you told me I had to make sure you would wake up, why you felt so lost without me.*"

"That's... a lot to explain."

The tension in his shoulders came back and when he spoke there was a slight bite in his tone. "Do you have somewhere to be?"

"No."

"Then tell me."

"...I didn't like coming back here last night and finding you gone," I said after a moment's hesitation. "I mean, when I get like that... I don't know. It's not like an I-miss-you thing. Not that I didn't—I mean, I don't—just—damn it." I pushed a tense hand through my still wet curls. "I can't do this."

He didn't respond to my little outburst, which was probably the wisest course of action.

"Sorry," I grumbled. I took a calming breath and forced myself to try again. "Okay. It's not like an I miss you thing. It's more like I *need* to be around you. Like a compulsion thing. It was bad on Monday, but when you gave me the note and we started talking, it was pretty much gone. Maybe because we were together, I don't know. Maybe not, though, because I left yesterday no problem, but when I got back and you weren't here it made me all nervous. Not knowing where you were felt wrong." I took a peek at him. He was still staring straight ahead out the window. I didn't look like he had heard a single thing I said, though he must have. "I know that makes me sound insane..."

Still, he said nothing and gave no indication of what he was feeling. Then suddenly, "Do you want to know why I came back yesterday?"

I nodded.

"It was for no reason, really." *I had to come back. Leaving made my skin crawl and it felt like that the whole time I was home. It didn't stop until I decided to come back. I feel a compulsion thing, too.*

"So we're both fucked up."

He finally turned to look at me. He had this ironic little smile on his face, one that was almost sneaky, as if we were sharing a private joke. "What do we do about that?"

"We could get a pair of handcuffs and lock ourselves together."

"Of course, Blaine, yes. That's the perfect solution," he said with a dry and cutting look on his face that made me grin. *I was thinking more along the lines of exchanging cellphone numbers.*

I wrinkled my nose. "That sounds so normal."

He shrugged. "I can't think of any other solution." *I could take you home with me next week.*

I froze. "Oh. Uh..."

He rolled his eyes. "Don't decide now," he said, letting me off the hook—somewhat at least. "What did you mean when you said you took my omission?" he asked, getting right to the point.

I opened and closed my mouth a few times, not knowing how to approach this. I didn't know how he was going to react. Most people didn't respond well to having their privacy invaded, not that Kurt was anything even remotely like most people, but he *was* pretty closed lipped. He didn't share things about himself readily.

"It's just something I can do," I finally settled on saying as I folded my arms across my chest and turned my face away from his. "Can we maybe leave it at that for now?"

He sighed in an overly patient way. "Blaine..." There was that warning tone again.

"Fine. You know how people say that you can lie by omission? Well, it's more than just some bullshit wives accuse their husbands of doing when they get caught cheating. It's actually a real way to lie. I'm a lie detector, so..." I shrugged, figuring it was needless to say more. "I asked you why you came back, and you chose not to answer. So I took it as an omission."

"You took it?" he repeated, incredulous. "Just like that?" he asked, snapping his fingers, his face written over with angry sarcasm. "Just like that, you decided that was okay?"

"I was drunk," I grumbled despite knowing how pathetic it sounded.

"Oh." He scoffed, throwing his hands up a little. "Well. That makes it *so* much better." *That's a bullshit excuse.*

"Look, I'm sorry, alright? It was a dumb fucking thing to do. I *know* that. I had already done it a couple of times that day and—not to you!" I said in a rush when his face went instantly livid. "To someone else. Just... it's not exactly a safe thing for me to do. It actually hurts a whole fuck of a lot and doing it too often in a twenty-four hour period can land me in the hospital, so I shouldn't have done it. For that and because the privacy thing, but, like I said, I wasn't thinking right."

"What do you mean it could land you in the hospital?" he asked, eyeing me carefully.

I shrugged, feigning nonchalance. "I went into a coma because of it once." His eyes went wide and I continued on, talking fast before he got the chance to ask questions. "Your omission was the third one I took yesterday, and it should have been really bad. But it wasn't. It didn't even hurt. I don't know why—that's never happened to me before, and I don't know what it means. But it was nice, I guess, to hear what you said and to not feel any pain when I heard you say it, and I just felt overwhelmed, so I kissed you, and..."

"And...?" he prompted.

"...And it felt—I don't know. It felt like *everything*. Like everything in the world was wrapped up in kissing you. I know that doesn't make sense and it sounds completely stupid, but I'm not any good at this crap. I just—I can't..." I trailed off, leaving my thoughts unfinished, even in my own mind. I had no clue as to how to keep going. It was difficult to tell what was right and what wasn't. I didn't know what he wanted, or if he had even wanted me to describe how the kiss made me feel in the first place. Maybe he just wanted me to keep explaining why I had done it. I didn't know. I tangled my fingers together and avoided his eyes. "I don't know what else you want me to say."

"It's not... Do you honestly think that's what this is about?"

I shrugged because what the hell did that even mean?

I looked down at my shoes. They were old and ratty and colored on in three different ballpoint pen colors. It was probably time for a new pair, especially in comparison to Kurt's shoes, which were black leather and damn near perfect.

Kurt sighed at my silence. "Before last night, I hadn't... I had never..."

"Kissed anyone," I filled in.

"Yes," he lied. *Yes and no. I had and I hadn't.*

I frowned, confused. "I don't get it. What do you mean you had and you hadn't? How can you have kissed someone and never been kissed at the same time?"

Instead of answering me, Kurt cleared his throat. "So, is that something we do now? Kiss each other?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. Do you want it to be?"

"Yes," he lied, and *damn* did that hurt like fuck.

I don't know, his truth whispered in my head. *You just took it from me. You never asked if it was what I wanted. I don't know what to do about that.*

"I was drunk," I argued again, even more feebly than the first time. Why did it have to feel like a piece of me was dying? Why was I suddenly so desperate to make this all okay? When had it all changed? Kissing Kurt had been a mistake. Everything had been a mistake. When had that changed? "I said I was sorry."

Kurt's truth was gentle and it broke my heart because it sounded so damn final.

I know.

When the fuck had I fallen in love with someone I barely knew?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Proper Way to Insert Your Foot Up Your Own Ass

I'll admit it freely and gladly. I am an idiot...

I recoiled at the words *I love him* as soon as I thought them. It was too soon. It was *way* too soon. Only crazy people thought things like that after knowing someone less than a week. Besides, love was the very last complication I needed so I shoved any thoughts of it quickly away, a task that was easily done partly because of my sheer determination to avoid thinking about it and partly because my stomach was still churning over Kurt's truth.

His unspoken words buzzed around in my mind, squishing the annoying *I love you's* flying around that was I more than happy to blame on sleep deprivation and a fucker of a hangover.

Back to Kurt's truth.

I know, he'd said with unsettling finalization, as if we were stuck at an impasse.

I forced myself to remember how shitty hearing it had made me feel. Feeling like shit was better than entertaining the truly psychotic notion that I had somehow fallen in love. And, fuck me, there it was again. That goddamn L word. The word that never did anyone any favors. It was a broken promise I never wanted to make.

I know, I know, I know, I know, I made the phantom Kurt in my mind chant.

What did that even mean? I tell him I'm sorry and he says that he knows. What was I supposed to do with that? Where was I—no, where were *we* supposed to go from *I know*?

I know, I know, I know.

"...Do you want me to leave?" I asked after a long, empty space of silence.

My question obviously threw him. He looked torn, which kind of pissed me off. I couldn't remember the last time I had said the words *I'm sorry* to someone. I was trying to make things better and he was being difficult.

When he opened his mouth to answer, my stomach gave a violent twist. Tiny little pricks prodded at my insides and outsides and my tongue went dryer than crusted old dirt. What if he said yes? What if he actually asked me to leave?

My eyes dropped down to his hand. I could grab it. I could grab it and refuse to let go. I could wrap my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist like a leech. I could kiss him until I forgot what it meant to breathe my own air. I could do something crazy. I could—

"Pink Houses" interrupted my internal insanity as well as whatever Kurt had been about to say.

"*Shit*," I was surprised to hear him say as he grabbed his phone from somewhere my eyes hadn't been quick enough to catch. "Dad—"

"Where are you?" Burt Hummel spoke instantly over him and Kurt winced.

"You didn't find my note?"

"The Dalton brochure I found on my nightstand that has 'here' written on it? And I was supposed to be what—reassured by that? Kurt, you took off in the middle of the night without so much as a goodbye. What the hell's going on?"

Kurt shook his head, opening and closing his mouth a few times. "Dad—I can't... I..."

There was a slight pause after Kurt trailed off, unable to explain himself. Then, on Burt's side, "No, Carole, I will *not* calm down! First he skips Friday night dinner and now this! He just up and left without saying—"

I only had about a second to puzzle over the bit about Friday night dinner because a new voice came on, Carole I guessed. Her voice was much quieter than Burt's had been but still not soft enough to keep me from hearing what she was saying. "Kurt, honey, I'm going to put you on speaker. Just answer yes or no, okay? Are you at school?"

"No." Yes.

"Okay. Do you need us to come get you?"

"Yes." *No.*

"...Alright," she said, though she sounded a bit unsure. "I'm sure you had a reason for leaving like you did, otherwise you wouldn't have done it."

Kurt's eyes flicked to me once and then dropped down. I wasn't sure if he knew whether or not I could hear everything being said. "No." *Yes.*

A very decisive snort sounded from the other line, obviously Burt.

"Feel free to ignore your father," Carole said, her tone of voice indicating that she might have been sending Burt an angry glare. I had never met her though, so I couldn't be sure. "The important thing is that you're safe. You *are* safe, right?"

"No." *Yes.*

"Okay, good. Next time we really need more of a heads up, honey. We were worried when we found you gone and your note didn't exactly explain anything, not that you can help that, but still."

"We'll talk about this on Friday," Burt cut in, sounding only marginally calmer. The struggle to remain that way was evident in his voice. "I expect you home this time—no excuses."

Kurt said nothing, not there was much point for him to since it was pretty obvious he wasn't being given a choice.

There was a short-lived silence which Carole broke with a sigh. "Don't worry, he'll calm down. Just prepare yourself for an interrogation. We'll see you on Friday, okay?"

"Bye," he answered quietly before disconnecting the call. He folded his arms tightly over his chest and looked up nervously at me. "How much of that did you hear?"

I shrugged and took up a false interest in a bit of imaginary dust on my pants. "When I asked you to go with me to Wal-Mart on Friday, you could have told me that you already had plans."

That made three things that he had sacrificed for me: Friday dinner, his weekend with his family, and a comfortable night's sleep spent in his bed rather than on the floor. Oh, and don't forget his first kiss. Fuck, that made four. I was beginning to rack up a debt, something I wasn't entirely comfortable with.

He didn't look very comfortable either. Obviously he hadn't wanted me to find out. "Yeah, well..."

There was that silence again, filling the space between us with more and more nothing. I sighed. "I guess I'll just leave you alone..." I said slowly, waiting in the silence that followed to see if he would try to stop me. He said nothing and I wondered what the hell I was doing, waiting around for some guy to tell me to jump just so I could ask him how high. That wasn't what I was about.

Kurt sat there not doing anything, an indescribable expression on his face. Well, fine. I didn't need this shit. All I had to do was get up and walk out without so much as a fuck you. Or at the very least make it to the door. Hell, finding the will to make it to the sofa that was five feet away would have been something to celebrate over at the pathetic rate I was going.

I jumped at the sudden feel of Kurt's fingers curling around the cuff of my hoodie, his grip on the material tight. My gaze fell to his hand and traveled up his arm and to his face but his attention was once again out the window.

"Stay," he said.

"...Okay."

I didn't think anything of it when Wes stopped me on my way to the bathroom one morning and started gabbing on and on about this song Kurt and I could sing together and would I be interested and *blah blah*.

First off, it was a Thursday and my academic drive for the week fizzled out sometime around 11:59 PM on Sunday, meaning my attention span was less than zero seconds per minute (I know, but just go with it). Second, Kurt and I were still awkward beyond reason and I was even less cheerful than usual because of reasons. Third, Sebastian had given up fucking Steven like it was his Great Gay calling and was in between fuck buddies (figuratively, of course), which meant he was back to bugging the shit out of me to suck his cock. And finally, I just really kind of didn't care what Wes wanted me to do so long as agreeing to

whatever it was meant he would leave me alone, so I sent Wes off happy with a distracted, "Yeah, man, whatever."

Like usual, I slept through my first two classes, waking up third period to smile at Kurt when he walked in the room with his leather book tucked neatly under his arm. "Hey, gorgeous."

He nodded in my direction as he took his seat and I sighed. Still mad at me, then.

He and I had taken up this weird sort of coexistence with one another since the weekend which involved spending all of our spare time together in heavy, uncomfortable silence. Kurt would do his best to pretend like I wasn't there and I would do my best to convince him to act normal around me again. However, trying to get him to talk to me (when it was just us, of course) was like pulling teeth. He made sure to answer me whenever I asked him a question, but he gave me one word answers only. The whole omission thing had obviously freaked him out, but I didn't know how to fix it. I had apologized twice more since Sunday and it was getting me nowhere, much to my complete annoyance. I mean, what else did he want from me? I was doing the best I could and he was giving me almost nothing.

I twisted my head where it was pillowed in my arms to study his profile. I saw him pause in his reading to take a peek at me from the corner of his eye and I frowned in frustration. He was so damn confusing.

We walked to our second class together side by side in the hallway. Just like I had done since Monday, I eventually gave in and grabbed his hand because not having some sort of contact with him when he was so close made me feel like a thousand little insects were running all over my skin, and just like he had done since Monday, he got all tense as if the contact between us bothered him but he didn't let go. In fact, he stepped closer to me so that our arms brushed. It made me want to tear my hair out.

I had been desperate enough over it to call Santana the night before and ask her what the fuck I was supposed to do to fix things. She had advised me to wrap a bow around my dick and handcuff myself to his bed. When I asked her how the hell that was supposed to show that I was sorry for violating his trust she told me to write SORRY across my chest in the dessert sauce of my choice. I told her to kiss my ass and hung up on her mid-cackle.

I was beginning to wonder, though, whether I should just go for it. If anything it would piss Kurt off to no end and he would probably spend a good bit of time yelling at me for it, which would be a nice break from the endless string of curt responses I was getting.

He let go of my hand as we walked into the classroom and took his usual seat at the back. I sat down in the seat next to him and buried my face in my arms, hoping that would be enough to get Sebastian to leave me alone.

My desk shifted under a sudden weight. "Alright, Anderson, here is the deal. I will give you one hundred dollars if you suck me off."

I lifted my head to look up at Sebastian, who was perched on the corner of my desk. "Seriously?" I asked with intrigue, only half joking, and I saw Kurt's head snap up. Well. That was interesting.

"Seriously."

I widened my eyes with false innocence. "*Here?*"

"No, not *here*. Later. In my room." He looked at Kurt. "You can occupy yourself for half hour, right?"

Kurt glared at him.

I leaned back in my seat, folding my arms as I went. "I'll do it for 1k."

Kurt's mouth fell open. Sebastian was sporting a similar expression.

"One thousand dollars? Are you insane?"

I shrugged. "That's my price."

"No way. *No. Way*. I could get some random thirty-something-year-old at Scandals to do it for free."

"Sounds like you don't need me then."

"I offered you a hundred!"

"Yeah, but I want a thousand," I said as I laid a hand on Sebastian's leg and traced it slowly upwards. I smirked when his breath hitched, but most of my attention was on Kurt, who looked completely livid. Jealousy was kind of really fucking hot on him I realized with a manic grin. "I'll even give you till the end of the day to think about it."

"Fuck you, Blaine," Sebastian spat, though his voice shook just a little.

I lifted my hand off his leg to grab hold of his tie and pulled him down to my level. "That, I'll give you for two thousand," I said into his ear, nipping at it once for a good measure.

Sebastian jerked away from me and moved to sit at his own desk, which was in front of mine.

"Let me know if you change your mind, gorgeous," I said with a shit eating grin and laughed when I saw his shoulders tense up. Kurt was still staring at me in abject outrage when I settled back down and closed my eyes with a smile on my face, pretending to go to sleep.

The second class was over Kurt grabbed onto my arm and dragged me to the nearest bathroom. He maneuvered the garbage can holding the door open out of the way and ducked down to see if anyone was in any of the stalls.

"Don't tell me you want a blow job, too," I said with a cheeky grin. "If that's the case, I'll suck you for free, gorgeous."

Kurt shot up to send me a death glare. "*Don't* call me that."

Shit. Maybe pissed Kurt off wasn't the way to go after all. "Aw, come on, Kurt, I was just—"

"*Don't*," he said again. "Listen very, very carefully, Blaine. Stay the hell away from me."

My stomach dropped. "Whoa, what the hell? Are you fucking serious? I was just *kidding*."

Kurt said nothing as he pushed past me and walked out of the bathroom.

I stood there like a total idiot for a few seconds, wondering what the fuck had just happened before my brain kick started up again and I stumbled after him.

I had to jog to catch up. His legs were long and he moved fast. "Kurt! Kurt, seriously, none of that with Sebastian meant anything. I was just fucking with him."

He shrugged my hand violently off his arm and kept walking towards his next class without so much as a glance in my direction.

Around that time I started getting desperate. "You're overreacting over nothing. It was a fucking *joke*, Kurt, come on! What are you so pissed about?"

He said nothing.

Ever since I had taken his omission he had been so careful to answer every single one of my questions. He had been so careful not to give me another chance to peek inside his private mind. But now...

He said nothing.

And like the true idiot that I was, I started to do it, almost without really meaning to. I'm pretty sure I would have eventually stopped just before I actually went through with it, but I didn't get to that just before point because somehow he *knew*.

He turned on me in an instant and pinned me with a truly hateful look. "Don't you *dare*," he said so quietly that it was a miracle I was even able to hear him.

I went instantly cold. My brain couldn't function well enough to entertain the thought that maybe he had reacted on a hunch rather than knowing with complete certainty what I had been about to do. Maybe if I *had* thought of that, I wouldn't have looked so damn guilty, which really just confirmed that he had guessed right. The less than a full second flash of hurt in his eyes made me feel empty. It felt worse when he instantly covered it up with more anger.

"I... I..." I had *nothing*.

Without another word he turned his back on me and walked away. I didn't follow.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Proper Way to Build Up the Courage to Make a Big Gesture

This is accomplished by using Kurt as incentive, being miserably alone, and getting more than your fill of some well-placed sarcasm from Bitches...

The day after our fight thing, Kurt left Dalton as soon as classes were over without so much as a kiss my ass. I didn't watch him go, but I knew he was gone when that he-left-and-I'm-slowly-going-out-of-my-mind feeling started to creep up my spine.

Two hours into my moping, Bitches texted me to ask what I was doing, to which I replied, *Kurt left. Leave me alone.* She showed up at Dalton about an hour and a half later and all but forced me into going with her to one of those stupid outdoor binge drinking parties that almost always suck and are never worth the inevitable post party hangover.

We spent all night dicking around at the party (if you could even refer to it as one), which was in some random assed field in the middle of nowhere, drinking half our body weight something called 'can juice'. It tasted like rubbing alcohol and fruit punch mixed together. Santana wound up sobbing her fucking eyes out sometime around one in the morning and not long after that I remember trying my best to get her to kiss me. Eventually I got her to agree and I remember giving a victory whoop as I swooped in to eat her face off. Fortunately, about an inch away from her lips, I finally noticed the globs of snot running down her nose from all the fucking crying and that her face had puffed up like a blow fish and remembered, *oh yeah, I'm gay.* She punched me in the face for changing my mind and cried harder.

After that I really don't remember what the fuck happened. The next morning I woke up in the back seat of San's car butt ass naked with a mysterious red stripe of paint on my back that ran from the nape of my neck down to the crack of my ass. My jeans were wrapped around my head like a makeshift turban and my underwear was hanging from her radio antenna, secured tight with leopard print duct tape. We never found my shirt. Santana had fallen asleep with her legs sprawled over the passenger seat, her upper half on the floor crammed underneath the dash.

After I was dressed (or half-dressed anyway) and she was awake, neither of us felt like going anywhere else so we basically spent the entire day in the car, slowly eating our way through the small supply of chips she kept in her trunk and bitched about everything in our lives that pissed us off.

She dropped me off at Dalton sometime around three in the morning on Sunday and though I was completely sober (my head still hurt too much from the night before to do any more drinking), I felt a sense of deja vu as I dragged my tired and sore body (sore from spending the day crammed in Santana's tiny sedan) into the student lounge. I killed about an hour staring up at the ceiling, wondering if Kurt would show up like he had done the week before, just because being away from me was too much to handle.

He didn't.

I fell asleep waiting for him.

Kurt returned to Dalton on Monday and a week passed by slowly with the constant feeling of disappointment in my stomach. Disappointment in myself for how royally I had screwed things up, disappointment for how I was letting Kurt affect me so completely, disappointment for each time his eyes would find mine for no reason at all before he would look apathetically away—oh, and lets not fucking forget, disappointment for how he seemed to need me so much less than I needed him.

That week I watched him drive away Friday evening with my heart being squeezed by an imaginary fist. I only lasted an hour before I all but ran to my car, Santana's advice from the day before on my mind...

So follow him.

I told myself that I wouldn't but I called Santana from the car because panic had started to slurp at the marrow in my bones.

"Speak," was what she said after picking up on the fourth ring.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" I blurted as I glanced again at the arrival time on the GPS. Just a little over ten minutes left. It made me feel sick. The fact that it was nighttime and dark as shit made things worse. I hated driving to places I had never been to before at night.

"Of course it's a good fucking idea. I came up with it, didn't I?"

I scowled. She *would* say that. "Yeah, but I don't see how this is going to help. In fact, me showing up to his house completely unannounced is just going to piss him off. He made it pretty clear that he wants nothing to do with me."

"Um, excuse me, Curly Sue, but which one of us has spent more time with him, you or me?"

I scoffed. "That really makes no difference. It's not like he can actually talk to you."

She hummed. "So you're finally admitting that he talks to *you*?"

I rolled my eyes. We were *not* having that conversation again. "That was a generic 'you,'" I said without missing a beat.

"Yeah, sure it was," she shot back just as fast. "But to clarify for those of us on the short bus, he didn't have to use his voice to make it obvious that he's the biggest romantic sap alive. Every time a couple walked by holding hands, the longing in his eyes would ooze out of his eyeballs and goop all over the freaking floor where it would be left for some poor innocent bystander to trek through later. It was embarrassing to watch."

I pinched the bridge of my nose as her truth corrected the lies. "I'm sorry, was there a point in there somewhere that I missed?" I asked tightly, willing her to silently get the hint that I wanted her to stop bullshitting.

"Probably. You're kind of an idiot."

"You're not fucking helping!" I snapped as I jerked into the indicated exit lane. "I mean, *fuck*. What the fuck am I doing?"

She scoffed loudly into the phone. "What you are doing is going to make up with Hummel so you can stop calling me every night to whine about how royally you fucked things up with Princess Gay-Face. My ears

have bled so much on account of your incessant bitching that I am way past the point of needing extensive reconstructive surgery."

And again with the onslaught of corrective truths. I was about three seconds away from throwing my phone out the window. "You know what? I don't even know why I fucking bother with you. Can't you just—I don't know, actually fucking *help* me when I need it instead of basically being a useless bitch? Just—*Ugh*. Whatever. Fuck this, I'm going back—"

"Oh my god, Blaine, take a pill and chill the fuck out! I was just busting your balls. This is going to work, okay? He'll appreciate the big gesture and then you'll both get to fuck happily ever after. Don't—" She sighed. She started again. "Don't go back, okay? You'll regret it if you do. And I wasn't *really* trying to piss you off. I just figured that maybe if you laughed a little you would calm down or something, I don't know..." She huffed, sounding uncomfortable and embarrassed by the admission. Her discomfort went along nicely with the color that exploded all over my face. "Sometimes you can be such a pregnant woman it's not even funny."

I grimaced at the underlying hurt in her voice. Or maybe 'hurt' was too strong of a word for someone like her. Still, I had made her all upset, which didn't exactly make me want to burst into song. "Jesus, Bitches, keep your fucking shirt on. It's not like I actually turned around or anything."

"Yeah, whatever," was her way of letting me know I was forgiven. "Are you there yet?"

"No. There is literally nothing here but trees and road. Who did you get this address from again? I swear to god, if you're sending me to a fucking crack house or something—"

"I'm sorry, but do I look like a humongous Jew-nose to you?"

"*What?*"

"Rachel Berry."

"*Who?*"

"Nevermind. I got it from Finn Hudson. Kurt's dad is dating his mom... Did you find it yet?"

"Yeah, hold on," I said distractedly as I followed the GPS's instructions and made the left turn into Kurt's driveway, which was easily missed. I couldn't see anything but trees and darkness, even with my high beams on. The driveway itself was freakishly long, and it took a few seconds before I saw lights in the distance, presumably from the house—Kurt's house—where he lived. Nervous flesh shredding bats exploded in my stomach. "Shit, shit, shit," I mumbled, starting to really freak out.

"Relax. It's going to be fine," Santana said softly in my ear, startling me because I had forgotten she was there.

"No," I shook my head, my hands fisted tightly around the steering wheel. "I should have stayed at Dalton and waited the weekend out. This isn't me. I don't do touchy feely crap like this. What the hell am I even supposed to say?"

"Well, I would avoid anything with the phrase 'you complete me' in it," she said, dry and sarcastic once again. She changed her tone to a more serious one before I could snap at her for it. "Listen, it really doesn't matter what you're going to say. You'll say what you have to and you'll do it for him."

I digested that in silence, trying to catch some sort of hidden meaning.

Santana sighed. "I'm going to hang up now, okay? You'll be fine. Text me later."

She hung up without waiting for me to say goodbye, which was just as well because I had finally reached the end of Kurt's ridiculously long driveway and I could see the outlines of people sitting inside through one of the windows. I couldn't tell who was who or make out anything specific about the shadowy human shaped blobs, but one of those people in there was *Kurt*, and the restlessness I had felt since he left school earlier that day started to ebb. I wondered whether he felt it too; the sense of calm that came from being close enough to see or touch.

I killed the ignition. It took me a few deep breaths, but I awarded myself some hypothetical points for getting out of the car despite the bats still tearing up my stomach.

I felt really weird. On the one hand, I couldn't get to the front door fast enough. On the other, I wanted to run back to my car and hide out in there for the rest of the weekend. I wasn't very well accustomed to being indecisive and I really didn't like it. Still, I eventually made it to the door and knocked louder and more sharply than I had originally intended, grimacing when people started yelling from the inside.

"Did someone just knock on the door?"

"I *told* you I heard a car!"

"Finn, honey, could you get that?"

"Boys! Why is someone knocking on my door at ten o'clock at night?"

"*What's with all the yelling?*"

"Make Kurt get it!"

"I am *moisturizing*, Finn! *You* do it!"

Kurt.

Oh, god, this is fucking happening...

Thundering footsteps sounded from inside a second before the porch light flicked on. I scowled up at it just as the door was pulled open and I found myself looking up at a ginormous fuck of a kid with the babyest baby face I had ever seen. His face scrunched up in confusion as he stared at me.

"Uhhh..." he said, looking and sounding completely idiotic. "Who are you?"

"Blaine," I said shortly, annoyed at the slight unsettlement I felt in my stomach at how massively huge he was. He looked too big to be allowed.

"O...kay? Are you, like, selling something... or something?"

"Do I *look* like I'm selling something?"

"Uh..."

A woman rounded the corner—a woman with pale skin, large, dark eyes, short, dark hair that went in all different directions, a lip piercing, a smallish gauge in one ear, and a pink shirt that said LET THEM EAT SHIT on it. Most importantly, though, she had a wide, pouty mouth that looked exactly like Kurt's.

She locked eyes with me as she walked over to the door, suspicion evident on her face. "Scoot, stretch," she said to the giant kid as she hip bumped him out of the way. "What do you want?"

"Kurt," I said without thinking.

The Lip Thief lifted her eyebrows at me. "Sorry, shorty, Kurt's not for sale."

I rolled my eyes. "Can you just go get him for me?"

She moved to lean her body up against the door frame and folded her arms across her chest. "He's not home, cutie, but feel free to play again next time." *He's upstairs in his room.*

Her truth sounded surprisingly pleasant. Pleasant, but still hella annoying because she was being difficult.

"The fuck he's not," I snapped. I was nervous, felt slightly intimidated, and was starting to get really pissed off. Sue me.

Another woman popped up seemingly out of nowhere. She had straight, strawberry red hair that was pulled back into a severe, professional looking bun. The severity didn't stop her from being beautiful, though, and neither did the plain gray suit she wore. She looked like she had just come home from the office after spending the day wiping employees all over the floor. She looked me over and frowned in confusion before turning to the bitch that wouldn't let me see Kurt. "What's going on here?"

The Lip Thief shrugged. "Kid says he 'wants' Kurt," she said, complete with air quotes. "Obviously he's some kind of sick little pervert." She glared at me and I cringed when her truth sounded off in my head just a little too loud.

The blonde redhead scowled at the other woman. "Don't be ridiculous, Logan. Obviously he goes to Kurt's school." She gestured impatiently at my uniform, which I hadn't remembered to change out of in my haste to get to Kurt. Next she turned to the mini giant who was still standing there looking confused. "Finn, find Kurt and tell him someone is at the door for him."

(If you need a second or two to puzzle over what deep hole the name *Finn* came from, feel free to go right ahead knock yourself out with that. I sure as hell spent a few good seconds staring at him in confusion and wondering what the actual fuck. But anyway.)

"Yeah, sure," Finn agreed with an awkward movement of his shoulders that I guessed was supposed to have been a shrug. Then he turned towards the stairs behind the two women. "*KURT!*"

"For crying out—*WHAT*, Finn?" Kurt yelled immediately from somewhere upstairs.

"DOOR!"

The suit rolled her eyes at the giant kid. "That was necessary?"

Finn grinned sheepishly. It made him look even more boyish, though I would have bet beforehand that was an impossibility. "Sorry, Ev."

'Ev' sighed and turned back to me. "Come in," she said, so I did. Lip Thief, or Logan, kicked the door closed behind me.

Ev put out her hand for me to shake. I shook it on impulse and tried not to show surprise at the intense pressure she put on my hand. "I'm Kurt's aunt, Everly," she said, her steel gray eyes trained on mine in a way that held my gaze and refused to let go. She was not someone to piss off.

"Blaine," I mumbled.

Logan snorted loudly as she walked over to prop herself up against a nearby wall. I got the feeling it was her go-to 'at ease' position. "Now, why you gotta lie like that, V?"

Tension presented itself around the edges of Everly's mouth. "Don't start with me Logan."

"What? Am I starting?" Logan asked with a shit eating grin. "I'm just trying to keep you good and honest."

Everly whipped her head around to glare at the woman. "I'm sorry. Next time I introduce myself to someone I'll be sure to say, 'I'm Kurt's dead mother's best friend. Kurt calls me his aunt, and normally I would introduce myself that way, but Logan Hummel has a problem with dishonesty that she doesn't like to apply to herself, just other people.'"

The truths rattled off in my head one after another. I started to think running after Kurt was a bad idea. I hadn't had any idea how many people would be at his house. Not to mention, the foyer was a small space and I was beginning to feel boxed in. The bickering wasn't helping much either.

Logan smirked, looking amused, but there was something more sinister in her gaze that she *almost* managed to keep hidden. "You know, if you agreed to marry me, you could be his aunt for real and this really wouldn't be an issue anymore."

Something dangerous came over Everly's face. "I'd rather cut off my own arm with the blunt side of a spoon." *I'd rather marry you.*

"*Blaine?*"

I turned at the sound of Kurt's voice. He stared at me from the top of the stairs looking bewildered, his body frozen with his hand resting on the banister. "What are you *doing* here?"

"I..." Fuck, 'I' what? "I came to see you."

He lifted his eyebrows at that. He picked up a foot as if to go down a step and move closer, but seemed to think better of it and put it firmly back down. "How do you even know where I live?"

I consciously had to keep from biting my lip. "Santana told me."

To that, Kurt said nothing.

Logan jerked her thumb in my direction. "You want me to throw him out?"

A third woman came down the stairs. "What's going on?" From the sound of her voice, I thought she might be Carole. Her voice had sounded so comforting on the phone but now it was one voice too many.

Then a man who I immediately recognized as Burt Hummel walked in and I officially started freaking out. There were too many people and they were all much too close.

"What are we all standing around in here for?" Burt stopped short when his eyes fell on me. "Who're you?"

They all turned to stare at me.

My head started to pound. Somewhere in the midst of it all, Kurt heaved an annoyed sigh and trudged his way down the stairs to grab my hand.

"I need a minute to talk to Blaine." *I need some unknown amount of time to talk to Blaine.* My eyes nearly rolled back into my head at having his truth in my brain for the first time in eight days.

Next thing I knew he was pulling me outside, Burt's question of "Who is Blaine?" muffled behind us as Kurt pulled the door shut with a bang before dragging me down the driveway.

I started at our joint hands. My skin quickly turned warm in his hold. It felt nice. Especially after being without it for so long. Just when I was about to slide my fingers in the spaces between his, he pulled away and turned to face me, a deadpan expression on his face.

"Why are you here?"

His question hung there in silence for a while. I had no idea what to say so I stuck with my original answer. "I came to see you."

He narrowed his eyes at me. "How does repeating yourself answer my question?"

"What else do you want me to say? It's the truth."

He folded his arms across his chest and shook his head. An ironic, disbelieving laugh left his lips. "Go back to school, Blaine."

I gaped at him. I was going to kill Santana. She said this would be a sure thing. She said this would work. But obviously Kurt didn't give a flying fuck about 'big gestures' or romance or whatever the fuck Bitches had been gabbing on about over the phone—some bullshit about handholding and oozing and a bunch of fucking shit that seemed jumbled up and confusing now because my head hurt really bad, a bunch of people I had never met before had crowded around me in a tiny butt-fuck of a room, and obviously Kurt Hummel was just the most infuriating person on the planet. I wanted to take him by the collar and rattle his brain. I wanted to hold his hand, too. I wanted to kiss him and I wanted to turn off all of my stupid, annoying feelings for him so I felt less like a crazy person all of the time.

"Are you serious, Kurt? You're *still* pissed off? I came all this way to see you!"

"Did I ask you to?" he asked pointedly.

"Did I ask you to ignore my fucking existence for a whole week?" I shot back just as fast.

"I don't know, Blaine, did I ask you to molest my roommate and prostitute your mouth out to him right in front of me?"

I ignored all the truths flying around in my head and kept on yelling. "I. Was. Fucking. Kidding! Besides, what do you care? You were hardly speaking to me at the time!"

"Were you kidding when you called him gorgeous, too?" He yelled back.

"Oh my god, Kurt, is that seriously what pissed you off? Because I called him some stupid pet name?"

His truth damn near rattled my skull. *IT'S MY STUPID PET NAME! MY STUPID PET NAME THAT YOU USE FOR ME!*

And I sort of shut up then because when I opened my mouth to return the favor of yelling back just as loud, or maybe even a touch louder if my vocal chords were up for it, I realized that I had absolutely nothing to say.

Kurt huffed at my silence, sounding amused in the most sardonic way. "How do you think that made me feel?"

My mouth falling open was as far as I got as far as formulating a response.

Kurt was better at the talking thing. Better at the making me feel like shit thing too. "Weren't you listening?" he asked quietly, arms tugged tight to his body, and I had no idea when he was referring to. He must have seen the confusion in my face because he elaborated as best he could. "The lounge, Sunday, the window. Didn't you hear me say that I felt the connection too?"

"*I'm sorry*," I finally found my voice. I took a chance. "I know how it made you feel," I admitted. "Even when it was happening, I knew it bothered you and I probably even knew it might hurt your feelings and that's... kind of why I did it..."

"You..." He looked completely lost. "You hurt me on *purpose*?"

"I..." It wasn't like that *exactly*. I just wanted to make him jealous but... "Yes. I'm sorry."

"But—" He shook his head. "Why? Why would you do that?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. Because I'm fucked up, I guess. I just... did it. I don't know. I guess I thought if I could hurt you or make you upset it would validate that you cared." Then, to clarify, "About me."

He started to get this *look* in his eyes—appalled. He looked appalled. There was something else there, too, that was unidentifiable. "That's..."

"It's sick. I know. I'm sorry."

"How many times are you going to tell me that?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. Until it works, I guess... *Will* it work?"

He stared blankly at me, his jaw working itself open and closed a few times.

"If it doesn't work, I can... I can do something else. I don't know what you'd... what do you want me to do? Because I'll do it—I—what do you want?"

He looked a little shell shocked by the question and I wondered then if anyone had ever bothered to ask him that before.

"I..."

"You can tell me." I tried to sound encouraging, but I think we both knew I was pleading and desperate. Something about that must have spoken to him though.

"I don't want anything from you," he said, looking as surprised as I was that he had actually spoken. *I don't want you to call anyone else gorgeous. Not like that, anyway. I want that to be ours.*

I gulped because that had been a little too honest. Neither of us was ready for that yet. I was tempted to fuck things up again by being an ass, but the week without him had been hell.

"I can do that," I told my shoes, feeling like an idiot when I felt my face get hot, which was the icing on the fucking cake really.

After a few seconds of awkward silence spent with neither of us knowing what to do with ourselves, Kurt heaved a frustrated sigh and started walking back to the house. "Come on," he said without looking back.

Stuffing my hands in my pocket, I followed.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Proper Way to Say "I Missed You"

The quiet way is the best way...

Kurt opened the door to reveal that nobody had moved an inch. Logan was still leaning against the wall; Finn was sitting on the bottom step with Carole standing right beside him. Everly was standing ramrod straight about a foot behind Burt Hummel, who stood with his arms crossed heavily over his chest. He didn't look happy.

"Kurt, you wanna tell us what's going on?"

Kurt mirrored his father's stance. "Because I'm capable of doing that," he lied.

Burt's jaw bulged a bit. "Hey, don't start again with the attitude. Every time you come home now you're in a bad mood, and, no offense to you," he said, looking at me, "I don't know you—I don't know you from Adam, but we all heard a lot of yelling out there and I really don't appreciate you talking like that to my son. So either somebody explains to me what this is or I'm going to start making my own assumptions."

Kurt looked right into his father's eyes. "Can Blaine stay the night?"

Burt stared at his son like he had never seen him before.

"Oh my god, dude, are you insane?" Finn spoke up from his place on the stairs, his mouth hanging wide open.

Kurt sent a glare his way. "Thank you for that, Finn."

Burt closed his eyes like he needed a minute to process things. I was right there with him. Not like I was an expert on families or anything but that seemed like a bold move, even for Kurt.

Burt shook off his incredulity. "Kurt, that had better have been your way of introducing him by name and not a legitimate request because..." Burt trailed off, shaking his head and doing that jerky hand motion thing people sometimes do when they are trying to keep themselves from going completely batshit.

"Okay!" Carole stepped forward with an overly bright smile on her face even as she sent her husband nervous looks. "Okay. Kurt. Honey. How about we do this properly?" She turned her nervous smile my way. "My name is Carole. I'm Burt's finance."

"Blaine," I told her.

"Apparently he doesn't have a surname," Logan put in.

Carole ignored that and pressed on with the introductions. "This is Burt, Kurt's father, and that is my son, Finn. Behind Burt is Everly, a friend of the family, and standing over there is Kurt's aunt, Logan."

Logan grinned manically at me and wiggled her fingers. I scowled back at her.

"And," Carole continued, "you're wearing a Dalton uniform, so I assume you're a friend of Kurt's from school..." She trailed off then, apparently waiting for me to confirm the obvious.

"Yeah," I said.

She nodded. "...and you need a place to stay...?"

"No," Kurt said firmly before I could respond. Everyone in the room knew what it meant. Burt seemed to bristle at Kurt's no-room-for-argument tone.

"For how long?" Carole wanted to know.

Kurt opened his mouth as if to respond but Burt, who looked like he was close to losing it, spoke over him. "Hold on a minute. I'm having some trouble understanding here..."

Logan raised her hand. "Yeah, me too. Are you guys seriously going to let this random kid sleep here? I mean, yeah, cool, it's your house and all, bro, but I think this might be a good time to point out that Blainers here might actually be a teenaged sexual deviant." She flashed a smile at me.

Everly rolled her eyes. "And here we go..." She moved forward. "Look, as fascinating as Logan's usual ration of nonsense is, can we please deal with the fact that Kurt is actually speaking in front of someone who isn't us?"

Everything stopped. As if that had been taken completely by surprise, everyone turned to stare at Kurt. I couldn't help the low snort that came out because fucking really? No one paid me any attention, though.

Everly looked intently at Kurt. Her entire body was wracked with suppressed tension as if she was just waiting for someone to shout go, at which point something of epic proportions would happen, I was sure. "Is he the only one who knows?" Her voice was low, serious; eyes sharp.

Burt held his breath.

Kurt softened under everyone's desperate stares. "No," he lied gently and everyone except for Everly and Burt seemed to relax a bit.

Everly shot out her next question like rapid fire. "Is he trustworthy with whatever information about yourself you have given him?"

Her eyes never left Kurt's but I got the very distinct feeling that every other fiber of her being was zoned in on me and that I should remain absolutely still. However, my stomach twisting itself into nervous knots had nothing to do with Everly and everything to do with my own curiosity as to what Kurt's answer would be.

He glanced at me once and then quickly looked away. "No." Yes. His cheeks were touched with embarrassed pink. I barely held back a grin.

Everly nodded, all business, and I realized something. "You're SIIPA," I said. Everyone turned their attention to me. I kept my eyes on Everly.

"I am, yes," she said with cool calmness, looking unconcerned by my observation. "I'm Kurt's handler."

It made sense. I should have known that, though. Kurt had told me that his handler was his mother's best friend.

Keeping my features as relaxed as I could, I looked closer at her outfit, trying to spy any concealed weapons underneath her suit jacket. I saw nothing. That could mean one of two things. One, she was solely a diplomatic agent and therefore wasn't required to carry a weapon. Two, she was combative as well as diplomatic and was just that good at keeping any weapons she had on her person hidden from sight. I had a feeling it was the latter, which meant she was particularly dangerous.

"What do you know about SIIPA?" she asked.

"I know it exists," I said uncooperatively.

"Is that due to personal involvement or secondhand knowledge?"

"Why do you want to know?" I asked tightly.

She narrowed her eyes at me. Instead of answering my question, she asked one. "What's your last name?"

There was no way I was answering that. Something was off—something Kurt was hiding. The entire family was way too jumpy, as if they were ready to spring into action at any given moment. Everly especially. She was protecting Kurt. I just didn't know from what. SIIPA was involved, though. They had to be.

My father practically *was* SIIPA. Everly would know him. She wouldn't find out that I was his son from me.

"That's none of your business," I told her in a no-nonsense tone and I saw Burt tense from the corner of my eye.

Kurt huffed. "What does it matter? Can he stay or not?"

"No," Burt said.

"Hold on," Carole said before my stomach could tighten too much at the thought of leaving Kurt just when I got him to talk to me again. "Burt, we can't just throw him out. It's almost eleven and Dalton is two hours away. What if he fell asleep while driving? We'd be responsible."

Burt took a deep breath through his nose and looked from Kurt to me and back again. "Kurt, I want to talk to you in the other room." With one last look my way, Burt spun around and stalked off. Kurt followed, but didn't look happy about it.

With my hands still jammed in my sweatshirt pocket I looked around at the people who remained.

Logan cleared her throat after a few silent seconds. "So what's the deal, mop head? Are you gay?"

Everly sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. Carole frowned. "You don't have to answer that, honey."

"Sure, he does," Logan drawled. "I need to know whether or not to bust out the knives for some sack hacking." She smirked in my direction. "So how about it, Blainers? Do you have a boner for my nephew or what?"

Finn's mouth dropped open. "Oh my god."

"If I did, you'd be able to tell," I said with a shit eating smirk, trying to throw her off. The only one I threw off was Carole, who gasped audibly at the implication.

Logan merely snorted. "Yeah, sorry, short stuff, but your obvious height challenge suggests otherwise. Why don't you drop trou so we can find out for sure?"

Finn groaned. "Please don't."

Kurt came back and walked straight towards me without looking in anyone else's direction. His face was set firmly with annoyance. "Come on, Blaine," he said as he grabbed my hand and pulled me towards the stairs. I didn't look back to confirm it but I felt everyone's eyes on me and I had to fight off the urge to pull my shoulders up to my ears. I settled for balling the hand that wasn't being held by Kurt's into a fist in my pocket where no one could see it.

Kurt's room was at the end of the hall and he all but power walked us there. He pulled me inside and shut the door firmly behind us. That done, he let go of my hand and went to sit down at the small desk pushed up against the wall next to the full-sized bed, not saying a word. It was the second time that night Kurt let go of my hand before I was ready for him to. I wished he would stop doing that.

To distract myself from the disappointment, I looked around the room. The first thing I noticed was the sketchbook sitting open on his bed. Curious, I walked over to take a look, ignoring Kurt's eyes that followed me. Surprised by the apparent artistic skill, I hunched over so I could get a closer look at the faceless, well-dressed model with expertly drawn clothes. "Did you draw this?"

"No, Finn did," he said with bite, though his truth sounded worn out and faded in my mind. Still on the defensive, then.

I sat down on his bed. "I didn't know you could draw."

"Because you know everything there is to know about me," he said haughtily. *There are a lot of things you don't know about me, Blaine.*

I shrugged. "I know that."

We spent the next few minutes in silence as I flipped back to the beginning of the book (it was almost completely filled) and turned from page to page. I was both surprised and not surprised at all to find a few of the clothes he had drawn were things I had seen him wear during free time at Dalton. The longer I looked, the more he relaxed he became. I waited until the tension was mostly gone from his shoulders before I spoke.

"You're really good," I told him seriously when I got to the last sketch, my eyes still trained on the art I held in my hands.

He smiled a little bit at the complement and it made my stomach twist. Even when he was just sitting there doing nothing at all, he could make me feel sick in the best way with a barely even there smile. There was something about Kurt that made me feel like a different person. Or maybe just like a different Blaine—one who smiled easily and surprised Kurt with flowers and soft kisses on a regular basis. One who told Kurt that he loved him every other second and wasn't such a fuck up all the time.

But no matter how strongly I could feel that person reaching at me from somewhere that was supposed to be unreachable, he wasn't me and I wasn't him. I could never be him. I pushed Sappy Blaine back where he belonged.

I closed Kurt's sketch book and leaned forward to hand it to him. "So... since I'm still here and all, I'm guessing I can stay?"

"Maybe," he said as he reached out to take the book from me. *My dad said you can sleep on the couch.*

I nodded. A couch was better than nothing. At least I got to stay near Kurt.

"Hand me those?" he asked gesturing to the colored pencils and markers scattered over the bed, not the Crayola/Magic Marker kind but the super serious artsy type ones.

Gathering up the collection, I passed them over to Kurt and his skin touched mine as the transfer was made. After he pulled back, I held my hand suspended for a second, trying to get the feeling of his touch back, but it left even faster than it had lasted, so I dropped it back down pretty quick. I frowned. This wasn't working.

"Are you still mad enough to want to castrate me or has it boiled down to a mere loathing yet?"

Kurt paused momentarily in his pencil and marker organizing to glance at me. He only gave it about a second before he looked back down again. "Why?"

I figured I'd just go for it. "I was wondering if you would let me hold your hand."

That got his attention. He looked at me with surprised eyes.

I felt my face get hot. "It's just it's been a while, you know?" I shrugged to try and dispel some of the awkwardness I felt. "So... will you?"

Slowly, Kurt put down the remaining pencils he held in his hand and swiveled in his chair to face me. He held out his hand.

I shook my head. "Uh-uh. You have to sit with me," I said and he dropped his arm back down with a dry look. *Yeah, right*, it said and I rolled my eyes. "Relax, gorgeous, I'm not going to ravish you or anything."

He rolled his eyes right back. "Fine." He stood up from the chair to sit next to me on the bed. "Happy?"

I wasn't. There were specifics to my plan that needed to be met. Looping my arm around Kurt's, I dropped backwards so that I was lying on my back, pulling him with me as I went.

"Blaine!" he yelled after he landed. He tried to get up but I held onto his arm and he only got as far up as our joint connection would allow. "*Blaine!*"

"Would you calm down?" I grouched.

He scowled waspishly at me.

"Sorry," I mumbled. "Maybe I coulda planned that better."

"You think?" he snarked, snapping at me.

"Sorry," I said again.

He huffed but stopped trying to fight my hold. "What did you do that for?"

"You said I could hold your hand," I grumbled.

"Did I?" he asked in a way that suggested otherwise.

I rolled my eyes. "Oh, I'm sorry, you *implied* that I could hold your hand by offering it to me."

He shot me a look. "And you couldn't hold my hand without yanking my arm off?"

"I didn't yank your arm off," I grouched over the sound of his truth in my head. "Here, just—relax, okay? Lay on your back."

He narrowed his eyes at me and I glowered at him. "Just do it, alright?" Fuck, if looks could kill. "*Please*," I added as nicely and calmly as I could.

With a deep sigh, he settled back down so that we were both looking up at the ceiling. Tentatively, I reached out with my left and to grab his right, sliding my fingers in the spaces between his where they belonged. I scooted a little closer so that our shoulders were touching.

"See?" I grunted, blushing again. "This is all I wanted."

He heaved an exhausted sigh. He sounded drained. "And you couldn't have just asked?"

"...I thought you'd say no."

"Shouldn't I be allowed to make my own decisions?" he asked pointedly and I winced.

Why was I always such a fucking idiot when it came to dealing with Kurt? All I wanted was to lay with him for a little while and hold his hand. Honestly, I wasn't thinking about whether or not he would be offended by my pulling him down with me. I just wanted to be close to him and the desire to make that a reality had taken over. Once that happened, the other stuff, like common sense, sort of just fell away. Unfortunately.

Had I been thinking straight, though, I might have remembered that Kurt hated being forced into things. His condition did that for him. I might have remembered how angry he had been when I took his omission and forced my way into the part of him that was supposed to be safe from any outside influence: his personal thoughts.

He was obviously reminding me of that now.

"I wouldn't have done it, you know." I sighed. "That day outside the bathroom, I wouldn't have taken your omission. I wanted to but I wouldn't have done it. I learned my lesson the first time." I ran my eyes along his profile. He kept his eyes trained on the ceiling.

"Why did you want to?"

"Because you're so... distant isn't the right word. Secretive is better, I guess. Or maybe it's just me. I want to know everything about it. It's like a compulsion. Most of the time I wish I knew less about people than I do but with you it's like it's never enough. But you were right to be mad when I took your omission. It was stupid. I shouldn't have pulled you just now either." I took a deep breath. "I'm sorry."

He finally turned to look at me. There was confliction in his eyes. "I don't have a reason to be sorry," he said softly. Then, *I'm sorry, too.*

"For what?"

"Nothing." *For being so distant with you before the whole Sebastian thing.*

I frowned. I had almost forgotten about that. "Why were you?"

He shook his head as if it was too much. "I don't know." *You're so intense. **We** are intense. The way we constantly gravitate towards each other is so overwhelming. I think about you all the time. When I left Dalton to come here it was a constant struggle not to go back just because I knew that was where you were. And even now, you're right here, but it's like even that isn't enough. That scares me...*

It was the first time he said something that was so raw and honest, and it ripped right through me. One thing stuck out to me, though. He had said 'we'. *Us*, as in two people coexisting together as one unit; Kurt and Blaine.

So of course I blurted out the stupidest thing possible.

"I want to kiss you."

He looked surprised for a moment, but that washed quickly away, leaving something much more complicated behind. "Why?" he asked, his everything eyes searching mine. He looked a little confused, as if he couldn't understand why I would want to share myself with him that way. My hand tightened at little around his.

"Because I want to know what it feels like to kiss you for real."

"What about the last kiss?"

I frowned. "I figured you would want to forget about it because of the drunk thing."

He frowned too. "Do you really think that?"

"...Am I wrong?"

"No." *Of course you're wrong. I would never want to forget it.*

Oh.

In that case... "Can we try again?" I had never asked for a kiss before. If I saw an opening, I took it, and it would be so easy to take a kiss from Kurt. His mouth was facing mine and he was close enough to reach without too much effort. It would be easy. But... "Please?"

He bit his lip.

He was going to say no.

He was going to say no and I needed it. My mouth was dry, my tongue smashed against the roof of my mouth, lightly sucking. What would it feel like to kiss Kurt and remember it? To experience something like that when I was fully aware of myself and of him?

"I'm scared too, you know," I told him. "I've never..." *Just say it.* "I've never needed someone the way I need you. And I don't like attachments. Or at least I didn't. But I can't help it when it comes to you, and I just... I *really* want to kiss you. I know I fucked it up the last time..."

I was still in the middle of trying to explain myself when he spoke so I heard his words, but didn't comprehend them. His truth, however, rang loud and clear. *Okay.*

My brain shut itself down and went into momentary overdrive as it tried to stop on a dime and readjust. "Okay?" I asked, partly out of shock and partly just to make absolutely sure.

He shook his head no, looking just as nervous as I felt, and for a second I felt the sting of rejection before I remembered that this was Kurt.

"Okay," I said. This was going to happen. He said okay. This was going to happen. "Okay."

He smiled nervously then shut his eyes. My stomach swooped because that meant something right? That meant he trusted me even if he didn't know it himself.

Not wanting to freak him out, I leaned in and brushed his lips once as lightly as I could. I heard him breathe sharply in and when I pulled back and opened my eyes, his chest was still contracting as he slowly released the breath.

He didn't open his eyes. "That's it?" he asked breathlessly.

Closing my eyes, I moved forward and caught his lower lip before he got the chance to close his mouth. He breathed in deep and I released his hand so I could roll on my side, rising slightly above him so that I could reach more. I angled my head, loving how soft his mouth was.

I kissed my way along his mouth, needing to feel all of him before I could get too far gone and give into the impulse to find out what he tasted like on the inside. My hand trailed slowly up from where it was resting on his arm to press my palm against his jaw and tangle my fingers in his hair. He responded by lifting his face towards mine and moaning softly and I decided I had tortured myself enough.

"More?" I asked against his lips.

"No," he said, voice soft and full of wonder and desire for something new and unknown. *Yes.*

I ran my tongue along his bottom lip and he gasped. Twisting my head the other way, I slid my tongue into his mouth where his lips were parted and groaned because fuck, he tasted like everything there was that had ever tasted good. It was still as obvious that he didn't know what he was doing but the slide of his inexperienced tongue against mine was mind-numbing and way better than any orgasm I had ever had.

He was a little shy about it at first, but he was quick to shake that off and soon his tongue was sweeping mine like we had done it like that since the start of forever. He held me close to him, his body moving with his mouth and tongue in a way that was demanding.

Needing to stop, I pulled my lips away from his with a smack. I was practically on top of him even though I didn't remember putting myself that way. I moved my hips (and my aching hard erection) away from him.

"Don't stop," he ordered and I nearly smashed my hips against his because *fuck* was that his voice? *Seriously?*

I melded our mouths together once more before pulling away a second later. "Have to," I said, my voice more fucked up than I expected it to be.

"Don't," he repeated and too fast for me to stop him, he pushed my body back so that our positions were reversed. He covered my mouth. His tongue swirling expertly around mine made my brain shut down. I gave him what he wanted and took what I could, pulling him closer.

Then without warning he twisted his head to the side, his lips swiping across mine until our mouths were no longer touching. He was breathing heavy. "Sorry." *I shouldn't have done that.*

"I'm not sorry," I said between gasps for breath.

He dropped his head against my shoulder. "Is it supposed to feel like that?"

I didn't need to ask what he meant by 'that'. I ducked down to kiss his neck once and his arms tightened around me. "It hasn't with anyone else."

He nodded. "Does that scare you?"

"A little," I admitted. Mostly, I just wanted to kiss him again. Maybe I would properly freak myself out later.

He nodded again but said nothing.

Eventually everything changed and somehow we ended up curled around each other on his bed, arms and legs tangled up, but not our lips. I was almost asleep. Me, nearly asleep in someone's arms. *Me.*

"...Blaine?"

I didn't open my eyes. "Mmhmm?" He mumbled something. His truth was more clear.

I missed you.

I smiled. "Missed you too."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Proper Way to Miss the Signs

So I know a lot of the time I start these things off by explaining the title and what it has to do with Kurt. This is me telling you to pretty much get used to it, because yet again the meaning of the title is all wrapped up in Kurt. I was so captivated by him that I missed pretty much everything. The world could have gone to shit and I wouldn't have noticed so long as I was looking in Kurt's eyes and he was looking back in mine...

I woke up warm and in Kurt's arms though I could tell by how utterly exhausted I felt that I hadn't been asleep long. *Maybe* half an hour—if it was any longer than that and I'd baste, broil, and then eat my own shorts—or, you know, whatever it is that you do after basting. But anyway.

The disconcerting feeling of being held in someone's arms, in *Kurt's* arms, had my blood zipping through my tangled veins twice as fast. I'd never been held before—not in the way that counted, anyway—and I panicked. Everything just seemed wrong. Me, him, us, the way I was so tangled up in him and being cradled by him, *whatever*, it was just all wrong and I needed to get *off* before my body caught fire and I burned slowly dead. I told myself that the last thing I needed—or wanted—was to become some sort of needy cuddle whore, forever addicted to the song Kurt's steady heartbeat was playing in my ear.

Then, everything stopped. Kurt breathed in deep and my blood slowed to a slow moving slip.

He inhaled slowly, his chest lifting under me as his lungs filled up with air and because my head was cradled under his chin and my arm was thrown carelessly over his chest, I moved with him. He released the breath with a soft hum that was soft enough to sound like a sigh, but still strong enough so that I felt the gentle vibrations reverberating beneath me. Nothing had ever felt so calming.

I slowly relaxed against his surprisingly strong yet comfortable chest and closed my eyes. I tried my best to match my breathing with his and relished in the slow-moving sparks of contented pleasure that lapped lethargically at the inside of my skull, making my head feel like it was stuff with soft fluff. That, when coupled with the dull press and thump of his heartbeat against my cheek, felt amazing.

As if he could somehow sense how blissed out I felt, Kurt's arms tightened around me and bliss turned into something more potent that I didn't have a word for.

All just because Kurt was holding me in his arms. It seems really stupid and ridiculous, but I had never been so happy before. I decided that maybe being Kurt's cuddle whore wouldn't be the absolute worst thing in the world as long as I was the only one who knew about it.

I fell asleep with my equilibrium once again intact.

The second time I woke up, I was lying on my side and I still felt pretty exhausted, not well rested at all, but still happy. Kurt was on his side too and that time he was looking back at me when I opened my eyes.

His eyes went a little wide, obviously embarrassed at getting caught staring. I couldn't help the arrogant smirk that made my lips quirk up to one side.

"Creep," I accused and he rolled his eyes, embarrassment immediately exchanged for annoyance. I loved it. "How long have we been asleep?"

Instead of speaking he reached out with the arm that I wasn't using as a makeshift pillow, groping blindly behind him for something. I lifted my head and peered around his shoulder. His iPhone was just a few inches away from his searching fingers.

"Relax, gorgeous, I got it." Detangling myself from him, I leaned up farther to reach around him. He helped make it easier by rolling on his back.

When I was finally holding his phone in my hand, I pressed the home button and then groaned. We had only slept for about forty minutes.

"What?" he spoke for the first time, voice soft, and I angled the screen towards him so he could see the atrocity.

He groaned, too, wrinkling his nose in disgust. "We should go back to sleep." *You should go downstairs before someone catches us.*

I frowned, not liking that idea. Kurt was warm and beautiful. The couch would be neither. "I vote that 'should' be the operative word."

"Blaine," he said slowly, a warning.

"What? No one's come up so far."

"My dad could come up any second." *More than likely he's passed out on the couch in front of the television but as soon as it's twelve o'clock, Carole will wake him up and then he'll come looking.*

For a minute I was sidetracked by how homey that one sentence made the Hummel family seem. I tried to imagine my mother waking my father up because he had fallen asleep on the couch in the middle of some unimportant television show—just because she didn't want to go to sleep without him. The idea was so absolutely ludicrous, it was almost funny. Even more ludicrous was the notion that my father would check on me before he went to bed. Cooper would have been the one to do that. Hell, he *had* been the one to do it. Not anymore, though. I pushed all that shit back and refocused on Kurt.

"So we've got until then to sleep." I shrugged.

Kurt sighed. "Blaine," he started and I kissed him to shut him up. It was languid and short, and still nothing like the kisses I was used to—none of Kurt's kisses were like anything I was used to. He looked a little dazed when I pulled back.

"I can do that now, right?" I asked, wanting to be sure. "It's okay if I kiss you?"

Instead of answering he leaned up for more. I smirked triumphantly against his lips and then dipped my tongue into his already open and waiting mouth. I leaned over him, letting him take some of my weight and used my hand to tilt his head back as I tilted my own to the side. I probed as deep as the length of my tongue would allow, wanting to taste as much of him as I could.

A throat cleared.

Kurt went tense and immediately pulled his lips away from mine. He made as if to sit up but I braced myself and refused to move.

"*Blaine*," he hissed through his teeth. "Get. Up."

I ignored him and looked over my shoulder at Logan Hummel. "Can I help you?" I asked snidely, trying not to let her manic grin get to me. The woman was obviously bent.

"You know, I always thought that Kurt had enough spit of his own." There was a lewd glint in her eyes. "Clearly you disagree."

I glared at her.

"Did you need something, Aunt Logan?" Kurt asked, no longer pushing at me. His face was about nine different shades of red.

Looking like the definition of ease, Logan moved to lean against the doorframe. "Me? Nope, not really. But your father should be up here any second."

Just as the words left her lips, Burt's voice called out from somewhere close by. "How long does it take to grab a few blankets and pillows?"

Kurt shot up in alarm, clipping my nose with his shoulder as he went.

"*Fuck.*" A burning sensation erupted in the space between my eyes and traveled like little pin pricks up and down my nose. "Thanks for that," I snarked, my voice muffled by my hands, which I held over my nose in a pointless attempt to relieve some of the pain.

"Sit up," Kurt hissed at me through his teeth. I glared at him, but still forced myself into what I felt passed for a sitting position. Apparently Kurt didn't agree because he pulled me up farther just as Burt walked in with a scowl on his face.

He took one look at us and folded his arms. "Something wrong with the chair?"

"Nothing that I can see," I offered before I could think twice about it. Kurt sent me a furious look.

Burt chose ignore my snark and turned to Logan. "Was the door open when you got up here?"

Logan made a big show of frowning thoughtfully. "You know, I just can't remember." *It was closed, alright.* She tapped her finger against her chin and threw a shit eating grin my way. "I bet Short Stuff remembers, though, don't you, B?"

That time I kept my damn mouth shut.

Logan shrugged at my silence. "Sorry, bro. Curly Top is being uncooperative. It's outta my hands."

Burt rolled his eyes at his sister and then turned to Kurt. "Why's your hair all messed up?" Burt asked, eyeing Kurt's head.

Kurt turned his eyes on his father. "Dunno, Dad"—*Blaine must have messed it up when we were making out*—"What was it that you said about the meatloaf Carole made last night because I can't remember." *I remember perfectly well what you said.*

Burt folded his arms slowly across his chest. "Dunno, Kurt,"—*I said I'd choked down cardboard that tasted better*—"Remind me what happened to Finn's lucky socks."

"Car key," Kurt shot back.

"Finn's Power Ranger sheets."

"Sweater."

Burt's eyes flared wide. "Damn," he muttered and Kurt grinned smugly. "Fine. Don't tell me, then. I probably don't wanna know anyway."

I frowned, confused, because what the fuck had all that been about? Blackmail obviously, so Kurt didn't have to answer his father's questions, but...

Logan held up a hand. "Wait, wait, wait," she said, looking at Kurt. "You mean to tell me that *you* were the one who torched those nasty sweat rags that had the audacity to call themselves socks? On *purpose*?" Kurt bit his lip and Logan grinned like an excited cat. "Ohhh, I've *so* got you. That totally trumps all of the dirt you've got on me."

Burt's head whipped around so fast I winced. "He's got dirt on you?" he asked, mouth hanging open.

Logan's eyebrows shot up. "You trying to snap your neck off?"

Burt crossed his arms over his chest.

Logan scoffed. "Pop a pill, Burt. You know the rules. When it comes to the bargaining chips, don't ask don't tell."

"Yeah, yeah." Burt waved a dismissive hand. "I'll find out eventually anyway."

Kurt snorted and he and Logan shared a look.

I watched them interact with each other, feeling lost and out of place. I was familiar with blackmail thanks to my loving father, but not the way they were doing it. They made it seem like some kind of game that could be used to settle a score between two people, almost like *Rock, Paper, Scissors*, or something like that, rather than actual blackmail. And I got the feeling that no matter what happened, no one would actually run up to Finn and tell him what happened to his socks, so it wasn't like they were actually holding anything over anyone's head. It was... weird. It was disconcerting and I didn't really know what to make of it, so I tried to stay as invisible as possible. I even scooted a little bit farther away from Kurt, needing some distance. I wondered if that was how families were supposed to operate.

Kurt took notice of the sudden space between us and frowned at me. When I refused to look at him, he turned back to his family members. "Is there a reason why you're all here or...?" he asked, obviously trying to hurry them along so he could get rid of them.

For once, though, I was happy we weren't alone. If they left, Kurt's curious eyes would be back on me and I wasn't sure if I could find a way to explain to him what I was feeling in a way he would understand. I wasn't even sure if I wanted to try. Fortunately for me, though, Kurt's question sent his father back on track.

"I know why *I'm* here," he announced, shooting Kurt a meaningful look. Then he looked at Logan. "Why are you here?"

Logan frowned and tilted her head. "You know, I just can't remember," she began again, and Burt rolled his eyes. *I came to warn Kurt that you were coming just in case he was in here doing some kinky shit with Mop Head that he'd rather you didn't see.*

Kinky. Shit.

Weren't family members supposed to shy away from all thoughts of other family members having sex? I certainly didn't want to think about Cooper and kinky sex. It left a bad taste in my mouth. Obviously Logan Hummel was an escaped invalid. There was really no other explanation for her. Even her truth was bent.

Burt huffed. "Alright, Logan. Out."

Logan grinned and mock-saluted him. "Aye-aye, Cap'in." She marched out the door.

That left me in the room with Kurt and his father.

"Blankets, Kurt," was all Burt said.

From his closet, Kurt grabbed what was needed and made as if to take everything downstairs but Burt stopped him.

"Blaine and I can set all that up."

Kurt looked like he wanted to argue, and opened his mouth to say something but Burt shot him a look and Kurt cut himself off before he made a sound. Once the blankets and stuff was transferred from Kurt's arms to Burt's, Kurt winced apologetically at me. I did my best to smile and shrug, telling him and myself that it wasn't a big deal. I wasn't scared of Burt Hummel.

The couch was lumpy and green. I stood off to the side as Kurt's father set up the pillows, sheets, and blankets he had brought down for me.

"It's not the most comfortable surface in the world," Burt said as he dropped two pillows down. "But it's better than nothing." He shrugged and, fuck, it was awkward because what was I supposed to say to that exactly? Gee-that's-nice came to mind and I only just managed to keep it trapped behind my teeth where it belonged.

Burt cleared his throat, looking slightly uncomfortable and I couldn't help but think that it served him right. "So, uh, there's filtered water in the fridge if you need it. The bathroom, if you need that, is through that door." He pointed. "If you're gonna turn the TV on just keep the volume low... I think that's everything." He paused. He waited. I stood there staring at the floor, feeling like an idiot.

"Thanks," I grumbled, giving him what I figured he was waiting for. I really just wanted him to leave so I could lie down. I was exhausted.

Burt opened his mouth to say something but in the end he seemed to think better of it and nodded slowly. "Well, let us know if you need anything." He left slowly, his eyes on me as if he didn't quite know what to make of me. In my head I told him he shouldn't hold his breath while trying to figure it out, but I kept that quiet too. I just wanted to be alone. Giving him an attitude would only prolong his departure.

When he was finally gone the embarrassment set in, which was weird, because I really didn't know what I felt embarrassed for. Trying not to think about it too much, I dropped down on the couch, which was a lot more comfortable than it looked at first glance, and pulled the blankets over myself. They smelled kind of like Kurt and the memory of being curled up in him tugged at my bellybutton. I was finally alone and all I could think was that I wished Kurt was there with me, curious looks and probing questions be damned. The last thing I remember thinking was that I was some fucking mess.

The first thing I saw when I opened my eyes the next morning was Finn. He was kneeling in front of the couch and grinning at me like a crazy mother fucker. "Dude, what the fuck?"

He kept right on grinning. "I was waiting for you to wake up."

With a wince and a popping sound somewhere near my left shoulder, I pushed myself up. "Yeah, I got that. Why?"

"Are you really gay?"

What was *wrong* with these people? "Ye-e-es..." I said very slowly, nodding my head like I was talking to someone with a severe mental handicap.

Finn frowned. "Like... seriously?"

I was beginning to lose my patience. "Are you going somewhere with this?" I snapped.

Finn winced and I almost—almost—felt bad for him. He reminded me a little of Brittany.

"Sorry, dude," Finn said, looking uncomfortable. "I was only asking because Kurt is, you know, gay and stuff, but he's... Kurt. And you're not. Kurt, I mean."

"O... kay?" Was there a point to all this?

Kurt walked in the room with a sigh and a plate in his hands. He was already dressed and his hair was done. He looked beautiful. "Just ask him, Finn," he ordered.

"Right. Since you're a different kind of gay than Kurt is, does that mean you like video games?"

A different kind of... was he serious? "What does being gay have to do with liking video games?" I asked as Kurt sat down next to me on the couch. On the plate was this rolled up pancake thing with fruit in it and some whipped cream on top. My mouth watered.

Finn looked genuinely confused. "Uh... I dunno. Nothing, I guess."

"Bingo," I said dryly.

"Oh." Finn frowned. "Was that defensive?"

I frowned too. "You mean 'offensive?'"

"Yeah, that one."

"Pretty much."

"Oh."

Kurt scoffed. "Seriously? Now you get it? Didn't I already make that point?" Finn shrugged and Kurt scoffed again. "Here," he said, holding the plate out for me to take.

I looked up at him. "You made this for me?" I asked, dumbfounded.

Kurt shrugged like it was no big deal, but it was a big deal to me and I could see the slight blush on his cheeks. Without thinking about it, I leaned in and kissed him lightly on the cheek. His face exploded with

color and he looked at Finn with nervous eyes, but I couldn't help the stupid grin that found its way on my face.

Finn was grinning too. "Dude, I've never seen Kurt so red. Not even when he had that creepy stalker crush on—"

"Shut up, Finn!" Kurt yelled, and Finn winced at the sudden outburst, shutting himself up. It was too late though. My interest was spiked.

"Creepy stalker crush on who?" I asked and Kurt scowled at me, looking like he might claw my face off, which was cool so long as he didn't take my pancake thing away because I had already taken a bite and it was fucking delicious.

"Uh, I shouldn't say. Kurt would be really mad," Finn said, surprising me. I had fully expected him to lie. Not lie in a malicious way or anything, but in the little-white-lie way most anyone else would have done. You know, like saying 'nothing' or something like that. It was a refreshing change, even though I really would have liked to know.

"Sorry," Finn said, looking apologetic.

I shrugged. "It's cool."

Then for some reason, Kurt blurted out, "Crush on Finn."

Thankfully I had swallowed the food in my mouth or I might have choked. My mouth dropped open. His face was tomato status now. "Seriously?" I asked him.

"It was forever ago," he muttered. *It was sophomore year.*

Finn looked up at Kurt, bewildered. "Wait. I thought you didn't want him to know. What did you yell at me for if you were gonna tell him anyway?"

"Don't worry about it, Finn," Kurt mumbled. "Just go get the damn game."

"But he never said that—"

"He likes them," Kurt cut him off. *I don't know if he likes them or not, I just want to get rid of you.*

"Oh. Sweet. Be right back."

"You know," I said when Finn was gone, "I've never actually played a video game before."

"They're great." *They're stupid.*

I snorted. "Well thanks for volunteering my gaming services then." I paused. "So why *did* you tell me?"

"I don't know," he mumbled, still pouting. *I felt bad for yelling at him. Also, you didn't try to take his omission, so I figured you deserved a reward or something.*

I sighed. I was never going to live that down. "I told you, that was a one-time thing. It's really dangerous for me to do it. I'm lucky I didn't liquefy my brain."

Kurt bit his lip and looked down at his lap. He looked kind of guilty, which I thought was weird.

"What's with the look?" I asked.

"Can I kiss you?" He blurted out too fast.

I'd like to interject here. There are some things about Kurt that I didn't know at the time this conversation was going on. And, yeah, maybe I should have thought his completely random question was a little out of place, but at the time all I could do was grin like a lovesick moron and answer his question by putting my mouth on his. I chalked his guilt up to the fact that he had doubted me and quickly forgot all about it. Hindsight, though, is a complete bitch. It makes you see all kinds of clues that you wished you had been attentive enough to notice back when the moment was right there and happening. I'm not really going to get into it right now, but just be aware that Kurt was hiding something from me. I'll tell you eventually, but not now. And if you're wondering if I'm being all secretive just to drive you bats, you're pretty much right. It's how I get my kicks. So squirm hard for me, bitches.

Anyway.

I pegged Finn for a COD kind of a guy but the games he returned with were not what I was expecting. One of them in particular, a game called *Little Big Planet*, had this burlap sack creature-thing on the front cover

that offered anyone who looked at it a cute-faced grin. It was the kind of game I would have bought for a 6 year old, but Finn swore up and down that it was 'like, really, really, really awesome' so I went with it and kept my opinions to myself for once.

Turned out that the game was pretty cool, and a lot more difficult than I expected it to be. Definitely not for a 6 year old, but probably not for a 17 year old either. Whatever, though. I had fun with it. Finn was pretty cool too. He got excited over the simplest things and in the three hours we played, he never lied. He could have been Britt's gigantic male twin only without the nine kinds of crazy and sans the obese cat companion that tried to maul my face with his claws whenever I got too close (And hopefully Bitches never reads that part about Britt being crazy so I get to keep my balls).

About an hour into the game, Finn admitted that I was the first person he played the game with. He figured that because I was gay I wouldn't give him any shit for liking it, unlike his other male friends, who told him it was 'gay.' Apparently some guy named Puck busted his balls for it or some such bullshit like that. Personally, I'd rather be 'gay' then have a stupid fucking name like Puck. But whatever. Finn took the 'gay' thing literally, I guess. Kurt rolled his eyes at Finn's admission, muttering something about idiots and stereotypes.

"Do you see what I have to deal with?" Kurt asked as he sketched idly next to me. He shook his head. "No matter how many times it's explained to him..." he trailed off, unable to say more.

Still, despite Finn's complete lack of knowledge of how 'defensive' he was being, he was okay. Maybe even okay enough to be considered a friend, but I had to see.

Around then three hour mark, Everly came in the room. "Kurt, can I talk to you for a minute?" *Can I talk to you for an undetermined amount of time?*

Kurt looked up from his sketching and sighed. He stood up. "Wait here?" he asked me.

I don't know where he thought I was going, but I told him, "Sure," just the same.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Proper Way to Begin

Kurt and I never did anything in the conventional way. Every first we shared together happened in the most ass-backwards, abnormal way. I simply thought we were weird. Kurt, however, said we were the way we were meant to be...

I was lying on Kurt's bed looking up at the ceiling when he found me. He paused in the doorway for a second before finally stepping in the room with a confused frown.

"Hey," he said. "What happened to the game?"

I shrugged. "Finn got a call. Someone named Rachel, I think." I rolled onto to my side and laid my head on my arm. "Come here."

He lifted a brow. "Why?" he asked slowly, clearly suspicious.

"I wanna ravish you."

His eyes went wide as saucers.

"Oh my god, I'm kidding. I just want to"—'cuddle with you' sounded so stupid I refused to say it out loud—"talk. It would feel weird if you were all the way over there."

He didn't look like he believed me, but he walked slowly over to the bed anyway and sat down on the edge.

I frowned. "Jesus, Kurt, you're acting like I'm going to bite your damn head off."

He chose to ignore that. "So, what are we talking about?"

"We can't yet."

"Oka-a-ay. Why not?"

I was grinning again. I couldn't help it. Messing with him was too much fun. "I can't when you're all like that."

He sighed in exasperation. "Like what?"

I held in a laugh. "That," I insisted as I gestured in his general direction.

He looked down at himself and then back at me. "I'm sorry, was that supposed to make sense or...?"

I laughed and pushed myself up to peck him on the lips, partly because I could and mostly because he was too adorable not to. Grinning at his blush, I placed both hands on his shoulders and pushed lightly to signal I wanted him to lie back. He gave me one of his what-the-hell-is-wrong-with-you stares, but let me maneuver him without a fight.

He eyed me curiously as I arranged his left arm so that his hand was resting on his chest. Then I pulled the other arm out so that it was perpendicular to his body and settled down in the empty space I had created, taking care to place my head on his chest in that spot just under his chin where we fit together perfectly. He let out a soft sigh when I finally stopped moving.

"You couldn't have just said what you wanted out loud?"

"Give it," I ordered in lieu of a proper reply.

"What?"

"Your hand," I told him, holding my own hand out over my shoulder and wiggling my fingers to indicate where he was to put it. I could practically feel him rolling his eyes but he did what I wanted and I wasted no time in taking his hand and placing it on top of my head.

He sighed in annoyance but laced his fingers into my curls anyway. "Words were created so you could use them," he pointed out. *Words were created out of necessity for complex communication.*

"Yeah, but my way is more fun."

"How is being vague as hell and confusing the crap out of me fun?" *How is being vague and confusing fun?*

I pressed more firmly against him and laced my fingers with the ones on the hand that wasn't tangled in my hair. "The answer is in the question."

He snorted.

I suddenly got an idea and grinned. "This is fun, too," I told him before angling my lips towards his neck to suck at his skin.

Kurt gasped. His entire body went tense but his fingers tightened around my hair and his palm pressed intently on the back of my skull, urging me closer.

I nipped his slicked up skin with my teeth before rolling my tongue against him for another taste. Fuck, he tasted good everywhere. "You like that?"

He moaned softly.

"Tell me to stop and I'll stop," I said, teasing and serious at the same time. Teasing because I knew he absolutely did not want me to keep my mouth to myself in that moment and serious because, well, Kurt was Kurt. If he said stop, I would have done it.

"Keep going," he urged, breathless and forceful at the same time. I smirked and trailed my lips up to his ear. I bit down gently on his earlobe and was rewarded with a real moan. "Jesus, that's hot," I breathed, licking my way around the shell of his ear.

"Gonna give you a hickey," I mumbled a warning to him before I pulled the collar of his shirt down and set to work. His skin was so pale that I barely had to try before the oval shaped bruise appeared. I was determined to leave a lasting mark, though, so I sucked relentlessly, rolling my tongue against his pectoral muscle. His hips bucked up.

"Oh god. *Blaine*. Kiss me."

As I kissed my way to his lips, I glanced down the length of his body at the very obvious bulge in his pants and groaned. I dipped my tongue in his mouth once before pulling away.

"I could take care of that for you, you know. If you wanted," I said, running my hand a little ways down his torso so he would get the message.

His blue eyes looked almost gray they were so dark, but his face was washed with embarrassed color. "Door."

I went back to lightly kissing his neck. "You want me to close it?" I asked between kisses.

"...What happened to wanting to talk?"

I couldn't help but grin at his nervousness. He was so obvious it was kind of really endearing. I pulled back so he could see my amusement. "Subtle."

He blushed harder. "I..."

"Hey. It's fine. We don't have to do anything you don't want to do, but what kind of a person would I be if I didn't offer?" I tried to keep a straight face but couldn't. "I was only trying to be polite."

"Sure, you were," he said dryly, regaining some of his sass. *We both know polite had nothing to do with it.*

I kissed him twice. He smiled at me when I pulled away and I honestly tried to just smile back and keep my eyes up, but it was practically screaming at me. I looked back down.

Kurt followed my eyes down. "Oh, god," he moaned, sounding mortified. "Stop looking at it."

I grinned. "Can't. It's too pretty. I can only imagine how much better it would look up close and uncovered. If you thought my lips on your neck felt good, just wait till they're wrapped around your cock."

"Oh my god." He grabbed one of the smaller pillows on his bed and placed it over his crotch.

I frowned and looked back up at him. "Kill joy."

"Pervert."

"Maybe only a lot."

I settled back down against him and reclaimed his hand. We were both silent while I absently played with his fingers, lacing and unlacing them with mine.

"How come you always let me hold your hand?" I asked as I traced the lines on his palm.

He went back to twisting my curls around his fingers. "Are you saying you don't want me to let you?"

"No, I mean how come you never told me to let go? I mean, even when you were pissed at me for drunk kissing you, you still let me hold it."

He shrugged. "We've always held hands." *Ever since we met holding hands has been our thing.* "Was I supposed to stop just because you decided to maul my face?"

"I didn't maul your face," I grumbled. Even during that first disaster of a kiss I had been more gentle with him than anyone else.

He snorted in amusement. "Are you really trying to argue with me? Do you know how pointless that is?"

I grinned. "Pointless because there's no point in arguing with a pathological liar or pointless because you're stubborn?"

He glared at me. "Take your pick."

"Stubborn is it then. But back to this,"—I gave our hands a shake—"why was this always okay for you?"

He shot me a skeptical look. "This is seriously what you wanted to talk about?"

"It would appear so. What? I've always been kind of curious about why you never pulled away. Even the first time I did it, you kind of just looked at me weird and then said nothing."

"So?"

"So, you really aren't the type to let someone manhandle you."

His eyebrows rose. "And that's something you just freely admit to doing?"

I shrugged. "Yeah, why not? If the shoe fits and all that. So, why didn't you ever pull away?"

He frowned as if the reasoning behind his atypical behavior had never occurred to him before. "Well... why did you take my hand to begin with? Are you saying you're the hand-holding type?"

"Pfft! Hell no," I asserted, wrinkling my nose in disgust at the idea. Sort of an ass backwards reaction for someone who had become a slut for hand to hand contact in less than a month, I'm aware, but I was just a mental case like that.

I tried to come up with a proper answer when he shot me a look. "I dunno. It felt right. It's kind of like how I get so on edge when we're too far apart. I can't be in the same room with you and *not* want to touch you." I failed to fight the grin. "That sounds kind of wanky."

He rolled his eyes. "Alright, Santana." *Alright, Blaine.*

"The offer from before still stands by the way," I said, glancing down at the pillow.

"*Blaine.*"

"Yeah, yeah. Shutting up. You gonna answer my question?"

"I don't know what to say." *It just felt right. It always feels right.*

Well if that wasn't sappy as fuck. Still. It was simple, and I could relate to it. "I know what you mean."

Kurt offered me a small smile, like a beautiful impulse.

"One more question."

"Okay." He sounded so relaxed. He even had his eyes closed.

"How do you feel about me?"

His eyes blinked open. Clearly he hadn't been expecting that. I hadn't really been expecting it either. Really, when I asked him to talk, I had only wanted to get him on the bed so he could hold me and we could make out for a while. But we had done all that and once the question popped in my head, it stuck.

"I..." He faltered and a nervous pit started to develop deep in my stomach. "What do you mean?"

"I kind of thought the meaning was pretty clear," I said, voice quiet.

"Blaine..."

"Do you feel more than friendship for me?"

"Isn't that obvious?" he asked, not looking at me.

"Do you?" I pressed.

"No." *Yes.*

"A lot more?" I couldn't help asking.

He shot me an exasperated look. "No." *Yes.*

Back in familiar teasing territory, the pit began to shrink and I grinned. "How much more?"

"*Blaine.*"

"Sorry," I lied, still grinning. Then I blurted, "Enough to be my boyfriend?"

He froze. The pit came back in an instant, only it was bigger and heavier than before.

I panicked. "I... It's just—I feel something when I'm with you. I've never had a boyfriend before," I admitted, looking down. "I never wanted one. But I'd like to be yours."

When I was finished, I looked up at him and my heart collapsed in on itself. He was going to say no. I pulled away from him and sat up before he got the chance.

Sitting with my back to him, I couldn't see his face, but the pain in his voice was palpable. I shut my eyes and shrunk away from it. "Blaine... We don't... we hardly..."

"Know each other," I finished for him, feeling hollow. It always came back to that. *Why* did it always come back to that? What more did he want from me? I was willing to slap a label on myself for him. Didn't he

understand what that meant? Hadn't I shared enough of myself with him? At least enough to earn myself the benefit of the doubt. I let him see me in a way I never dared to show to anyone—not even to myself.

I was constantly forgetting that I had only known him for a short amount of time. A few weeks were nothing in the grand scheme of things, but it didn't matter. Being close to him just made sense to me. He was the absent part of me I was always meant to find, and finally he was *right there*. He was therein front of me, close enough to touch. But he didn't feel the same. He didn't get it.

He didn't get it.

Make him get it, something inside me prompted.

"I told you about my brother once," I said quietly. "Cooper. He practically raised me. He was my everything. Whatever I needed, he tried his best to give it to me. A proud father, a mother who gave the best hugs, a big brother, a best friend; it didn't matter. Whatever I needed at any given moment he would just... be it." I traced the patterns on Kurt's comforter with my hands. "No one has ever loved me like Cooper has," I whispered to the blanket like it was some dangerous secret.

"He was fucked up, though," I said. "Mind hearers always are. They hear thoughts constantly. Just all the time, nonstop, twenty-four seven. It literally drives them insane."

Kurt tried to stop me. He moved on the bed to kneel in front of me. "Blaine, you don't have—"

"Sometimes," I cut him off. "Sometimes he would be okay, you know? Like we would be looking up at the stars at night, or building a fort out of blankets, or trying to get through my homework, and he would be okay. He could smile and just be my brother. But then there were times when he just wasn't himself anymore and he would scream without stopping for hours. Not for what felt like hours, but *literally* for hours. When that happened I was supposed to crawl under the bed and stay there until he told me I could come out."

"Why?" Kurt breathed, like he didn't want to know but had to ask. When I looked up at his face for the first time since I started talking, I saw that he looked horrified.

Good, I couldn't help thinking. *He was the one who wanted to know.*

"Cooper has two D5 classifications. One for psychic ability and one for telekinetic ability." I decided I would show him. "Give me your hand."

Slowly, he lifted his arm and I took his shaking fingers in mine. Bringing his hand towards my face, I guided it into my hair, to the spot just a couple of inches above my left ear where a stripe of skin was raised up and ruined forever.

I stared hard into Kurt's eyes. *This is what you wanted.*

"I was three. He hit me with one of his soccer trophies when he lost control. It just sort of flew off his desk and cracked me in the skull. He was only twelve."

"Blaine. Please. You—"

I cut him off again. "I had to get staples. He wasn't allowed in the operating room, but he forced himself to wait in the waiting room. I can't even imagine how he did that. I can't stand more than an hour in the cafeteria without throwing up or getting a migraine, but somehow he managed to sit in a fucking hospital surround by incessant head chatter just so I wouldn't be alone. When we got home it was different. He refused to come near me and locked himself in his room for two days. I sat outside his door crying for him to come out. When he finally caught on that I wasn't leaving until he came out, he finally gave it up. That was when he made the rule: if I wanted to spend my time in his room I had to promise to crawl under the bed if he had a psychic fit.

"But none of that is relevant anymore. Cooper has been locked up in a D5 facility for years now."

Kurt looked at me with wide, pleading eyes. He silently begged me to stop talking, but his lips were pressed into a thin, hard line and he said nothing.

"My mother's name is Melissa Anderson. That's really all I know about her. I've talked to her maybe five times in my entire life. She lives in the house I grew up in, but she's... I don't even know. She's messed up, I guess. She never leaves her room. She used to come out once a year on my birthday. She would sit in a chair and smile at nothing with this unfocused look on her face. I didn't understand what it meant when I was a kid. Once in a while, though, she would look at me and call me darling boy..."

For a few seconds I was lost in a mental cocoon, wrapped up in cakes and balloons and raven haired mommies that looked like dollies. I had to forcibly pull myself out and remind myself that I hated her.

I blinked away the chilling memory and looked at Kurt. He looked completely horrified and he head tears in his eyes. Seeing him felt like being doused with reality.

"My father's grandfather was the founder of SIIPA," I admitted in a rush; my first gasp of air after crawling out of the nightmare I put myself in (almost anything was better than thinking about my mother). "My father practically runs it now. He's my handler. He's also a bastard and I hope you never have to meet him.

"I get to see Cooper once a month in exchange for my services as a human lie detector. I help SIIPA find and incriminate runaways and in return I get to spend a few hours with my brother.

"I've fucked around a lot. Almost every gay guy at Dalton has had my cock up his ass at some point or another, and even some of the straight guys when they were too drunk to care either way. I've never kissed someone on the mouth and felt anything real until I kissed you. I've never slept next to someone before last night and I've hurt a lot of people."

There was one more thing I needed him to know.

"I love you."

He gasped and recoiled at the news as if he was afraid that words might jump out and stick to him. I tried not to let him see how much it hurt.

"I can be a different me when I'm with you. I can be someone I like. No one has ever made me feel like that before."

"Blaine..." He choked on his words when the tears that had gathered in his eyes finally spilled over and rushed down. "There's nothing I can say." *I'm happy that I make you feel good about yourself, and that's beautiful—amazing even—that I was able to do that for you... but that doesn't mean you love me. You love the way I make you feel about yourself, and that's not the same as you loving me for me, and I'm so sorry.*

He looked sorry, too. He looked like he was being torn to pieces, but to be honest I just didn't care. He might have been torn up, but I was completely destroyed.

I had gotten myself naked in the worst, most exposing way, and he just *stomped* all over me, smashing me into tiny little bits that were smaller than small.

But what if he's right?

I didn't want him to be right.

I barely noticed when he got up from the bed, I was so caught up in my own head, but I did notice when he returned with a small but thick book with the leather cover and no title. It was *the* book. The one he always seemed to be reading, but never finished. The one I always wondered about.

"This is my mother's," he said softly. *This was my mother's.*

He placed it in my hands.

I looked up at him with wide eyes.

"Open it," he said.

"Kurt..."

He pointed to one of the many faded yellow tabs sticking out of the pages, marking the important spots. "That one."

With my heart hammering in my chest, I gently pushed my fingers into the indicated spot and lifted the pages. The first thing I noticed was the tab, though technically it was a small post-it note—old, yellow, faded, slightly frayed on the edges, and completely familiar. Familiar because I had one. Kurt had given it to me the day we met.

I ran a hand over the post-it on the page that was identical to mine.

I was hesitant to speak, but I had to know. "The one you gave me that first day in the hallway... was that from here?"

"No." *Yes.*

"But... why? Why would you give me something so important?"

"For lots of reasons." *I honestly don't know.*

I nodded in a daze.

Kurt pointed to the middle of the page. "Read this one."

For the first time, I looked at the words written on the pages and was surprised to see neat handwriting rather than print. For a second I thought it was Kurt's writing, it looked so similar, but at a closer look I decided it wasn't. The handwriting in the book was softer and less confident than Kurt's.

"She... your mother wrote these?"

Poems. They were all poems.

"No." *She did.*

I read the title of the one he had pointed to.

~My Darling Boy~

I nearly dropped the book. I felt Kurt's eyes on me. I gave myself a second to recover then continued to read.

He looks up at me and I look too.

His lips can't smile yet—

He's still too small.

I realize that it's okay;

His blue eyes smile for him.

I smile with my lips

I show him how it's done.

I show him another way to love.

-Elizabeth Anne Hummel, June 10th, 1993

I was going to fall apart. I was too full and I was just going to fall apart.

As if he could sense it, too, he eyed me carefully and spoke softly. "I don't want anything from you." *I want you to love me for me. I want you to know who I am. This is a start.*

Drowning in everything he made me feel, I threw myself at him. I wrapped my arms around his neck and crawled in his lap, straddling him. I couldn't crawl inside him, so I compensated as best I could by getting myself as close to him as I could go.

It took him a second but he wrapped both arms around me and held me tight. I hid my face in his neck.

"Can I see her? I want to see her."

He kissed my cheek. "Let go."

I shook my head. "Can't."

So he just wrapped an arm around my waist and scooted up the bed to where his nightstand was. I clung to him as he leaned forward to open the drawer and he held on to me like I was a vulnerable child who weighed next to nothing. I certainly felt like that little boy from so long ago.

From the bottom of the drawer, he pulled out an old picture for me to see.

I turned my head to look but didn't let go of him. I looked at the smiling woman and felt a million different things.

"You look like her." That part was absolutely true. Their faces were the same. The next part, though... "You have her eyes."

He frowned at the picture. "But..."

Her eyes were a warm brown. Nothing like Kurt's blue, gray color. "Not the color. She has everything eyes. You do, too."

"What does that mean?"

The answer was simple. "It means you're beautiful."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Proper Way to Exist in the Eye of the Storm

It's weird to remember a time when I had no idea what crazy shit was about to come...

Dinner with the Kurt's family was... interesting I guess is the word.

Carole did a pretty good job of keeping the conversation always going, even though the only real contributors were Kurt, Logan, and Carole herself. Finn was too busy shoving as much food in his mouth as he could between minimal gasps of breath for air.

Burt stayed quiet throughout dinner and spent most of his time staring at me with this pained, kind of confused expression on his face, like he was trying to understand how I had gotten to be at his dinner table and what the hell his son saw in me. From the frustrated twinge that made his left eye twitch every so often, I deduced that he was having a difficult time finding an answer to either question.

Everly sat ramrod straight in her chair, her eyes focused intently on the laptop that sat in front of her. Every so often her hand would travel out from behind the computer to shovel some food onto her fork and then disappear behind the computer at the midway point of its journey to her mouth.

Logan kept looking at the strawberry-blonde with an annoyed expression on her face, a twinge very similar to Burt's plaguing her as well, only at her right eye rather than her left. Eventually she broke with a frustrated groan and called the other woman out.

"Do you *have* to do that during dinner?" she snapped at Everly, stopping herself in the middle of a conversation with Carole to do so.

Everly glanced up at her, but didn't pause in her work. "I wouldn't be doing it if it weren't important, Logan."

"But it can wait, don't you think?"

"No."

Logan huffed and I saw Carole discretely pat her hand. Logan rolled her eyes as if to say 'it's whatever.' Carole gave her a sympathetic smile and they continued their conversation.

I watched them all as discretely as I could, fascinated by their whole family dynamic. I doubted my fascination with them would ever dwindle. I couldn't ever see them becoming less of an enigma in my eyes.

After dinner I decided it was time I left. After telling Kurt my entire fucked up life story I really needed to clear my head. Fear might have had a small something to do with it, too, but I was trying not to acknowledge that too openly.

Kurt didn't look too happy about the news when I told him, which made me feel kind of good.

He walked me outside, stopping me on the front porch to wrap his arms around my neck. He had caught me by surprise, so I kind of just stood there awkwardly for a few seconds before I slipped my arms around his waist and let my head drop forward until my forehead was resting somewhat uncomfortably against his collar bone.

I had been trying not to get too caught up in my own head, but it was difficult not to wonder how long it would take for everything I told him to really sink in.

"I keep waiting for you to freak out," I admitted quietly.

"Is that why you're..."

"Leaving?" I supplied for him when he couldn't say it himself. "No. Not really. I don't know."

He laughed a little at that, his voice full of emotion for some reason. His arms tightened around me. "Have I freaked out yet?" he asked, obviously trying to make a point.

I got the meaning, but it did nothing to placate my growing nerves. "Maybe you haven't processed it all yet."

"Explain it to me then."

"There's not much left to explain. You pretty much know everything there is to know about me now." Even some things Cooper didn't know.

"What about the good things?"

"What good things?" I shot back, quiet.

"Tell me your favorite childhood memory."

I frowned, trying to come up with one. I eventually came up with something I hadn't thought about probably since it happened, but remembering it made me want to smile so I decided it was better than nothing. "Cooper spilled soda on my favorite white bow tie once," I said, and for a moment I got so stuck in the remembering part that I forgot to elaborate further.

Kurt's eyebrows shot up. "That's your favorite childhood memory?"

"Oh. No. Not that exactly. What happened after. I basically cried for like an hour and he felt so bad about it that he promised he would get me a new one. Neither of us had any money, though, and we couldn't drive anywhere even if we managed to find some, so he came up with 'Operation Make Blaine the Best Bowtie Ever,'" I said, complete with air quotes and a roll of my eyes. "So he totally got a pair of scissors from his desk and dragged me to the living room where he then proceeded to cut out the sorriest excuse for a bowtie ever created from the four hundred dollar curtains hanging in the living room."

"Oh my god."

"Yeah. The nanny flipped her shit. And I mean, screaming at the top of her lungs, face ten kinds of purple, psycho crazy kind of flipped. It probably would have been really intimidating if Cooper hadn't been laughing his ass off the whole time she was yelling at us. He actually told her she looked like Violet from the *Willy Wonka* movie. You know, the one who blew up into that giant purple grape thing." I laughed at little at the memory, remembering the struggle to keep a straight face and look properly chastised as I stared at the floor while Cooper held my hand and cracked up in a snorting fit next to me.

"I haven't thought about that day in a really long time," I murmured, still mostly stuck in the memory.

"See?" Kurt prompted, voice soft, bringing me back.

I did see, actually. I saw pretty clearly that Kurt was the best thing that had ever happened to me. I didn't know how to say that, though, so I just held him tight and mumbled a thank you into his neck. Then I surprised myself by adding, "I'll miss you." The affectionate stuff was getting a bit easier, I guess. I had the 'I miss you' thing down, at least, given how easily it had slipped past my lips.

Kurt responded in his silent way, squeezing back gently so I would know the sentiment was returned.

I was about to kiss Kurt goodbye before heading to my car when Carole's voice drifted outside to us from the kitchen window.

"...leaving now, Burt, so I hope you're happy." *I hope you realize how ridiculous you're being.*

"How does this get blamed on me? Were we supposed to just let him stay forever?" Burt grumbled back.

Kurt looked at me with wide, embarrassed eyes then opened his mouth, probably to call out and let Burt and Carole know we could hear every word but I slapped a hand over his mouth.

"Hey, don't give me that look," I whispered. "They're the ones talking about me and I want to know what they have to say."

I caught Carole's response somewhere in the middle. "...were practically staring him down during dinner. I don't think you looked at anyone else but him."

"So?"

"So you probably made him uncomfortable," she told him in an annoyed, exasperated tone.

"I was just trying to get a read on the kid," Burt defended himself. "It's not like we know anything about him other than his first name, which, incidentally, is because he flat out refused to give us his last name."

Carole groaned. "That's his personal information, Burt. You can't really expect him to tell us his whole life story the second he meets us."

"I can too if he's gonna be staying in my house."

"Yes, well, I doubt he'll want to come back after the way you behaved tonight."

"Fine by me. Everly says she's got a bad feeling about him anyway."

Kurt pulled away from my hand to glare dangerously in the direction of the kitchen window.

"And besides," Burt continued, "something is going on with those two. I *know* they got up to something in Kurt's room last night. They looked like they had spent an hour rolling around on the bed."

"So what if there is something going on? Kurt isn't a baby anymore, Burt. He's growing up and teenage romance is a normal part of life that we have to deal with as parents. Kurt is *supposed* to have 'something going on' with a special someone at this age."

"Ugh. Carole, I don't want to talk about this."

"Well, we've got to," she insisted, not backing down. "You can't just ignore it."

"Well, why not?" Burt threw back, raising his voice a little. "I wasn't *supposed* to have to deal with this crap until he went off to college. We're in Lima, Ohio for crissake. How many out, gays kids can there possibly be around here?"

"What are you saying? That you were hoping Kurt would be alone until he left for college so that you wouldn't have to deal with him falling in love?" Carole asked, incredulous.

"No! No, I—*No*. That's not it. It's just... I miss my little boy, you know? I miss all the 'hi, daddies,' and the 'can you tuck me ins' and stuff like that. All that stuff is gone now and I don't know when that *happened*, Carole..."

There was a slight pause before he continued, "And then all of a sudden out of the blue this *boy* shows up and he keeps looking at my kid like Kurt put the stars in the damn sky and then I look at Kurt and he's looking back at this kid the same way and I just... I don't know what to *do* with that."

I felt embarrassment creep up the back of my neck and settle like hot fire in my cheeks, but I didn't worry too much about it because when I looked at Kurt he was looking down at the ground with this shy, adorable look on his face and a redness in his cheeks that matched my own.

"Burt... honey, you don't have to do anything. You just have to get to know him and hope for the best."

"But Everly—"

"It doesn't matter what Everly said. I know she means well, but she's just as overprotective of Kurt as you are. You have to remember that *Kurt* trusts him. Your son, who trusts *no one*, trusts that boy and that has to mean something, don't you think?"

"Is that true?" I asked, nudging Kurt's toe with my own and no longer paying attention to the conversation going on in the kitchen. Everly had asked him something similar the night before, to which he indicated that he did trust me, but this felt different. This was something someone else had noticed in him.

"Which part?" he asked, a small, shy smile on his face.

"All of it."

Slowly, with his smile still in place, Kurt shook his head no and I grinned. I couldn't stop myself from leaning in and pressing a quick kiss to his lips that he not only returned, but turned into something more. Our lips moved together easily before I pulled reluctantly away.

"See you tomorrow night," I whispered. I gave him one last kiss and left with a smile on my face.

Instead of driving back to Dalton Saturday night I went to see Santana. Her house was only twenty minutes away from Kurt's and I figured I would have less separation anxiety if I went there than if I went all the way back to Dalton.

I didn't want to deal with her parents, or more specifically her father, who reminded me too much of my own, so I climbed up to her window on the second floor and got in that way. Neither of us batted an eye at the fact that I walked in on her changing since it was nothing I hadn't seen before (we had never particularly cared who saw what), but the broken look on her face gave me pause.

"Hey," I said carefully.

"Hey," she said back and finished pulling on the oversized nightshirt she had in her hands.

"You okay?" I asked even though I knew the answer.

Her face crumbled but she stubbornly kept the tears in her eyes from spilling over. "They had to sedate her again. Third time this week."

We both knew what that meant. It wasn't good for a D4 to have to be sedated too often. It was grounds for re-evaluation and Brittany's fits induced by her visions were getting habitually worse. She was hardly ever lucid anymore for more than a few hours at a time. It didn't turn into a major problem unless she saw something that scared her, in which case she would start screaming and lash out at anyone who came near her.

"It's only one bad week," I reminded her as gently as I could.

"Is that supposed to make me feel better?" she snapped, dashing the back of her hand furiously over her eyes.

"I was hoping it would," I admitted. "It's also the truth."

Her face crumpled again and that time I didn't hesitate to close the distance between us and wrap my arms around her. She fell against me without a fight but didn't lift her arms to hug me back. They dangled uselessly at her sides.

"It's only the beginning of the month," she said, voice miserable. "What if it gets worse and they increase her Division level?"

If that happened Brittany would be placed in a D5 facility Santana would never see her again.

There was nothing I could say to make Santana feel better and we both knew it. False promises of hope were bullshit and neither of us would ever do that to the other anyway. So instead I maneuvered us both to the bed without letting her go and lowered us down. She fell asleep fitfully in my arms.

By Sunday morning Santana was bitchier than ever and snapped at me for the stupidest shit. I rolled my eyes and griped at her a bit but otherwise let her verbally abuse me, knowing that it was just her way of coping with everything. My own way was similar so I understood.

When I left to go back to Dalton later that night she stopped me and hugged me tight enough to make breathing a chore. She whispered a 'thank you' in my ear before shoving me off her damn stoop. I nearly fell flat on my ass but caught myself just in time and flipped her off with a scowl, which she promptly returned.

The first thing I did when I got back to school was look for Kurt. Thankfully I found him in the first place I checked, which saved me from going to his dorm and having to deal with Sebastian.

From one of the back tables in the student lounge, Kurt smiled at me when he looked up from one of his textbooks. I tried my best to smile back but given how exhausted as I was, it was a halfhearted attempt at best. He noticed, of course, if the curious look on his face was anything to go by but he waited patiently for me to sit down in the chair next to him, which I did.

"Do you ever wish your life was different?" I asked once I was sat down and leaning heavily against his shoulder. He took my weight without complaint.

"All the time," he lied. *My life isn't so bad*, his truth told me, taking me by surprise. *It could be worse.*

"Well, yeah, but I'm talking about making it better," I explained. "Wouldn't you want to be normal?"

"I don't know," he said, sounding odd. *It would be nice, I guess, but it doesn't really matter what I want because that won't ever happen.*

I frowned; confused with the unpredicted direction the conversation was headed. "But what if there was a way to eliminate our abilities?"

Kurt sighed impatiently. "SIIPA has been searching for a way to do that since the beginning of time." *They've been searching for a way to 'cure' us for years.*

"Yeah, I guess," I relented with a shrug. "It would be nice if they found a way, though, don't you think?"

"Yes," he said, his voice tight, almost angry, and completely unexpected. It was of course followed by a resounding, *No*, in my head.

Shocked, I leaned back so I could look at him fully. His lips were drawn in a thin line and he was staring intently at his textbook, though I doubted he actually saw the book in front of him. "Why 'no'?"

"Do you honestly think it would solve anything?" he asked in a meaningful tone, as if I was supposed to derive something significant from such a stupid question.

"I think Cooper wouldn't have to be stuck in a D5 facility for the rest of his life," I said forcefully, hoping to shove the significance of *that* down his throat. "I think I wouldn't have to be my father's plaything anymore."

Santana could actually be happy for once in her life, I added silently to myself. *Brittany could experience the world through her own eyes for a change instead of getting stuck looking at it through visions.*

"So, yeah," I bit out harshly, "I honestly think life would be a whole fuck of a lot better if there was a cure."

Kurt's mouth fell open. "Blaine, I... I didn't..."

"Didn't *what*?"

He looked at me with sad eyes. "I don't know." *I didn't mean it like that.*

"And that's supposed to—what? Make me feel better?"

"Blaine...." His eyes were pleading with me, saying something I didn't know how to interpret.

I fell against my chair, anger suddenly gone. "I just don't understand why you would think that way..." I had been hoping for a cure to be found ever since I was a kid. Sometimes I tried not to think about the possibility too much because the idea seemed too perfect and so farfetched, but it was always there in the back of my mind no matter what.

Kurt gave me his 'I don't know' lie again. *It's not that I don't understand that there are people who really want to eliminate their abilities it's just... what if a cure comes at a price?*

"Then I'd pay it," I insisted firmly. "I don't care what it is. I would do anything for my brother."

"Even if that meant..." he trailed off.

"What?" I asked, helping him along when I sensed that he was unable to continue because of his condition, which, I added bitterly in my mind, would no longer be a problem for him if a cure was found. Even some

questions held too much truth in them for him to handle. I couldn't understand why he wouldn't want to be able to speak freely, without so many restrictions.

"Nothing." Even if it meant giving SIIPA the power to do whatever they wanted? SIIPA locks people up in the D5 facilities because they pose a threat to an corrupted chain of command. If you take away the abilities of all the people they've locked up then the only ones left with power are the corrupt commanders.

"I don't care," I argued stubbornly. "I don't give a *shit* about people I don't know. If there is ever a chance that my brother doesn't have to suffer for the rest of his life then I'm going to take it."

Suddenly Kurt's arms were around me, pulling me close. "Okay," he said gently. "Okay."

I hugged him back tightly, not realizing how much I needed the contact until I had it. I gripped his shirt in my hands, crumbling it in my fists.

"Okay," he said a final time, his way of saying sorry. At the time, I thought I understood why.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Proper Way to Forget to Breathe

This one requires either shock or stimulation...

The days that followed the conversation Kurt and I had about the cure weren't exactly pleasant—not necessarily because of what we had talked about, but it didn't help things.

I was sort of in a strange place with our whole relationship thing or whatever it was. Unfortunately, I never actually got to the head clearing part when I left Kurt's house that Saturday—instead of unloading some of my problems I decided to keep all of them piled on top my shoulders and throw some of Santana's issues into the mix just to make things interesting.

So yeah... stuff sort of started to fester and it wasn't just me acting strange. Kurt was being all weird too with the half smiles he kept throwing my way and the constant egg shell walking. I guess everything that happened between us in the previous couple weeks had finally caught up with us and the awkward had set in. Not to mention Brittany was getting worse rather than improving and Santana was freaking out big time and calling almost twice a day to send panic vibes at me through the phone, which was understandable, but not really helping.

So all that shit was part of the reason why I freaked out on Wes in the middle of Warbler's practice one afternoon when he pointed out that my constant complaining was getting on his nerves and that my singing reminded him of a dying cow who was trying to push a giant squid out its ass. Now assuming Wesley actually knew what a cow sounded like while passing a giant squid through its anal cavity (never mind how the squid got in there in the first place, or why the cow hadn't exploded yet) I'm pretty positive I didn't sound *that* terrible but it was still pretty damn close—I can admit it; it's just that I didn't give one single fuck. Also, informing Wes that he could go fuck himself seemed like a thing of brilliance at the time, so that happened. Then I stormed out.

It took longer than I thought it would, but eventually Kurt came and found me.

"Hey," he said quietly.

"Hey," I answered back without taking my eyes off the ceiling (I was laying on my back on one of the couches in the student lounge—where else?).

"Will you show me how to look at the stars?"

His question was so random and out of nowhere that I couldn't stop myself from turning my head to stare blankly at him. "Where the hell did that come from?"

"Will you?" he pressed, not answering my question.

I sighed and redirected my attention back up to the ceiling. "There's not really anything to show. You just lay down and look up."

"Will you come with me then?"

I looked over at him again, wondering where all of this was coming from. Then I finally noticed that he had a green blanket slung over one arm and his mother's poetry book tucked safely between that and his chest. My eyes zeroed in on the book specifically—the start to falling in love with the real him, he had said. I sat up and swung my legs over the edge of the couch cushions.

"Yeah, okay."

As soon as we stepped outside I looked up at the sky. It wasn't exactly dark outside, but the sun was gone from sight for the most part and the stars were trying their best to outshine the little bit of light that did remain.

With a sigh, I followed wordlessly behind Kurt, who kept walking until we were far from campus and hidden away in one of Dalton's stupid rose bush gardens. When he found the spot he liked best I helped him spread out the blanket he brought with him, which turned out to be a lot bigger than I expected it to be. Kurt wasted absolutely no time in walking to one side of it and laying himself down on his back, dropping like a rock like he had been standing for weeks and had finally, *finally* been awarded sweet relief. He stretched his long limbs out and sighed, eyes already searching the sky, as if it held all the answers to every question he refused to ask out loud.

I, on the other hand, was less excited about the whole thing. Specifically, I was hesitant to just lie down like it was nothing and uproot years of stargazing with Cooper and only Cooper, so I sat down instead, folding my legs like a pretzel.

Kurt held his mother's book out for me to take without taking his eyes off the sky. "Will you read to me for a while?" he asked quietly.

Feeling lost, I searched his face, trying to grasp the randomness of it all. When his expression gave me nothing to go on, I silently took the book from him. "Which one do you want me to read?"

"None of them." *It doesn't matter. You pick.*

With one last probing look in his direction that was once again a moot point, I shifted into a more comfortable position and opened the book to search for something that caught my eye. At first there were too many things. Elizabeth Hummel had written almost fifteen years' worth of poetry in the book and it was obvious even at a glance that consistency had not been a factor in a single one of those years. Quickly looking through the book I saw she had written in about ten different colors of ink, her handwriting was all over the place, and the book was littered with sticky notes of various colors, states, and sizes. There wasn't a single thing that stood out to me because everything was unique.

"Are all these tabs hers?" I asked, trailing my fingers over the frayed notes.

Kurt watched my finger, transfixed for a moment before he seemed to realize it and looked back up and away. "Yes." *Some of them are mine but only a few. The rest are all hers.*

I nodded absently, skipping over yet another tabbed page. The book was littered with them. "Do you know what they are supposed to be indicating?"

His eyes jumped from one patch of sky to another. "I've never really thought about it to be honest." *I always thought the tabs marked her favorites, but I don't know for sure.*

His truth confirmed my own suspicions. People typically singled out the things they were proud of, but I didn't want something polished. I wanted something rough. I didn't know why exactly and I still don't, but once the thought was in my head I couldn't let it go.

The word that finally grabbed my immediate attention was *shit*—or *shittiest* if you want to be technical about it. The page was marked up all over the place with notes scribbled into the margins. Words were crossed out out, whole sentences were run through with lines that marked them as failed attempts.

It looked something like this on the page:

~The Shittiest Poem Ever, AKA, the Math Teacher's Nose Named Colossus~

So there's his nose where it lives on his face—

*Offensive***HIDEOUS!** *and bulbous.*

Sticking out.

I can't focus.

So many words spill from his lips.

They fall to the floor—

Valuable and important.(yeah right)

I need them

But I don't pick them up.

I can't.

*All I can see is the nose.*I am SO going to fail the final

I can't look away.

If I do, it could get me.

Burt— I see you looking at me with that face. I'm not crazy. I'm bored and this class sucks. Please stop looking at me like you're thinking about having me committed as it is very distracting and kindly return your

judging eyes to their respective sockets so that I may finish writing this wonderful and inspiring piece of literature.

It could poke me with its

Nasty

Nose-y

Fleshy

Skin.

Lizzie—you're writing about our teacher poking you with his nasty fleshy skin. And you named it. Am I supposed to let that one go?

Burt—you stole my poetry journal and *WROTE* in it. Am I supposed to let that one go?

Let the records show for future reference that Burt Hummel is now pouting like a five year old. That's one point for me.

But ANYWAY. Back to brilliance:

The.

End.

Elizabeth Hummel, October 5th, 1987

I caught the look on Kurt's face as the last word fell from my lips. "Why are you looking at me like that?" I asked.

His lips curled into the wide grin he had obviously been trying to hold back. "I don't know." *You look so confused.* He giggled. "If you could see your face..."

"...It's about a nose."

Kurt smiled, amused, like he was humoring me. "Yes. She was obviously very reserved. I never really liked that one." *She sounds like such a crazy person, doesn't she? My dad used to say that she had a really wacked out, carefree sense of humor and a spastic personality. I never really got to experience it for myself, so it's nice to see a piece of it in her writing.*

"Well, I can definitely see spastic. It's just not what I was expecting to find. I guess I figured she would be really serious and mom-like or whatever."

He grinned. "Read another one."

I flipped back to the beginning.

Surprisingly, the more I read, the more relaxed I began to feel—at least relaxed enough to stretch out of my stomach as I read and Kurt looked up at the sky.

Elizabeth had been an interesting person and it showed in her writing. A lot of the poems I read that night were about random crap, which was mostly because I kept on searching for pages that were filled with more side notes and cross outs than actual prose—one had a shopping list right in the middle of it.

She also seemed to enjoy poking fun at herself and her past mistakes. It was interesting to read the comments she had made on her earlier poems years after they had been written, most of them biting and sarcastic. Even more interesting were the changes in her writing style as the years progressed.

It just sort of happened that the two of us would go out every night after Warbler's practice so Kurt could look up at the sky as I read out loud to him. Sometimes we would talk about random nonsense instead of me reading.

Weeks passed. We stayed apart on the weekends. I made a habit of going to Santana's house every Friday and staying until Sunday. It worked out for all of us. Bitches needed someone to keep her same and I needed somewhere to stay that was close enough to Kurt so that I didn't have to spend our separation feeling like I was trying to quit crack.

Sometimes Kurt wouldn't ask for the book back when it was time to go back inside and I would get to keep it for a few days. Elizabeth had written a lot of poems about fall. They helped relax me when I needed it.

The September visit to see Cooper had been pretty bad and I got pretty fucked up by a man named Jim Des who really hadn't appreciated that fact that I basically gave my father to OK to lock him up for the rest of his life. Coop had lost it at the angry, hand-shaped bruises on my neck. The bruises were still there when I saw Kurt again the next day and he gave me an earful for 'being such an idiot.' He didn't chew me out for long, though. The fact that I had only gotten about five minutes with Cooper before he had to be sedated messed me up. Kurt was the one who read that night. I listened.

About a couple weeks later Kurt caught me by surprise.

I had been in the process of searching through Elizabeth's book for something that caught my eye when he asked a question. I knew Elizabeth's writing pretty well by that time and I could usually tell a lot about a random poem just by looking at things like the handwriting, which changed according to the mood she had been in when writing it. The color pen she decided to use was usually a good indicator as well. Black meant she had been having a bad day, blue meant good. Regardless, the point is that I was distracted, which is why I gave Kurt only half of my full attention and absently mumbled a "What?" in response to his soft spoken, "Want to know something?"

"Nothing," he said in reply, and I rolled my eyes as I flipped through a few more pages, knowing he was grinning without needing visual confirmation. Almost all of his lies were 'nothing's' now, which was extremely annoying. Kurt found it hilarious.

My dad asked me to ask you if you wanted to spend next weekend with us.

"Uh-huh," I said turning another page. Kurt waited patiently for my brain to catch up. "Wait. What?"

He grinned at me when I turn my baffled and shocked expression in his direction. "Hi," he said.

I rolled my eyes. "Shut up." Then, "Are you serious?"

He shot me a dry, sarcastic look complete with a raised eyebrow.

"Okay, dumb question. Jesus. Keep your hair on," I snarked back. "Do you think I should?"

"No-o-o-o," he deadpanned. *Yes, you idiot.*

"Name calling now. Nice. I can't this weekend, though," I finally remembered. "Cooper is this weekend."

His eyes became weary and concerned. "What about after?"

Did I want Kurt's whole family to see me when I was that vulnerable? "What about next weekend?"

Kurt shrugged. "I don't think that will work." *It shouldn't be a problem.*

He still looked worried, though, so I abandoned Elizabeth's book and leaned up to kiss his cheek. When that didn't work, I did it again. And then again and again until he finally grinned and pointed to his lips.

I blinked up at him dumbly, teasing him.

He rolled his eyes and closed the distance himself. I laughed against his mouth as I leaned back, taking him with me.

Just a few days later he finally managed to coax me into lying next to him on my back, my hand clasped tightly in his as we looked up at the stars together for the first time. There was a small pit in my stomach that rebelled against what I was doing, insisting that stargazing was for Cooper only, but another part of me rationalized that Kurt had shared so much of himself with me and that I should return the favor.

"I never thought I would do this with anyone with Cooper..." I admitted.

Kurt squeezed my hand. "Ask me what I want to say," he said softly.

"What do you want to say."

"Nothing," he said, voice gentle to show that he wasn't doing it to be a brat that time. *It doesn't mean you don't love him, Blaine. You're not betraying him or anything. You know what don't you?*

"I know that logically. It just feels... I don't know. I'm being stupid."

What started out as a soft, it-will-all-be-okay kiss from him quickly turned into something more—something that was out of control but still designed so that we could both pour every emotion we had into it; me releasing the tension I had been carrying around with me into his mouth and him accepting it without fear or hesitation.

And then it turned into that completely unplanned and unexpected moment when I was fucking his mouth with my tongue as he rolled his hips into mine, making both of us gasp and moan. I had no idea how we had so suddenly got there, but he was moving above me in the most delicious way and I couldn't summon the energy to care.

"That's it, baby," I panted into his mouth as he ground his covered cock into mine.

I held him tighter than I probably should have, one hand gripping the back of his head while my other hand gripped his ass, pulling his body roughly against mine—as if I was terrified that he might fade into oblivion if I let him go.

"Blaine," he gasped, looking completely lost and desperate for some sort of validation that what we were doing was allowed. Mixed in was disbelief over the things he was feeling—the things we were both making each other feel.

"It's okay," I whispered, telling him both the truth and what he wanted to hear. I pulled his head down towards mine, consoled him with my lips gentle on his. "It's okay. Take what you want. I'm right here," I said against his mouth, making him breathe the words in so that they filled him up.

A desperate sound escaped his lips as he kissed me back sloppily as he moved with me. With the hand that wasn't holding the back of his head I found my way under his shirt to feel the impossibly smooth skin that stretched across his back. He gasped and his lips were suddenly gone, his head falling forward until his face was buried in my neck. He mouthed lethargically at the skin he could reach.

His trusts became erratic and uncaring as he reached that place where the inevitable end was in sight and all that was left to do was get there as quickly as possible. I pulled impossibly harder at his hips, insistently helping him along. He half whined, half groaned against my neck.

"I know, gorgeous," I said, trying to ignore the restless feeling that was slowly driving me insane. The constricting denim around my cock and balls made me ache to be at that point past the point of no return where he was, but the building anticipation at the prospect of making him come overpowered my own need to do the same. So I hung on and mentally willed him to finish fast so that I could follow.

It didn't take him much longer. A few more erratic thrusts and he came with a final soft, high pitched moan that was probably the sexiest thing I ever heard.

He fell against me when he was spent and I rolled him onto his back and continued to thrust against him until I fell over the edge, joining him in that blissful place where everything was perfect. I gave myself a few seconds to breathe harshly from my mouth before I nudged him with my nose until he tilted his head back enough so I could kiss him. His kissed me lazily without moving any part of his body other than his lips.

"Are you okay?" I whispered to him.

"Yeah, I'm okay," he mumbled, eyes closed, and my heart began to drop towards my rapidly sinking stomach before his truth set my mind at ease, *Just okay doesn't cover it*, his truth told me, sounding as lethargic and spent as his audible voice had been, *I'm amazing*.

He gave that some time to sink in before asking, "Are *you* okay?"

"I think 'amazing' covers it," I told him, pulling him close as I stubbornly ignored the discomforting mess in my pants. Then, even though he had told me that I didn't, I couldn't stop the soft *I love you* from gliding effortlessly through my mind.

Cooper and I didn't watch the movie I had brought with me for my November visit which meant that *Santa Clause Conquers the Martians* stayed stuffed my backpack with the plastic covering still wrapped around the case. Instead of carrying out our tradition, we sat on his bed, his back pressed up against mine as we each leaned heavily against the other, keeping each other upright. We took turns digging through the bucket of Bazooka gum (the gum hadn't suffered the same fate as the unwanted DVD in my bag) that sat beside us like it was popcorn.

"Are you mad?" I asked as I spit the tasteless wad gum I had been chewing back into its wrapper. I tossed it somewhere unimportant before shoving my hand back in the bucket for a new piece.

When I had first walked into Cooper's room that day and saw his face, the words formed in my mind before I could think to stop them. As I sat with him on the bed, waiting for him to answer my question, I recalled the fallen look on his face as the words, *I looked at the stars with Kurt* traveled from my mind to his.

"Mad isn't the right word. Jealous definitely works, though." He paused to spit out his own gum with a sigh. "And no, you don't have to say sorry."

So I didn't. He knew I was sorry anyway. "What are you jealous of exactly?" It was kind of a stupid question to ask because I knew the gist of the answer. Stargazing was supposed to be the thing I shared with Cooper. It was supposed to be what we did when we needed to be reminded that there were bigger things in life than their own much smaller problems. No matter what Kurt said, I could help but feel like I had broken a piece of my connection with Cooper by sharing that experience with Kurt.

His humorless laugh brought me out of my guilty reverie. "Well, that's part reason," he said, hearing my thoughts. "Though, I wouldn't say a piece of our connection was broken by you stargazing with Kurt. Nothing you do could ever break our connection, Blaine. What I'm feeling is more complicated than that. Yes, I wish that I could still be the one to look up at the stars with you when you've had a bad day, and it kills me that I can't, but it's more the fact that you're growing up and I'm missing it that I can't handle. I'm jealous of anyone who gets to watch you do that."

"That's not your fault, Coop," I said gently.

"Yeah, but that doesn't really make it hurt any less. I'm supposed to be there for you. I'm supposed to bust your balls when I catch the two of you making out on the couch or wherever. I'm supposed to be there for you when one of you fucks up and makes the other one cry. I'm supposed to threaten him and tell him not to break your heart. I'm supposed to watch you fall in love. I'll never get to do that, though, will I? I'll never get to do any of those things." His return breath shook. "I can't do this anymore, Blaine. I hate it."

For the first time ever he didn't have a telekinetic fit when I left. He just sat there on the bed with a sad smile on his face, saying he would see me next month. It made my skin turn cold and a disturbed feeling ran up my back like a thousand tiny little legs pricking at my skin. I couldn't help but feel like I was the one who broke him, like it was my fault.

I felt so wrecked by the whole thing that I *almost* blew by the exit that would take me back to Dalton and went straight to Lima instead—emotional instability around near strangers be damned. I didn't, though. However much I needed Kurt, I didn't want anyone to see me when I felt so ruined. I wasn't crying or anything—I didn't do that—but the utter feeling of wrong that was pulsing just underneath the surface would make me feel exposed regardless.

I didn't go to Lima Heights either—Santana was spending the weekend with Brittany, who hadn't had any psychic fits that week, which meant that she was out of solitary confinement for the first time in a long time and back in her one bedroom apartment, where Santana would be permitted to visit her.

As soon as I got to Dalton I went straight to my room. As much as I wanted the solitude, the thought of laying on the stiff couches in the student lounge made me want to vomit.

Steven was busy with something at his desk and he looked up at me when I walked in. He studied my face for about three seconds before he quickly grabbed up some random shit and left without a word. I was already lying face down on my bed, my face pressed up against the pillow, eyes shut, brain trying to forget.

I had only been lying like a vegetable for about twenty minutes when the door opened and then shut a second later. I was half asleep so I didn't bother to look, didn't bother to care until familiar fingers found their way into my hair, smoothing it gently back. Stunned into moving, I groggily pushed myself to one side to look over my shoulder. "Kurt?" I asked at the unexpected sight of him. "What are you doing here?"

Kurt smiled sadly at me and leaned down to kiss the corner of my mouth. "Are you okay?" he asked instead of answering my question.

I didn't even think about responding with anything other than the sad and pathetic, "No," that left my lips.

A sad, unsurprised look passed over his face. He kissed me again before laying down with me, his body on top of mine for the most part. I held him tight, relishing in the press of his weight as I fell fully and properly asleep.

I woke up with the desperate need to forget and Kurt was right there, asleep and beautiful, tempting me. So I took what he unknowingly offered.

He had rolled onto his back sometime during our nap, his head tilted harshly to one side on the pillow leaving his neck exposed. I licked his skin and rolled on top of him, pressing myself against him. He woke up in seconds, gasping.

"Blaine."

I licked my way harshly into his mouth and pulled back abruptly, leaving him to flounder. "Let me touch you," I ordered, needing it.

"W-where?" he asked.

Without warning I palmed his cock and he let out a choked gasp. "Here," I said rubbing my fingers lightly over the rapidly hardening length of him—enough pressure to torture him, but not nearly enough to get him off. In the back of my mind I realized on some level that I shouldn't be so forceful with him because he was Kurt and nothing whatsoever like the faceless, nameless guys I had fucked in the past, but I was too far gone and instinct had kicked in.

"Oh god," he groaned and hiked his hips up to push himself against my hand.

I pulled my hand away. He whined at the denial.

"No, gorgeous," I said when he whined and tried to push his hips to where my hand was hovering just out of his reach. "Tell me you want it," I told him, pausing to suck at his neck. "Do you?"

"No." *Yes!*

I moaned at how desperate he sounded. "Fucking right, you do," I muttered and kissed his mouth again, rough and wet, my tongue demanding against his. I placed both my hands at the button of his jeans and pulled them open, pulled his zipper down, touched him through the flimsy material of his briefs, stretched tight over his cock. My fingers curled around his covered skin, the heat that had collected there pushing through the fabric to my hand. For a moment, I was content to take my time with him, but then he moaned loudly and began rubbing himself sloppily against my hand, his hips rolling sensuously as he used me to pleasure himself.

I groaned at the sight. "Fuck, Kurt." He was like a fit of nerves with that sexy as hell look on his face and his eyes clouded over with mindless feeling.

I sucked harshly at his bottom lip, making his hips jerk up as he moaned once more. "Like that, do you? What if I sucked on your cock instead? Want me to?"

His eyes went wide. "No," he rasped out. *Yes.*

I grunted at his response, took a minute to roll my own erection against his leg, and then released him to push his shirt half way up his chest.

"I have to take your dick out to do that, baby," I told him like he didn't already know. "You okay with that?"

"Do it," he ordered and I smirked.

So fast. We were going so fast. It was delicious and familiar. It was what I was used to. It was no warning, no debating, just yes, please, Blaine, yes, fuck me now.

I ran my hand up and down his partly bare chest, working him up, making him whine; down, down, down until I reached the tip of his clothed cock, just barely teasing it before quickly pulling my fingers away to trail back up, far away from where he wanted me.

He gasped and moaned, eyes closed, mouth wide open. He opened his eyes every few seconds to silently plead with me, asking for the friction that I refused to give him until...

"Please, Blaine," he begged.

With a satisfied smirk, I reached instead of his underwear and fisted his cock, jerking him once, twice, and then stopped when I glanced up at his face. He looked completely overwhelmed with everything—needy, desperate, and absolutely mindless. I realized that wasn't what I wanted. It was fast and delicious, but it was supposed to be more than that—it was me and it was Kurt. It was us together and that meant something to me and I knew I couldn't do anything else until he understood that.

With my hand still gripping his cock but no longer moving, I reached up with the other to stroke his cheek with my thumb. I kissed his lips, his cheek, the tip of his nose. "Hey. Look at me, baby."

He did—with his blissed out, desperate, gorgeous eyes, he looked at me.

"This isn't nothing to me, Kurt," I told him. "You're beautiful and you're everything. Okay?" My stomach swooped at the look he gave him in response—a look that made me feel like I was everything too. "Do you believe me?"

He shook his head no, looking like he couldn't speak if he tried, but I understood it—I understood *him*—and I kissed him again, suddenly overwhelmed with the truth he was giving me. Once again, I kept the *I*

love you that I stubbornly refused to let go of to myself and kissed my way down his chest, sucking once at one of his nipples while his shirt was still bunched up to just above his pectorals. He whispered my name as I began moving the hand wrapped around his cock once again, teasingly slow until I had finally kissed my way down to the light trail of hair that ran down to his pubic area and released my hold on him completely so that I could use both hands to push his jeans and briefs halfway down his thighs.

His cock, darkened with blood, was flushed, longer than I expected, and leaking against his lower abs. He wasn't as thick as I was, but he was thick enough to make my mouth water in anticipation and he groaned with his head thrown back when I placed an open mouthed kiss just above the base. He looked up for the second kiss, though, his face flushed with color, his eyes half-lidded but still full of fascination.

I groaned and trailed my tongue up to the tip. "Don't stop watching," was all the warning I gave him before swallowing as much of him as I could.

"*Fuck, Blaine!*" he gasped, voice high. He lifted his hips involuntarily, instinctually seeking to push himself farther into my mouth. I let him do it, relaxing my throat to accommodate him as I used both my hands to unbutton and then unzip my own pants. As I started to jerk myself, I dragged my mouth back up his length, sucking him as I went and then went back down until he hit the back of my throat once more.

"Oh, my god. Oh, god. Shit. *Blaine*. Don't stop. Don't stop."

I didn't plan on it. It was all so good—the weight of him on my tongue, the tightening in my balls as I got myself off, the unashamed way he watched me as I greedily sucked him, the sounds that filled the room as his cock slid in and out of my mouth, the staccato gaps of pleased bliss that worked their way passed his lips when I stopped bobbing my head to groan around him, all of it.

When I abandoned my own cock to slide his hands under his ass and squeeze, he came loudly and aggressively, lifting his hips even farther off the bed as he shoved his cock far down my throat. That combined with the taste of him on my tongue was enough to send me over the edge after two savage thrusts against the mattress.

I only became aware that my mouth was empty when I mumbled a soft and breathless, "fucking hell," against his thigh.

Kurt didn't respond—he was still panting heavily and staring up at the ceiling—so I kissed his spent cock one last time before dragging myself back up to his face. I didn't bother with pulling my pants back up, nor did I bother asking whether or not he would mind if I stuck my tongue down his throat only seconds after swallowing his cum. He groaned into the kiss, though, so I assumed he wasn't going to kick my ass for it.

"I just jizzed all over my blankets," I felt the need to point out once I caught my breath.

"Oh my god," Kurt groaned.

"Sorry, gorgeous, but it's true. You should be proud of yourself. That's twice now that I've come without being in someone's mouth or up their ass."

"Please stop talking."

I closed my eyes and snuggled up to him. "Hey, it's not like I help what I'm saying right now. My brain is fuck all at the moment." I yawned. "Your fault."

Kurt yawned as well.

"Hey..." I began out of the blue, suddenly nervous. "Are you okay?"

He twisted his neck to frown at me. "Why do you always ask me that?" *Why do you ask me that every time we do something sexual?*

I sighed, "I hurt a lot of people, remember? I never really cared how the other guy felt so long as I got off. I don't want it to be like that with you."

"But I already said before that I..." he trailed off, unable to go on.

"I know," I assured him, figuring he was referring to my random burst of sensitivity just before I went to town on him. "I just had to make sure. We never really talked about whether you wanted a sex thing with me. The first time just sort of happened."

"I wouldn't tell you if it bothered me." *I would tell you if anything that we've done so far bothered me. In fact, I wouldn't have done it if it bothered me.*

"Just making sure," I repeated.

He yawned again and shifted underneath me. "Go to sleep, Blaine."

I kicked my pants the rest of the way down, he pulled his back up.

"Kay." A thought occurred to me. "Hey, Kurt?"

"Mmm..."

"Thanks for coming back here for me."

His lips touched my forehead before he fell asleep.

"Hands off," Kurt barked out the second my fingertips brushed his thigh.

I pulled my hand back with an annoyed scoff and flopped back against the passenger seat of Kurt's car. It was Friday, we were on our way to Lima for the weekend, and I was horny—again. "You are *such* a cockblock."

"Excuse me?" he demanded in an are-you-serious-right-now kind of way. "Does what happened ten minutes ago no longer count?"

"Oh, it fucking counts," I grumbled. "I just want more."

Kurt snorted, unimpressed with that bit of logic.

I have to admit that I was being pretty obnoxious. Once I finally got my hands on him it was like having a new drug—I needed it constantly. I had lost track of how many times I had gotten him off in the span of six days—not that he was complaining about it. His issue was definitely not with the near constant orgasms I was giving him—it was the fact that his parents were expecting us to be at his house around five, and five had come and gone about twenty minutes earlier.

It was my fault we were late. Twice, we had pulled off to the side of the road since we left Dalton so that I could work him out of the frenzy I put him in.

"We don't really even need to pull over. You can just keep driving while I do it."

"Are you insane? Do you have a death wish or something?"

"Not since I last checked," I said, rolling my eyes. "I do have a wish to swallow your cock, though, so let's deal with that."

"So you can whip yours out in the middle of it and make a mess all over the place?" *So you can start to masturbate while doing it and potentially get your stuff on my upholstery?*

"Hey. Sex should be beneficial to both parties."

He snorted.

"C'mon, Kurt. You won't crash. I won't touch myself this time, I swear." Yeah, that was a total lie.

Unfortunately Kurt knew it, too. He drew the line and refused to let me cross.

I sulked in my seat and tried not to let my mind wander too much. I had always been a fairly sexual person, but I knew I was going overboard. I had a tendency to use sex to distract myself from the more unpleasant things in my life, and if worrying about Cooper had been at the very top of my list before, it was a list all of its own now. Kurt was the perfect distraction from all that even if he technically had no idea that was what was going on. He was so addictive and responsive to everything and not the blushing virgin I had thought he would be despite the fact that we had yet to progress from the one-sided blow jobs.

Still, my baggage aside, long car rides sucked—especially when I wasn't the driver. Sitting in a passenger seat made me twitch.

"Fuck. Are we there yet?"

"Seriously, Blaine?"

Somehow I survived the trip and even managed to refrain from dropping onto my hands and knees to kiss the ground when the car rolled to a stop. I did practically throw myself out, though, and made a big show of stretching, which Kurt pointedly ignored in favor of yanking his ginormous suitcase out of the back.

I shouldered my light backpack that held one pair of jeans, two pairs of boxers, and two T-shirts, and stood off to the side shaking my head at him. He took a second to flip me off before giving the think one more vicious yank, which sent it crashing to the ground.

"Need a hand, honey?" I asked, a shit eating grin on my face.

The look he shot me was pure evil. I wisely hid my smile. After a second of murderous staring, he hefted the thing up and onto its wheels, pulled out the pull-y thing and stalked off with his head high.

I took a second to admire him, a stupid grin plastered on my face, before jogging after him and praying I somehow survived another visit with Kurt's psychotic family.

I decided sometime in the middle of the Buckeyes game that football wasn't so bad. I even found myself getting into it, though not nearly as much as Finn and Burt, who spent more time on their feet, yelling at the television for this or that, than they did anything else.

Kurt sat in the loveseat off to the right of the couch, alternating between sketching and shaking his head at his father and Finn while rolling his eyes.

"YEEEEAAAH! Go, baby, go, go... go... TOUCHDOWN! That's what I'm talking about!" Burt turned to Finn, who was also on his feet, with both hands up. Finn slapped his hands with what looked like as much strength as he could muster. I forced myself not to wince at the sound of the impact.

An instant replay started and Finn dropped back down on the couch with a satisfied sigh. Burt remained standing, which I was grateful for—it was a little awkward being sandwiched between Kurt's father and his almost step-brother, but Burt insisted that the couch was the best place in the living room to be when a game was on, especially since I had never seen one before. It hadn't been a lie, but the small twinge I felt altered me to the fact that it wasn't the whole truth either.

At first I thought either Burt was trying to keep me close by having me sit next to him (which meant I couldn't sit with Kurt) or he was actually trying to make an effort to include me. As time passed, though, I began to suspect it was a mixture of both—Burt still looked at me like he didn't quite know what to do with my presence in his home (even though he was the one to extend the invitation), but his persona was different than it had been when we first met—less like checking all the exists for the best one to shove me out of.

So back to the game.

Touchdown, instant replay, Finn sat, Burt stretched his arms high above his head and didn't.

"You boys want anything?" he offered. "I'm starving."

Finn thought for a second. "Do we have any more of that dip stuff from last week?"

"Probably. You want chips with that, I'm guessing?"

"Doritos."

Kurt looked up sharply at his father. "Dad..."

Burt huffed and rolled his eyes. "Relax, kid. I'll bring out carrots too. You good with Doritos, Blaine?"

"Yeah, I like them."

"Alright, I'll be back in a minute. Call me if anything exciting happens."

Burt headed for the kitchen just as the replay finished and the game started again. Finn nudged me with his elbow.

"Dude, you should totally try yelling at the television. It's, like, really there-reputic and stuff."

I frowned. "You mean 'therapeutic'?"

Finn frowned too. "Uhh... I dunno. Kurt? Do I?"

"No," he said, not looking up from his sketchbook. *Yes.*

I could practically see the wheels turning in Finn's head. Of course, the play by play helped, too. "Okay... Kurt said no... so that means he really said yes, so... yeah, that's the one I meant."

"How is yelling at people who can't hear you therapeutic?"

"It just is, man. Seriously. Try it next time things get good. It's part of the whole experience."

I didn't have to wait too long. A truly brilliant pass was made and the receiver took off like a rocket. Finn hopped up on his feet, pulling me with him even as he called for Burt to hurry up. Once I was standing on my feet it was a whole different experience. Finn's excitement was catching. Adrenaline rushed through my veins and I found myself willing 15 forward and warning him to watch his left side where the other team was closing in on him.

My phone buzzed in my pocket. With my focus still on the game, I grabbed it out of my pocket and connected the call without bothering to check the caller ID. "What?"

"Blaine," a voice said. One short word. My name.

For a second I got absolutely nothing from it. I couldn't place the voice, couldn't recognize it, couldn't comprehend it because of some stupid football game.

It wasn't until my stomach dropped like a brick that my brain caught on to what my body already knew.

"Santana?" I asked, turning away from the television as I pressed the phone closer to my ear, trying to concentrate. I didn't like the way her voice sounded nothing like her—panicked, terrified. *Why?*

"She's here."

My lips fell open. Confusion set in. "What?"

Finn suddenly exclaimed. "Dude! Did you see—oh! Crap, man. Sorry."

I ignored him.

"She's here," Santana said again, and it was just as unhelpful as it had been the first time around.

"San, go back because I don't know what the fuck you're talking about. Who is where?"

"Brittany," she whispered.

Fuck. My mind immediately went nuts piecing scenario after scenario together—Brittany losing control, passing the point of no return; Santana having to watch helplessly as SIIPA dragged her off to somewhere she would never be allowed to follow. She would never let them take Britt without a fight. Had she tried to stop them? Had they hurt her? Was she okay? She sounded catatonic. Had she finally cracked under the constant pressure? I couldn't lose her too.

"Where are you?" I demanded, too caught up with imagining a million different horror stories to realize that not one of them made any sense with what Santana was saying.

Somewhere in the back of my mind I heard Kurt order Finn to turn the volume down. Then I felt his hand on my shoulder, a light, gentle touch that was probably meant to soothe me. It didn't.

I heard him more clearly when he said my name, just like Santana had. "Blaine?" only he sounded concerned.

However, all thoughts of Kurt flew out of my mind when Santana answered my question.

"I'm at my house. She's here."

What?

"What?"

That was impossible. D4s weren't allowed to leave their community—ever.

Then she dropped the other shoe:

"She has Cooper with her."

CHAPTER TWENTY

The Proper Way to Take Something Away

No one can take something away like Kurt can...

"She has Cooper with her."

Then I hung up.

This is the best way I can describe what happened after....

Feeling lost, I just stood there, trying to latch onto something that made sense. My body was humming, pulsing with sudden, instant energy that made me feel like I could run a thousand miles without stopping. I couldn't think. My brain was stuffed with nonsense that was swallowing each and every thought worth having whole.

A million useless thoughts ran their way around my head.

Britt was at San's house. With *Cooper*. Somehow she had gotten out. *How* had she gotten out? It was supposed to be impossible. How had *he* gotten out? That was even more than just impossible; it was unthinkable—or it was supposed to have been.

How much time did I have? How much time was left before a search team was sent? Had Santana called as soon as Britt and Coop showed up? Was Brittany okay? Was Cooper? Was she having a fit? Was she hurt? Had Cooper destroyed the Lopez home already? Had he hurt someone? What the fuck was I going to do once I got there?

I looked Finn. He staring at me, looking confused and concerned.

"Dude, what's wrong?" he asked.

Noise. That's what I heard—annoying, incessant, unimportant noise that just kept flying out of this boy's mouth when I had to *go*.

Fuck, what the fuck was I doing?

"I have to go." I said it in a rush. The words seemed to string themselves together in a tangled mess of sound.

Finn shook his head, bewildered. "What? Why?"

Why was I even talking to him when I needed Kurt?

Kurt.

My mind reeled. It was hard to focus on one thing. Why did I need him again?

Because he's Kurt, I reasoned with myself. It sounded completely logical in that moment.

He was right there next to me. His hand was warm on my shoulder still and when I turned to look at him, all I saw were more questions on his face. I didn't need his questions. I needed answers.

"What happened?" he asked.

"I have to go," I said again. "I have to go."

"Okay, Blaine," he voice calm, trying to break through the panic that had taken hold. "Okay. But what's going on? You have to tell me." *I want you to tell me.*

"I have to leave. I have to leave right now."

"But why?" he said, still trying to get me to cooperate. "What happened?"

"Will you come with me?" I asked, but my hand was already holding his, already pulling, my body already turning and taking his with me. I was only about half way to the door when I realized I didn't have my own car. I needed his. I needed *him*—for so many things.

Right at that moment though, I needed his keys and I needed his car. "Where are your keys?" I knew that I already knew the answer. I had watched him put them down. I didn't remember where, though—couldn't remember anything before that stupid football game.

"I—they're—they—"

"Go get them," I told him, pushing him gently away. "Quickly."

He ran off.

Finn was back. He said something to me. I don't know what, but I know he looked scared. Then he called Burt's name and walked off and I knew we were out of time.

"Kurt!" I called, no longer in that weird, quiet, slow-moving time state I had been in. Now everything was too fast and too much, but somehow still not fast enough. "*Kurt!*"

And then he was there, everything eyes scared and lost and desperate to understand, but he was still *there*. He was still with me.

I grabbed his keys from his hands.

Burt came out from the kitchen, Finn close behind. He stopped abruptly when his eyes landed on the both of us. He regarded us carefully, as if we might bolt if he wasn't smart about it. Smart didn't matter, though, not in this case.

"Kurt," he said very slowly, very carefully. "What's going—"

With Kurt's hand in mine, I took off like I was being chased by the unknown thing from my childhood nightmares.

Just as we cleared the doorway I heard a chair topple over. In my head, I pictured Burt and maybe even Finn running to chase after us but I didn't look back to confirm it and neither did Kurt.

What the fuck are you doing? I thought as I pulled the front door of the house open and ran us through it and then down the steps.

This is insane this is insane this is insane this is insane.

And it was, but I couldn't stop. I had committed myself to running down the shit path and it was too late turn back around so I just pushed myself to run faster and held Kurt's hand as tightly as I could.

My heart was pounding. I had my thumb on the unlock button of Kurt's keys before Burt was even out of the front door. By the time he finally made it out, Kurt was in the passenger's seat looking completely shell-shocked and I had my foot on the gas and was backing out of the driveway like my brother's life depended on it because for all I knew it did.

"Oh my god," Kurt whispered when Burt could no longer be seen futilely running after us. "Oh my god."

I was barely listening to him. All I could think was that too much had happened in not enough time and I would never catch up with it all in time to salvage the mess that had been made.

Furious at everything, I spun backwards out of the driveway into the road and then threw the car in drive. "How do I get to Santana's house from here?" I had driven there from Kurt's house once before but that had been weeks ago and I could barely keep the car in its correct lane, let alone remember twenty-something miles worth of directions.

"Why would I know?!" Kurt exploded at me, no longer stuck in his useless loop of babble. He struggled to get his seat belt on. "What the hell *was* that, Blaine?!"

"I don't know!" I yelled right back. Then I took a deep breath. Calm. I had to be calm. I *would* be calm. "Look. Just—do you have a GPS in here?"

"Because Santana's address is *clearly* what's important after you kidnapped me out of my own home!"

Calm went right out the goddamned window. "I DIDN'T FUCKING KIDNAP YOU!" I roared over the sound of his truth in my head, disputing his sarcasm.

I felt like I was breaking inside. I knew I needed to calm down, but I couldn't do it. I was scared, Kurt was scared, Brittany was an escapee, Cooper was involved, Santana was in danger because of it, and I was confused and lost, and Kurt was too so we both decided that screaming nonsense at each other would be the best way to handle it all.

"Well, what would you call it then?!" he threw back.

"Are you serious right now, Kurt?! You were walking towards me! And it's not like you tried to stop me or put up any kind of fight whatsoever! No one fucking forced you to get in the fucking car!"

"What was I supposed to do, Blaine?! Did you think that maybe I was too shocked to do anything but follow you?! Did you even see my dad's face?!"

I saw it alright—desperate and terrified, like I was stealing away his entire world.

"Don't blame this all on me!"

"Who should I blame it on then?!"

I noticed the red light almost before it was too late. "*FUCK!*" I slammed on the breaks just in time to keep us from driving directly into open traffic. Kurt's seat belt caught him. Cars zoomed by in both directions on the main road, their drivers oblivious to what could have just happened. Blood rushed in my ears. I was gripping the steering wheel for dear life.

I turned to look at Kurt, who looked absolutely terrified.

"Shit. *Shit*. Are you okay?"

He turned his everything eyes on me and I broke. My forehead connected with the backs of my hands as I fell forward against the steering wheel. "Jesus. I'm sorry. God, I'm so sorry."

Then I felt Kurt's hand on my arm. "Let me drive," he said softly.

I twisted my head to the side to stare blankly at him.

"Please," he added.

"Yeah, fine. Okay."

With one last glance in my direction, Kurt got out of the car and walked around. I didn't even bother. I just crawled over to the passenger seat and let my body collapse. He climbed in and put on his seatbelt. I jumped a little when I suddenly felt Kurt's hand on my thigh. "What are you doing?" I asked uncaringly.

"Phone," he said softly as his hand slid into my pocket and grabbed my phone. "What's her address?"

With my arms like noodles at my sides, I told him and he typed it into my phone then took one of my hands and put the phone there for me to hold. "Read them to me."

I could do that much, I told myself. "Turn right and then keep going for a while."

We drove in silence for a while. Then, "Tell me what's going on."

Such a loaded question. "I don't know."

"Well, what *do* you know?"

"Cooper got out."

Kurt's mouth dropped open as he turned to stare at me in disbelief.

"Road," I reminded him in that same dead tone.

He looked forward once more. "How? Did they...?"

"Let him out?" I guessed. "That's impossible. But then again," I said with a humorless laugh, "escaping from a D5 facility is supposed to be impossible."

He didn't ask any more questions after that, but he did slip his hand in mine and that made me feel slightly better.

We spent the rest of the ride in silence. I didn't know what I would do once I saw Cooper. Strangle him probably. Punch him. Something violent. He deserved it for basically signing his own death warrant—no one had ever escaped before and if SIIPA wanted to maintain control over the D5s there would have to be an unthinkable consequence. If they didn't kill him, they would break him down to nothing—and justify it with the pretense that sacrifices must be made for the greater good of society.

Kurt came to an abrupt stop after we pulled into Santana's driveway. I was glad to find the house still standing.

Bitches ran out before I had my hand on the door handle. "He's hyperventilating."

I scrambled out of the car and the two of us took off for the house, Kurt close behind.

"Is he having a fit?" I asked. Now that I was there and I had something to do, I could think more clearly.

"Not yet. Not telekinetically. He's really messed up."

That was no surprise. He had probably been messed up from the second he stepped out of his room. He had been trapped underground for years, shut up behind thick metal walls that were carefully constructed to help him block out the voices of everyone outside his room. I knew it didn't stop the voices completely, but he said it helped a lot. There was no help for him now.

"How did they even get here?"

"I don't know. I heard a noise in the living room and they were just there. Brittany was stuck in a vision and Coop was on the fucking floor so it wasn't like either of them could answer any questions."

When we finally made it inside, we found Cooper lying curled up on his side behind one of the couches in Santana's living room, his forehead pressed firmly against his knees and his hands pulling harshly at his hair.

Brittany stood muttering to herself in the middle of the room, her eyes rolled back so far that all you could see was white.

Together the two of them made one fucked up sight.

"If the unicorn helps, the wolf won't puff the house down," Brittany said in a dead voice as she interpreted whatever future she was seeing in her mind out loud for us to hear. She was supposed to be the most powerful psychic alive, which would have been saying something if she had any clout as a psychic whatsoever. Brittany had always lived in her own little private world—one that made sense only to her—her interpretations never made any sense until after whatever it was that she saw actually happened.

Ignoring Brittany, I walked over to Cooper and very carefully dropped to my knees in front of him. I made it a point not to touch him. "Goddamn it, Coop, what did you *do*?"

Cooper let out a dry sob at the sound of my voice and the house creaked loudly. "No, Blaine," he moaned softly. "G'away..."

Panic shot through me. "I thought you said he wasn't having a telekinetic fit," I snapped at Santana, who had moved to stand next to Brittany.

After a quick glance around the room, she frowned in confusion. "He's not. Nothings moving—"

"It's the fucking *house* that's moving," I cut her off as it creaked again. "Don't you hear that?"

She blanched for a second and her arms tightened around Brittany, who whined. For a second, Santana looked like she might panic but she put a sudden stop to it, her features hardening with stubborn disbelief.

"He can't—"

"He *can*," I insisted.

The entire house rattled in vengeful violence, the wood screaming angry sounds as the force of Cooper's telekinesis pushed it and stretched it in ways it wasn't supposed to go.

Santana's eyes went wide. "We have to get out of here then," she said in a rush. "If he makes the house cave in—"

"And how the fuck do you suggest I move him? He's in *shock*. Moving him could make everything worse."

"Well, we can't just stay *here*, Blaine! Not if he's going to tear the fucking house apart!"

"What are you saying?! That I should leave him in here to get crushed instead?!"

"*No!* Jesus!"

"Then what—"

I didn't get to finish. Several things happened then.

I was so focused on Santana that I didn't notice Kurt until it was way past too late.

Sometime in the middle of my back and forth with Santana, Kurt had knelt down next to Cooper. The slow moving hand in my peripherals was what caught my attention. On instinct, I looked—glanced, really—and

saw that Kurt, for whatever reason, was less than seconds away from placing his hands at either side of Cooper's face.

My eyes flared as the words I had been about to say to Santana died suddenly. In my mind, I shouted for Kurt to stop, but the warning got stuck somewhere along the way from my brain to my mouth. I watched in horrified silence, picturing the chaos that would erupt, knowing it would be bad. It was one of those slow moving moments when you think to yourself, *I can stop this*, but for some reason you're stuck and all you do is sit there and watch it happen, wondering why.

Kurt closed the distance. He latched on to Cooper like a vice and forced Cooper's head away from his knees—Just like that, like it was nothing.

For a split second everything stopped—Cooper's breathing, the creaking wood, my heart. Cooper stared at Kurt with wide, shocked eyes and Kurt stared back. The two of them seemed to make a connection on some deeper level that was beyond my comprehension.

Then, without warning, Cooper's eyes lost their focus.

The house groaned again as Cooper's body contorted under the mental torture he couldn't escape. Every piece of furniture in the room was lifted into the air. All of it hung in ominous suspension, floating with what seemed like no effort at all, but I could see the veins in Cooper's neck strain against his skin in a futile effort to keep control.

Behind me, I heard Santana's breath leave her in a woosh. "Oh my god."

Then the quiet moment passed, Cooper's effort shattered, and his lips fell open to make room for the scream that came rushing out. Everything went flying in all directions as a war broke out in midair.

Santana tackled Brittany to the floor and yelled over the deafening noise. "*Blaine!*"

The sound of her scream kick started my brain. My hand shot out, grabbing hold of Kurt's wrist to try to pry him off Cooper, whose spine was bowed back in a way that was painful to look at.

Kurt reacted to my touch and turned his eyes on me. They blazed. "Let me go," he ordered with struggling vocal chords. He looked pained and sweaty, like he had just pushed himself far beyond what his body was capable of. I could only wonder why.

Everything was a mess. Santana was dragging Brittany over to the enormous fireplace in an effort to hide away from the furniture that was shooting around the room like over-sized bullets. Brittany, who was in the throes of a fit, was screaming her earlier prediction at the top of her lungs like a nonsensical mantra, *"If the unicorn helps the wolf won't puff the house down if the unicorn helps the wolf won't puff the house down if the unicorn helps—!"*

I had to *do* something, but I felt so small. Too small to be of any help. Too small to understand. Too small to tell Kurt to let the fuck go of my brother. Too small to get everyone the hell out of there.

My fingers fell helplessly away.

Kurt turned back to Cooper with an expression on his face that was almost violent, his everything eyes dark and intense as he stared down at Cooper in a chilling way that made me want to force as much space between them as I could. Kurt's hands were like claws on either side of Cooper's head, his fingertips digging into his skin. Kurt's arms shook from the force of his hold. ***Look at me,*** he grit out, his voice like crumbling gravel.

Cooper buckled under the command and did as Kurt ordered even as his hands clamped themselves around Kurt's wrists and tightened. Neither moved, not even when the jagged side of a broken lamp swiped across Kurt's eyebrow, cutting into his skin and making him bleed.

"Don't fight it," Kurt hissed.

Cooper's eyes rolled back.

Their hold on each other grew more intense, knuckles white from the pressure.

Then Cooper's strength gave out and his body collapsed. All of the furniture that was flying through the air stopped and came crashing down. I curled in on myself to shield myself from the worst of it, gritting my teeth when a chair dropped on top of me on its way down. The room shook when the couch crash landed upside down on the other side of the room and the second one came down on top of it. Glass was sprayed everywhere along with little bits of splintered wood.

Once everything settled I looked up at the two people who meant so much to me. The bone crumbling grip Kurt had on Cooper's skull lost its intensity and turned into something soft—a gentle hold that was meant

to be soothing. The two of them breathed heavily together, chests rising and falling sharply as they stared at one another like they had a secret.

I sat there silently—watching them, feeling like I was intruding on something private, which made my insides feel wrong and twisted up tight.

Kurt broke away first, releasing Cooper suddenly as he let his body fall back to slump against the wall. He looked up at the battered ceiling and just breathed. Cooper remained boneless and sprawled out on the floor and did the same.

I still sat there trying to process everything, coming up with nothing. I felt like I should ask something—I just didn't know what.

After long moments of continued silence, Cooper's head rolled to the side. He looked up at me with wet eyes. "Blaine," he said and his voice cracked.

My lips fell open, but nothing came out.

"I can't hear them," he whispered. He squeezed his eyes shut, tears fell. He shook his head and his face crumbled with something that might have been relief. "I can't hear them."

"Who?" I forced out.

"The voices. The ones in my head. I can't hear them." More tears. "It's so quiet..." His voice was like quiet bliss.

And then I had to ask. I *had* to because there was just no way that what I thought Cooper was saying was what he actually meant. "What am I thinking?"

"I don't know." He sounded so fucking happy.

My eyes flicked to Kurt. The guilt in his eyes was like a knife in my heart.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The Proper Way to Study the Pieces of Your Broken World

Looking back from where I'm at now, I would say that my sanity buckled under the weight of everything that was happening. My mind was sluggish and slow moving despite the fact that I was jumping from one emotion to the next faster than I could blink. In a matter of moments, Kurt had taken apart my entire world, and I thought that was it, but the hits kept on coming...

We all sat defeated in Santana's newly silent living room. No one had moved. Kurt and I looked at each other as precious seconds passed us by. He used his eyes to beg me to understand, but I just couldn't.

When I looked into his eyes, the only thing I felt was lost. I realized that I had to rethink every single conversation we had ever had. I had to reinterpret every defining moment we shared where he hadn't bothered to tell me the biggest thing he was keeping from me—the biggest omission. The biggest *lie*.

I tore my eyes away from his. I had to look at somewhere else.

I avoided looking anywhere near Cooper—he was just a reminder of the cannon ball that was bludgeoning its way through my body in wild abandon—and turned to Santana instead. She was still in the fireplace, clutching onto Brittany like her life depended on it. The living room was in complete disarray. "Are you okay?" I asked.

"Peachy," she responded.

Having nothing to say to that, my eyes quickly found Kurt's again. He was still pleading, still guilty, still desperate. I didn't know what to do with him anymore. There were a million questions I needed answers to and every single one of them burned my insides black the longer they went unasked.

I didn't have time to ask questions, though. I didn't have time for betrayal. The world was still turning, still as shitty as ever. Cooper and Brittany were still in danger, and we needed to get the hell out of there before the men with guns came busting in to drag us all underground where we would stay and rot for the rest of our lives.

"We need to go."

"Where?" Santana asked.

"Away from here. I don't know where. Just not here."

And then, just because I still couldn't believe it, I looked directly at Cooper and mentally asked him whether he was able to move. I painstakingly pronounced every single sound in my mind, clearing out all other thoughts and distractions so that I could devote my full attention to the four monosyllabic words I needed an answer to: *Can you move, Coop?*

He didn't even turn to look at me. His eyes stayed closed, his breathing slow and relaxed as he experienced the silence.

I had to try again. *Cooper?*

Nothing.

Nothing but the strange desperation that slowly began to fill me up.

Please say something.

My heart sank at the silence ringing in my ears. He really couldn't hear me. *Why are you upset?* I asked myself. *This is what you've always wanted for him.*

No more voices, no more screaming, no more pain. He was fixed. He was *normal*.

Normal because Kurt had—what? Changed him? Turned his ability off? I didn't know what.

Santana's voice reached my ears in a kind of muffle; it was as if she was talking from inside a glass box.

"Blaine." She tried again. "*Blaine*."

I blinked over at her. "What?"

There's no time for this.

Her eyes bore into mine, reminding me that I needed to keep it together right now and that when Cooper and Brittany were safe I could collapse into bed and feel like absolute shit and forget the world, but not a second before.

I forced myself to stand up and look down at my brother. "Cooper? Coop, look at me."

His eyes moved sluggishly, like moving them was too much to ask. He looked fucking high.

"We need to go, Coop," I told him gently, like our roles were switched and he was the little brother who needed someone to hold his hand and show him the way. He certainly looked like it with the way he was blinking owlishly up at me. I felt guilty for thinking it until I remembered that I didn't have to—not anymore. I could think whatever I wanted about him.

Don't think about it don't think about it don't think about it...

"Can you move?"

"I—yeah. Yeah." He slowly sat up, his eyes sweeping from one side of the room to the other as he surveyed the damage he had done. When he was finished, his eyes finally settled on my face, and he looked me over with a confused and frustrated expression. "It's so weird. I don't know what you're thinking right now..." Worry mixed in with his frustration. "Are you mad at me?"

It was the one question I just couldn't deal with. My emotions were botched up and blown to pieces all over the place. I had no idea what I was with him.

"We need to go," I repeated.

He frowned and I realized that for the first time in our entire lives, I could keep a secret from him.

Stop. Thinking. About it.

"Okay," he said. I helped him get to his feet.

"Blaine, are you hearing this?" Santana got my attention.

She was focused entirely on Brittany, whose head was resting comfortably on Santana's shoulder as she muttered calmly to whoever would pay attention and played with the hem of Santana's shirt. "... and now the little spiders are really mad at the wolf for escaping. They'll come to string him up in a great big web and take his head away. I saw it happen. He can't think without a head. I know because I lost mine a long time ago and now no one understands me..."

Santana kissed Brittany's forehead in a way that was meant to be gentle and comforting, but she had her eyes trained hard on mine. There was urgency there.

"How much time do we have before the spiders find us, Britt?" Santana asked.

Brittany shrugged and continued to play with the hem of Santana's shirt, pulling and twisting the material. "There are too many different futures."

"What's the best one?"

"The unicorn knows how to hide. Maybe he can help us again if we ask nicely." She smiled up at Santana. "He did a really good job before, didn't he? The wolf gave him a hard time, but he still did it and he didn't give up. Unicorns are bosses like that." Her eyes went unfocused again. "Someone should tell him not to drink anything the cherubs give him, but I don't think he'll listen..." She shook her head sadly.

I took what I could understand from what she said and turned to Kurt. "I need to hide them from SIIPA. She says you know how. Is that true?"

Kurt looked up at me and I could tell that it was. I had no idea how he could possibly know how to do something like that, but so many impossible things had happened that day that I wasn't going to question it.

The *I'm sorry* was still there in his eyes, but I couldn't turn it into something that mattered to me. I had shared everything with him. Obviously he had shared next to nothing with me.

I turned away from him, conscious of Cooper's probing gaze as he studied the two of us. Without looking back at anyone, I started for the door. "Let's go. We're taking Kurt's car," I said without bothering to ask him if it was okay. I didn't care whether he was okay with it or not.

"Blaine," Cooper's said like all of a sudden he wanted to be the older brother again.

"Not now," I told him.

"Blaine," he said again, voice stronger this time.

"*WHAT?*" I snapped. "What, Cooper? What? What do you want?"

"You need to calm down."

I looked at him incredulously. "*I* need to calm down?"

He folded his arms across his chest. "Yeah. You need to calm down."

"Are you fucking serious, Cooper?!" I exploded. "*I* need to calm down?! Look around you!" I yelled, throwing out my arms at the destroyed living room.

He winced.

I instantly felt bad. But I couldn't take it back and he could no longer hear my every thought to know how sorry I was. The reality of it squished my guilt and made my anger flare. "If there are no more stupid fucking suggestions I would like to *go* before our fucking father gets here and buries us all alive."

That time no one stopped me when I stormed outside.

Kurt drove sitting ridged in his seat with both hands gripping the steering wheel hard. Nobody spoke. Cooper, Santana, and Brittany were all in the back, which left me in the passenger seat. I didn't pay any attention to where we were going and chose to focus instead on the slow pulsing throb that was plaguing the left side of my head. I counted each painful beat to pass the time and keep my mind occupied. The counting was making me feel wrestles but it was better than screaming at everyone like I was itching to.

Eventually, though, I couldn't ignore the nagging sense of déjà vu that kept prodding at me with every accidental glance I took out the window. The roads, and the trees that lined them on either side, were too familiar. However, it wasn't until we pulled into the impossible to see turn that lead to Kurt's driveway that I spoke up and broke the longstanding silence.

"What are we doing here?" I asked, sitting up straight in my seat for the first time since I got in the car.

"I don't know," Kurt said quietly. *You told me to take you to a place where they wouldn't be found. This is it.*

My annoyance sparked at his response, which did nothing to help me understand and only inspired more questions. What was it about his house that was different from anywhere else? What was it that would keep us from being found?

When we finally broke through the thick cover of trees, the first thing I saw, rather than the house itself, was Burt, who was running towards the car, shouting something that could only be Kurt's name. I realized that he still had that same desperate look on his face that he had three hours earlier—the one he had been wearing as he ran desperate and out of breath to catch up with his son as I backed out of the driveway and stole away his entire world from him. Kurt seemed to come to the same realization, and the Navigator came to a shoddy stop when Kurt threw it into park without bothering to fully apply the brakes.

He struggled to free himself from the seatbelt in his hurry to get out of it, and once he finally managed it, he all but threw himself from the car, his voice alarmed as he called out, "Dad! Stop! Your heart!"

But Burt wasn't listening and he ran until he nearly collided with his son. He grabbed Kurt with both hands, his fingers clenching impatiently and holding too tight. He alternated between shaking Kurt's whole body and hugging the life out of him as angry, loving words spilled past his lips.

I was so focused on the two of them that I didn't notice Everly until my door was yanked open. Before I had time to process what was happening, two insistent hands wrapped themselves around the collar of my hoodie and dragged me roughly from the car. Someone yelled—Santana, I think—as I was slammed down on the ground with enough force to knock the wind out of me.

Something cool and hard was pressed against the space between my eyes. A knee pressed heavily against my chest, keeping me down even though I hadn't planned on going anywhere.

I looked passed the barrel of a gun into Everly's cold, gray eyes.

"Stay where you are," she said in a clear, controlled voice, and for a confusing second I thought she was talking to me.

"Okay, okay, not moving," Cooper said in an overtly soothing tone, but I could hear the underlying fear in his voice that he was trying to hide. I didn't doubt that Everly could hear it too. "Just... please don't shoot him. *Please.*"

My whole body hummed as my head tried to catch up with what was going on, but nothing was making any sense and I was getting tired of trying to play catch up. The constant onslaught of random unforeseen circumstances was getting old fast. I just wanted the day to end. I wanted to be done.

So I shut down. I stopped trying to find answers to all of the whys floating around in my head and laid on the ground silently.

Sometime in the middle of my shutdown, Kurt must have caught sight of what was going on because I heard his voice, confused at first, then alarmed. "Blaine? Blaine! What are you—Dad—no! Stop. *Let go!*"

There were sounds of a struggle, and then Burt spoke again. "Hold your brother, Finn, and *keep* him there. I don't want him anywhere near that kid. He's dangerous."

I forced myself not to speculate on what Burt could mean by 'he's dangerous' or on what could have happened in the past couple hours to make him think that about me.

Don't think about it. Don't think about anything.

When he replied, Finn's voice was hesitant and unsure. "O-okay."

"What the fuck, V?!"

That was Logan. Her voice called off from a distance, but I heard her running footsteps coming rapidly closer. Seconds later she came into my line of sight, panting and out of breath, her wild hair windswept away from her face. "What the fuck are you *doing*? Put the gun away!"

Everly stayed exactly as she was.

"Burt!" Logan's voice lashed out like a whip. "*Do something!*"

Then was a pause. Then, "Don't let him move," Burt said tightly.

Everly didn't say anything, but she did press her gun harder against my forehead.

Logan's mouth fell open. "Are you serious right now, Burt? Did you both suddenly get stupid and forget what this kid means to Kurt? Or the fact that he's a minor? You can't just go around shoving guns in kids' faces!"

"Stay out of this, Logan," Burt said in a stern tone that booked no room for argument. "You have no idea what's going on."

"I know V has a fucking gun pointed at Curly's goddamn head!"

Burt ignored her and moved until he was standing over me and looking down at my face as if he wanted to try ripping it off. "Where did you take him?" he asked.

Even if I had planned on answering—which I didn't—I would have been interrupted anyway by the sound of Carole's furious yell.

"Burt!"

I watched Burt go pale.

"What the hell are you *doing*?" she said, pushing her way through the small crowd of people to gape down at me in disbelief. She took one look at the gun pressed against my forehead before turning her furious eyes on Everly, who was still staring me down.

"Everly. Put that gun away," Carole said in a deadly tone. *"Now."*

"Absolutely not," Everly said, not the least bit intimidated. "I made a promise to Elizabeth that I would protect Kurt. I'm going to keep that promise no matter what."

Somewhere in the back of my mind, it registered that Brittany was whimpering softly, her barely audible whispers drowned out by the sound of arguing voices to the point where I couldn't make sense of what she was saying. Not that I was paying much attention to her anyway. Something bad was going to happen, but I didn't need a broken psychic to tell me that.

Carole whipped around to look at Burt. "Make her put it away."

"Carole," Burt began in a careful tone, "you need to let us handle don't know who he is—"

"No," she said firmly, affectively cutting him off. "I don't care. He's just a kid." A slight pause, then in a softer, more pleading way, "Please. *Think* about this. This is going to cause problems for us—for *Kurt*."

"He *is* the problem," Everly said in a voice that made me feel like I was already dead, and *that* couldn't be ignored, no matter how determined I was to try. Disgust and unmitigated hatred swirled in her eyes and seeing it there made my stomach churn. I knew that look. I had seen that look. It made good people do really shitty, really terrible things. I realized that she was going to pull the trigger and put a bullet between my eyes and that would be it.

"He's Carl Anderson's bitch," she announced. Then she said, softer, quieter, and just for me, "I know what you've done."

With those words, everything became all too familiar. Everly became just another face in a sea of many—just another victim who wanted payment for the pain and suffering I caused. If she actually killed me, I realized that a lot of people would be very happy.

She continued, "And I won't let you tell your father about him. He's not going back there. Not again. Not *ever*."

I didn't have time to wonder what she was talking about.

It happened too fast for me to process the change. One second she was there, leaning over me with the scorching eyes of a killer, and the next she was hanging thirty feet above the ground by some unseen force and everyone was screaming as her legs kicked uselessly in the air.

She hung by her gun, and in my mind I could picture her grip failing and then the inevitable fall. Everyone was yelling for her to hold on, but I held my breath, waiting for it to happen; imagining the horrible crunching sound her bones would make when she landed.

It didn't happen exactly like I pictured. It was worse.

Out of nowhere, her body was jerked roughly to the left, which opened up a gateway of violent aerial maneuvers that had her getting tossed around like a ragdoll.

Logan screeched Everly's name and ran back and forth with arms stretched up towards the sky as if that would get the other woman down. It might have been funny to watch if it hadn't been for the sickening sound of her panicked and horrified screams. Just listening to the desperation in her voice as she screamed herself hoarse made my stomach twist with discomfort. They were ugly sounds that I wouldn't wish on anyone.

Everyone else was completely still, stunned stupid by the sight.

Amazingly, Everly managed to hold on for almost a minute before her grip finally gave way and she went flying. She landed hard enough to crack the back windshield on one of the many cars in the Hummel's driveway and I sucked in a breath, imagining the pain of the impact.

Logan jerked to a sudden stop and stared with wide eyes. Nobody moved. We all waited.

We heard a soft groan before Everly slowly rolled off the car and dropped to the ground. With tired, painful looking movements, she tried to push herself up but her right arm didn't seem to be working, and she dropped back down. She didn't move again after that.

At her sudden stillness, Logan took off like a rocket in her direction, but before she could get close, the ground gave a violent tremble, throwing her off her feet. She landed hard on her ass just as chunks of earth and rocks shot out of the ground and exploded like bombs. Dirt flew everywhere and everyone who was standing was thrown to the ground, where they curled in on themselves in an effort to protect their bodies from the flying debris. Logan, however, continued to push herself to her feet again and again as she struggled to get to Everly. Eventually she gave up trying to stand and crawled.

I watched in horrified awe at the untamed destruction. It was terrifying to watch, but I was captivated by it at the same time, and my eyes swept the area over and over, taking it all in.

I looked over my shoulder at Cooper who was sitting on the dirt with his knees pulled up to his chest and his hands in his hair. His body shook from the force of his screams, but it was nothing more than a murmur of noise in my ears. I felt completely calm—sluggish even as I studied the destructive man who was my brother. He could kill us all with a thought.

Then my eyes shifted and I looked at Kurt who was on his hands and knees in front of Cooper. He was talking; his lips were moving around words that I couldn't hear. I studied his lips hard and thought that maybe I was looking at him say, 'control it,' but I couldn't be sure.

It didn't occur to me to start panicking until Kurt's eyes found mine. His eyes screamed at me in a way that made my whole body feel cold and I scrambled over as fast as I could over the shaking ground. Kurt immediately moved away Cooper when I got close enough to take his place. I ran purely on instinct as I tried to calm Cooper down.

"It's okay, Coop. It's okay. I'm okay. You have to calm down, okay? Remember the stars? We can look at them whenever we want now. You never have to go back to that room again. I'm right here and we're together." I had no idea what I was doing. I just kept saying whatever came to my mind without overthinking what was right, or wrong, or stuck somewhere in between. "But you have to calm down. I love you. You're my brother, and I love you, but I need you to calm down."

I kept on talking, keeping my full attention on Cooper and nothing else. I have no idea how long it took, but eventually Coop was leaning heavily against me, breathing hard but slow through his mouth, and Kurt had his hand on my shoulder, letting me know in his silent way that the worst was over and everything was okay.

But nothing was okay and everything was a mess and I didn't feel sluggish or clam anymore. I felt like a rubber band that had been stretched so far that the only thing left to do was either break or snap.

I turned to look at Kurt. "I thought you fixed him," were the words I hurled at him, monosyllabic and piercing like tiny knives that wouldn't come out once they were in. I watched, completely unapologetic, as it took him a couple of seconds to process the sudden attack.

"I did," he lied. *There was nothing to fix. There is nothing wrong with him.*

"Of course there is." I told myself no one could be that stupid. "There's something wrong with all of us."

"Blaine," Cooper said in a breathless, pleading voice. "Stop."

I ignored him. I knew my timing was completely wrong, but I was done being patient. I was done waiting. Nothing mattered but the billions of questions that I just couldn't deal with anymore. I needed my answers. Everyone else, including Kurt, including Cooper, could fuck off.

"I thought he wouldn't have to go through all of this shit anymore." I released Cooper to stare Kurt down. I listened to the voice in my head that whispered everything was Kurt's fault. "I thought he was normal now. Wasn't that the point of whatever it was that you did to him?"

Kurt met my stare without hesitation. "Yes." *No.*

"If that wasn't the point, then what is?! Stop being so fucking vague! Just tell me what the fuck you are! I want to know *exactly* what you did to him!"

"I didn't do anything," Kurt insisted. *I took away his psychic ability.*

"But not his telekinesis?"

"Wrong." *Correct.*

"*Why? Why would you leave him like this if you could have taken it all away?! You could have fixed him!*" Nothing seemed to matter—not Kurt, not how I felt about him, not Cooper's insistence that I let Kurt off the hook, nor the fact that I kept contradicting myself in regards to how I felt about a normal Cooper. The only thing that *did* matter was how fucking good it felt to be angry. The rage was spicy and intoxicating and I embraced it gladly. It felt even better to have someone to direct it at—to have someone to blame. *"Why didn't you fix him?!"*

"I don't know why," he said and there was that look again—the one where he was using his eyes to plead with me to accept what was happening and move on. *I can't just go around taking people's abilities away. The only reason why I took his psychic ability away was because he couldn't function with it. If he could have learned how to control it, then I wouldn't have left it alone. His telekinesis is different. He can learn how to control it with practice. We need our abilities. Without them, SIIPA has all the power. They have everything and we have no chance of ever fighting back.*

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I felt sick. He sounded just like *them*—justifying the destruction and manipulation of people's lives for his own twisted agenda. At least, that was what I told myself.

"Are you fucking insane?! We have no chance of fighting back no matter what! You don't know what the fuck you're talking about, Kurt! You don't have one single clue what they're capable of!"

I was so angry that I completely disregarded the sudden hurt on his face and the pain that swam free in his eyes. And before I could take a second thought, it was gone, replaced with a rage that matched and fueled my own.

Looking at his twisted face, I thought, *this is it. This is what he meant.* This was the difference between loving the idea of someone and loving someone for who they actually were—flawed and imperfect, bad and good, terrible and wonderful—and Kurt was all of those things. And I loved him with everything that I had.

And I hated him almost as much.

It was the worst time to realize it, but that was how it happened. That was how it went, and I already told you that I would only tell you the truth. Love it or hate it. Deal with it or don't.

It wasn't a happy moment. It wasn't beautiful or loving at all, but that was when I knew for sure. And despite the way my world tilted just a little bit under the force of it all, the real world that I was forced to share with everyone else, kept turning, and the moment passed by.

"And you think you do?!" he yelled back in my face.

So I screamed in his. "YES!"

His response, if he had one to begin with, was cut off when I was wrenched up by the back of my sweatshirt and slammed up against Kurt's Navigator. Burt's fisted hands that were wrapped tightly around the neckline of my hoodie pulled upwards until I was reaching with my tiptoes in an effort to stay on the ground.

Kurt's hands were instantly on Burt's arm, pulling. "Dad! Stop it! Let him go!" He shot Cooper a nervous glance.

Burt shouldered Kurt off without taking either of his hands off me. Kurt stared up at his father in shock at the forceful, almost violent gesture, but Burt didn't seem to comprehend the hurt he stirred up.

"Damn it, Kurt! *Why* do you keep protecting this kid? Didn't you hear what your aunt said? He's on *their* side. He is *Carl Anderson's* son. He helps that son of a bitch stockpile innocent people under the dirt! And

now he knows about you! He knows where we live! How long do you think it will be before he tells his fa—"

Kurt interrupted him with words that left his lips in a rush, "I didn't know about Blaine." *I already knew about Blaine.*

Five quick words and Burt lost his grip on my sweatshirt. "What?"

"I didn't know," he repeated, and his eyes pleaded with his father to understand the lie and know what it meant.

Burt stood absolutely still. "You *knew*?" he asked, appalled—like the very idea of it was enough to make him violently sick.

Kurt's eyes flooded with something worse than tears. "No," he whispered. *Yes.*

Burt's expression hardened—not in an angry way, but in a defensive way that was meant to protect him from something that dark and ugly. "How long?"

Kurt's mouth opened and closed. He shook his head. "I... Dad..."

There was something hallow in Burt's eyes. It mixed powerfully with the disappointment that began to radiate off of him in waves.

"I don't understand." Burt shook his head like a lost man. His eyes went unfocused and haunted, and it was obvious from the look on his face that he had gotten himself tangled up in his own thoughts. "Eight months. I lost you for eight months. And then your mother..." He closed his eyes against whatever past horrors he was facing.

Kurt looked completely ruined by it. "I..." His voice broke.

Burt suddenly exploded—the change dizzying and without warning. "Do you have any idea what was going through my head when you left?!" Kurt winced. "And then when Everly found out what he was? Do you know what I was thinking? I thought I would never see you again, Kurt! I thought you were gone and this time I would never get you back! You're mother *died* to protect you! How could you compromise that?!"

"I'm..."

"Sorry. Yeah. You're sorry."

The silence that followed was deafening. It filled up fast with more and more questions that I didn't have answers to. We all stood there—me, Kurt, his father, Cooper—and said nothing.

So many lies, and half truths, and things that had never been said at all. I didn't know where I stood anymore. Maybe that was what hurt most of all.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The Proper Way to Lay It Out There

So this is it. This is where I've been leading you. Everything will be pretty much out in the open after you read this. I'll be honest, though, writing this one sucked. There's really nothing I could possibly say to accurately describe the things I felt. I did my best I guess...

Eventually Carole came to put a hand on Burt's shoulder. "We need to go inside. I relocated Everly's shoulder, but she's still unconscious and I need you to help Finn take her inside."

Burt didn't move. He didn't speak either.

"Burt," Carole said softly. "Please. Logan needs stitches and I can't help her until everyone is inside."

Burt turned and walked off without a word to where Finn was gathering Everly in his arms with Logan's help. I noticed for the first time that half of her face was covered in blood that was seeping out of a deep cut on her forehead.

Once Burt was gone, Carole turned to Kurt and took him into her arms. He was even more unresponsive than his father had been, but Carole obviously didn't mind. She kissed his cheek and ran her fingers through his hair in that way that only a mother can. "He'll be okay, sweetheart," she soothed. Kurt leaned heavily against her with his arms dangling at his sides.

"Come on, honey. Let's go inside and you can sit down." She tried to urge him towards the house, but he wouldn't go.

I didn't do anything to help.

Cooper was the one to step forward. He was the one to put a hand on Carole's wrist and tell her, "It's okay. I got him." Cooper was the one who picked Kurt up like a little boy and Cooper was the one who Kurt clung to with tight arms and legs. It was Cooper's neck that Kurt buried his face in, and Cooper was the one to run a comforting hand up and down Kurt's back.

I did nothing.

As the three of them started to walk away from me, Santana slid her hand in mine and slotted our fingers together. She pulled me forward, forced me to follow. "Don't shut down."

Carole led everyone into the living room, where we found Everly already stretched out over the longest couch. It was obvious from the way that she was arranged too perfectly that she was unconscious.

Carole didn't pay her any mind, though. Instead she forced Logan into the loveseat and sent Finn to get supplies. He returned with a metal first-aid kit (the contents of which were a lot more impressive than your typical first-aid kit given that Carole was an NP) and a towel.

No one spoke as Carole carefully disinfected and then cleaned Logan's cut. Finn looked away when Carole started to sew the stitches in. Logan kept her eyes on Everly the entire time. About five stitches in, Carole looked at her watch and then asked someone to hold the needle for her while she checked Everly's breathing and pulse. Santana did the holding. Brittany stood by her side and hummed an upbeat song that was completely out of place in the stifling air.

"Why isn't she waking up?" Logan asked in a small voice.

Carole released Everly's wrist and went back to Logan to reclaim the needle from Santana. "She hasn't been out for very long, so I'm not worried," Carole said gently. "Her vitals haven't shown any difference from the last time I checked—and they were okay to begin with—so she's stable for now. If anything changes, we'll call an ambulance right away."

"She hit so hard..."

Carole said nothing to that and sewed the last of the stitches in silence. When she was done, she began reaching for Logan's arm. "Let me see the cut on your arm again, please." Logan didn't respond to Carole's request, but Carole was already turning the arm with gentle hands. "This isn't as bad as I thought it was," she muttered to herself. "I'll just bandage it." She began cleaning the cut.

Again there was silence. Santana was still holding my hand. I refused to look at Kurt, who was still seeking his comfort from Cooper as if they had known each other all their lives.

After a few more quiet minutes, Burt spoke up for the first time from his place in the doorway of the room's only exit. "What do we do if she's not awake by tomorrow?"

"If she's still unconscious in another five hours then we'll have to take her to the hospital," Carole answered without stopping what she was doing.

"SIIPA will send someone to investigate."

Carole sighed. "What else would you have me do, Burt? If she needs medical care that I can't give her then we have to take her in."

"I know that," Burt said tightly. "But we can't afford for any of them to get too close and that will be exactly what happens when they start asking questions. And speaking of questions, I want to know what the hell is going on."

"Burt," Carole started.

"No," Burt said, holding out a hand. "Carole—can you just—okay? I need answers and somebody had better start talking."

I decided to bypass complacent and crash right into confrontational. "You can't tell SIIPA anything about what happened here."

Burt pressed his lips into a thin line. "You don't get a say in what this family does or doesn't do. What you get to do is sit there and answer any questions I've got for you."

I met his hard stare, reminding myself that he was the one who would decide whether or not Cooper and Brittany could stay. "Fine."

Burt didn't waste any time. "Have you told your father anything about my son?"

"No," I said tightly, offended that he would even ask, though of course he didn't know me well enough *not* to ask.

"Why?"

Ha was all authority and protection wrapped up in a burly package of don't fuck with me. Worse, he was staring at me with eyes that made me feel like a little fucking kid. Which was probably why I started acting like one. "What does it matter why? I just didn't."

"Not good enough. It's your word and nothing else. And just in case it's not clear, you're not leaving this house unless you do a damn good job of convincing me that you kept your mouth shut. And that you'll continue to keep it shut."

Carole huffed. "Burt."

Burt squared his jaw and folded his arms across his chest, not taking it back.

I looked into the eyes of the man who thought he knew everything about me and glared. "The only thing I would ever willingly say to my father is 'go fuck yourself,'" I said through my teeth.

His eyebrows shot up, but his surprise quickly turned calculative and suspicious. "Pretty strong words for the man who raised you."

My stomach clenched. My relationship with my father wasn't, and never would be (I told myself) any of Burt's business. I shrugged and said nothing.

He continued to press. "If you hate him so much, why do work with him?"

"I work *for* him," I snapped. There was a difference.

"Fine. Why do you work *for* him, then?"

"He did it for me," Cooper spoke up. "In exchange for visitation rights."

Burt looked at Cooper and then slowly slid his gaze to Kurt. Silently, Burt studied the way Kurt was still pressed against Cooper's side and staring at the floor with vacuous eyes. Burt didn't say anything even though it was pretty obvious that he wanted to.

After a quick blink to dispel the regret in his eyes, Burt turned his attention back to Cooper. "And who are you?"

"I'm Cooper. Blaine's brother."

Burt's face remained carefully impassive. "Why did he need visitation rights to see you?"

Cooper glanced at me and then looked back at Burt. "I was in a D5 facility."

Burt's mouth fell open.

Cooper kept talking. "The one in Dayton. I've been there—I mean, I *was* there—for over nine years."

Burt shook his head, clearly having trouble. "You got *released*?"

"...Not exactly."

"What hell does *that* mean?"

"I escaped."

Burt scoffed. "That's impossible."

"That's what I thought."

"*How?*"

"I..." Cooper hesitated. "I don't know. She was just..." he looked over at a still humming Brittany. "She was just there and then... I don't know. We were somewhere else and my head was splitting open and then Kurt was there and he..."

"Kurt what?" Burt urged.

"He took the voices away, he..." Cooper trailed off and back peddled. "Sorry. I'm... I can't focus very well. One of my D5 classifications was for psychic ability. Mind hearing."

Burt didn't comment on Kurt's involvement, but the protruding vein in his neck made it pretty obvious that he didn't take it as good news. "Clearly that classification no longer applies or you would be curled up in a corner right now."

Cooper didn't deny it. I wanted to ring Burt Hummel's neck.

"Jesus," Burt whispered. He ran a hand over his face. "You said *one* of your classifications."

"The other is for telekinesis."

"Which you clearly still have." Burt looked pointedly at Everly.

"I'm sorry," Cooper whispered. "I... she had a gun pointed at Blaine's head."

"Which wouldn't have happened if he hadn't taken my son."

My rage bubbled up at that and was silenced just as fast when Santana dug her nails into the back of my hand. The desire to argue fell flat with the desperate and determined look in her eyes that reminded me that this wasn't just for Cooper. This is for Brittany too, her eyes told me, so don't say anything to fuck it up.

"I think I'm understanding this better now," Burt thought out loud. "You need a place to hide. Kurt brought you here because he knows that this is the only place that you *can* hide, and things just got real simple for everyone." His eyes were back on me. "You keep my son's secret and I'll keep yours."

"You're blackmailing teenagers now, Burt?" Logan asked from where she was still sitting with Carole kneeling in front of her. Her voice was wrong, though—dead, unfocused.

"Do you really think now is the time?" Burt snapped at her, and for a second he wasn't a tough father with all the answers, but a desperate man who had no idea what the fuck he was doing.

Logan was hardly paying him any mind, though. Her tired eyes were on Everly and I wondered why she had commented at all.

Before anyone could say anything else, though, Kurt stood up out of nowhere and walked out of the living room. No one stopped him, not one looked at him directly, though we all watched him from the corner of our eyes.

Burt stayed quiet after that. Logan was finally given the okay from Carole to move, and she went to sit on the floor next to the couch where Everly was. It made me think back to what felt like a million years ago when Kurt had curled into a similar position and stayed with me all night long just because.

Eventually everyone just sort of went places, and soon we all fell asleep one by one propped up against whatever we could find. Nothing was resolved and everything was all confused and still up in the air. The last thing I thought about before I gave up on trying to keep my eyes open was how hallow I felt inside when I thought about Kurt.

Waking up after a night like that is a pretty shitty process. Basically, you feel like sleeping was a colossal waste of time—You're still tired as fuck, the day doesn't seem any newer than it had before you fell asleep, and confusion that chews at your body like a burning itch you can't scratch is a complete bitch. Uncomfortable doesn't even begin to describe a feeling like that, and saying it sucks is a massive understatement, but 'it sucks' is about all I've got.

But anyway, that was how I woke up: confused with a migraine.

I looked around. Cooper, Brittany, and Bitches were all still propped up against the back of the couch, sleeping. Carole wasn't in the room, and neither was Everly or Logan. Burt was sleeping with a deep frown on his face where he sat propped up in a chair that did its best to keep us all trapped. Finn was sprawled out snoring on the floor. Small beams of light broke through the gaps between the curtains, sunny and too happy for the reality I had woken up to.

I was on my feet before I had time to think about it. I squeezed passed Burt's attempt at creating a blockade with his massive chair and made my way to the stairs. I was in Kurt's room in less than a minute, not bothering to knock.

I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't know what I was going to say, or what I was going to find. I didn't know whether I wanted him to be awake or sleeping. I didn't know too much of anything, but I did know that once his sad blue eyes were on mine that he was more than a little broken. The despair was there in his eyes for me to see and he didn't look away to spare me from having to see it.

We were still for a while—him sitting with his back against the headboard and me standing just a few steps beyond the doorway. The minutes dragged by us until that first minute was too far away to remember and I felt like I had been staring into Kurt's empty eyes for days.

Then the words came from nowhere and fell out.

"I don't know what to say to you," I told him.

He looked at me and said nothing.

More words fell. "I shared everything with you."

Still nothing.

"You were supposed to be the one honest thing in my life."

He was supposed to be my rock, but looking at him then, he reminded me of a browning sponge that had seen better days. And I know I was being selfish by going in there and throwing out accusations when he was so obviously dying inside, but I felt like I was dying too, and his secrets scared me. There was something terrible lurking inside the walls of their house, and inside each and every one of them—I could feel it. I could see it written all over Kurt's face.

"And you're not," I continued. "You're just like every other dishonest person I've ever met." He didn't so much as flinch at the words.

Then I took a chance. "But I still just want to hold you and be close to you until I can fall asleep again."

He wanted it too. I could tell by that small spark of something that lit up his eyes—barely discernible, but definitely still there.

So that was what we did. I walked over to his bed and we held each other even though it didn't make anything any better. For the second time, I fell asleep.

When I woke up Kurt was gone and I didn't know how to feel about it. I wanted him back, but at the same time, I was glad he wasn't there. His absence allowed me to lay there minute after minute and breathe him in as deeply as my lungs would allow without having his body and his sad eyes there to distract me from healing myself just a little bit with his phantom presence.

I forgot all about the unresolved shit that was piled up downstairs, forgot about Cooper and Brittany and Santana. I didn't think about where Kurt was, or if he was still as broken as he had been before, or if Burt was still guarding all the exits, or whether Everly was taken to the hospital or not. All I thought about was that Not-There-Kurt smelled really good and that all of the problems and lies that I didn't want to face were Future-Blaine's problems.

Carole interrupted my vegetable state with a soft knock at the door that was obviously meant to announce her arrival rather than ask for permission to enter.

She gave me a tired smile as she stepped inside and then shut the door behind her. "Can I talk to you for a minute," she asked as she sat down in the desk chair by the bed. She continued to talk without waiting for an answer. "I want to talk about something that's none of my business and probably not my place to discuss with you. But Kurt has his difficulties communicating and Burt is... well, Burt won't do it. We'll just leave it at that.

"I don't know too much about Elizabeth—Kurt's mom, I mean. I know a few really simple things like she was a great mom and she loved Kurt more than anything else and that Kurt returned those feelings, and still does. I also know more complicated things like she had cancer twice and that she had the ability to control people's minds." Carole paused, visibly thinking as she mulled over what she wanted to say. "When she had cancer the first time, she and Burt discovered that using her ability made her sicker. So she stopped using it, I guess, though Burt never told me what exactly she used it for. Anyway, the point is that when she stopped using it completely, she got better, so she continued to avoid using it. Long story short, she beat the cancer—it was brain cancer, by the way—and she and Burt continued on with their lives. Then she got pregnant with Kurt.

"Now, I don't have any experience with this firsthand, so I can't pretend to really understand what must have been going through her mind, but I guess getting pregnant when you have an ability is something of a gamble. Your child could be completely normal, could have an ability that was no big deal, or could have an ability that resulted in SIIPA taking your baby away minutes after you held him in your arms. Elizabeth knew this, of course. Burt did not.

"He knew the basics, such as how the D-Classifications worked, but not how they were determined or when. Why would he? He didn't have an ability, and Elizabeth was the only person he knew who did. So when an agent came in after the delivery to give Kurt his classification, Burt had no idea what was going on—especially when the agent classified Kurt as a D5 with a PC. Like I said, Burt knew all about the D-classifications, but for whatever reason, Elizabeth never told him what a PC was. She might not have believed in it herself, it might have just never come up. Either way, I'm assuming you know what it means?"

I had to swallow a couple times before I answered her question. "Someone who carries the preternatural genes that could potentially result in finding a cure."

I'll interject here. I haven't mentioned PCs before and maybe I should have. Basically, in the preternatural community, PCs are kind of a taboo subject surrounded by conspiracy theories, denial, and confusion—the reason for this being that most people don't want to entertain the possibility that there are people stockpiled in some top secret facility as lab rats. That's exactly what PCs are, though—lab rats trapped in underground testing facilities who no longer exist in the outside world. Once they're taken by SIIPA, scientists damn near fry their brains in attempt to find 'the cure.'

At the time my conversation with Carole was happening, I knew about PCs. I knew what they were and, unlike most people, I knew that it was a real classification and not just something adults whisper about behind cupped hands or the bullshit stories kids tell sleepovers to see if someone will get scared enough to wet the bed.

I knew that people were taken to a testing facility and that they would spend the rest of their lives there. That was *all* I knew. My father wasn't exactly a chatty person and he sure as shit didn't talk about the top secret inner workings of SIIPA with me, so I had no way of knowing for sure that the PC facilities were as bad as the rumors said they were. But I'd be lying if I said that I didn't have my suspicions.

I knew my father was capable of some really terrible shit. I had always known it. But I guess knowing someone is evil doesn't mean that you accept that they are. I didn't *want* to think about how bad things could be. My father's involvement with PC testing was just something I never allowed myself to think too much about—but Carole's face back then said it all, and I knew then that the blinders I had on were about to get ripped off my eyes.

Back to the story now...

Carole nodded at my answer. "Right. Kurt has two classifications. Burt told me that Kurt's inability to tell the truth is called Preternatural Conditioning, which I guess is a D1 classification. His D5 classification is the ability to manipulate abilities. He can take them away completely, make them stronger, or weaken them. Burt thinks that maybe your father was looking for a way to give an ability to someone who is otherwise normal. We don't know whether Kurt can actually do that, but there is a chance that he can. Basically, Kurt is a once in a lifetime find. So, of course the agent insisted on taking Kurt with him. Not surprising, Elizabeth used her ability to convince him that Kurt had been born completely 'normal' and didn't have any sort of preternatural ability whatsoever. The agent left and Burt and Elizabeth took their baby home. Later that night Elizabeth explained what happened. Burt was angry that she lied, but he couldn't be angry at her for protecting Kurt—he was their little boy. So, once again, they continued on with their lives.

"Then the Re-Classification Act was passed. This happened in 2002, which means that you would have been about seven or eight, so I'm not sure if you were too young to remember it."

I did. Pretty clearly, actually. My father had been very excited about it. He had been coming home every night in a great mood, which I used to my advantage to get him to tell me small details of how Cooper was doing. At the time, Cooper had been in the D5 facility for about six months, and I had been desperate to hear *anything* about him, even if it was just a gruff, "He's fine. But don't worry about him right now, Blaine, you need to pay attention. If this thing gets passed, it will change the entire way that we operate."

And it did. The Re-Classification Act gave SIIPA the right to test minors while they were in school without their parents' knowledge or permission. Basically, an agent was sent to every school in the country, and under the guise of routine eye exams and hearing tests, they would check each student to determine whether they had been misclassified or not.

When the test was complete, the students were sent back to class and permitted to return home regardless of the results, not knowing that SIIPA might show up at their house in the middle of the night to cart them off.

"I remember," I told her, and Carole nodded and continued with her story, though now I could see where it was going.

"Kurt was re-classified without Elizabeth there to protect him and that night your father showed up with an armed team of agents."

I knew it was coming, but my insides still reacted harshly and caved. My father was obsessed with the cure—of course he went that night. And I remembered what happened when he got home. "January 22, 2002. It was a Tuesday."

Carole frowned. "What—?"

But I was on autopilot. "He came home so happy that night. He said that he finally found it—a way to control our abilities. He said that a little boy would help him do it."

I could remember the manic expression on his face as he held tight to my shoulders and shook me.

"Don't you understand what this means for us, Blaine? What it means for me? I'll be able to control abilities. I'll be able to do anything I want. I'll finally get to—"

"Will I get Cooper back?"

He frowned and blinked some clarity back into his eyes. "What?"

"If the little boy helps you control the abilities," I told him slowly, giving him time to focus on what I was saying instead of the deranged excitement firing off in his addled brain. "Can I have Cooper back then?"

It took him a few seconds. "Oh. Yeah. Sure. Go to your room, alright? I'm busy right now."

The memory ghosted its way along the line that separated my conscious and unconscious mind. I relived the past in horror as I mumbled to Carole in the present. "I circled the day on my calendar."

My hand wobbled a little as I circled the day with the biggest red marker I owned. Then I counted. One two three four... all the way up to seven. That was one whole week. Surely the little boy would help by then. Surely Cooper would be home by then. But I didn't want to jump the gun. I didn't want to be disappointed just in case the little boy was an asshole or something. So I kept counting. Eight nine ten eleven... until I got to Tuesday, February 5th. Then I circled that one too. Cooper would be home by then.

Carole's voice broke into my thoughts. "...Blaine? Honey, I don't know what you're talking about."

"Nothing," I said, blinking. "Keep going. What happened after my father got there?"

After she spent a few seconds looking at me with concern in her eyes, she began again. "Your father came prepared to deal with Elizabeth. She was shot when she answered the door and Kurt was taken."

"For eight months." The words left me in a drawn out and sluggish way as I remembered Burt's words.

Carole nodded. "Kurt doesn't talk about it. Ever. Burt says that he's never asked because he doesn't want to know. He told me that Kurt was barely alive when they finally got him back."

"How?" Once again, it was one of those 'no one ever gets out' deals. There are a lot of those in my world.

"Elizabeth. She didn't die when she was shot; it put her in a coma instead. Burt couldn't stand losing them both, I guess so her held on to the hope that she would wake up the whole time. She did eventually, and the first thing she did was sneak out of the hospital. Given her ability, it was probably very easy for her to make her demands to the first nurse she saw. She caused uproar, of course. I wasn't an NP at the time, so I was in a different ward, but it got around fast that one of the coma patients was suddenly missing. No one knew how she did it, either. You can't just wake up from an eight month long coma and walk out like nothing. But I'm losing focus. Once she got out of the hospital she made her way inside one of the PC facilities. She used her ability to do it. First on whoever got in her way once she got inside and then on your father once she finally had Kurt. The stress caused a rapid acceleration of her cancer and she had a stroke not long after she showed up at Burt's front door with a half-dead Kurt."

"But... my father always said that the little boy..." I trailed off.

It's over. He's dead.

"She altered his memory," Carole told me, catching on. "I don't think he remembers who Kurt is at all. Burt said that she planted the memory of a fake boy in your father's mind and that is who he remembers now when he thinks of the little boy with the PC classification. He also thinks that the fake boy died after all the harsh testing they put him through."

Carole paused. "I know this is probably very difficult for you to hear. I don't know how much you knew before I told you all this, but... I told you so that you can understand. Burt isn't a bad person, and I'm not making excuses for how he's been handling all of this, but he's been through a lot. So has Kurt. I'm sure he wanted to tell you, honey. He just didn't know how."

I was barely listening by that point.

It was almost too much to take in. Carole probably thought that she was helping but she only made everything worse. I hadn't thought that I could feel more wrecked than I already did, but her story ripped me open all over again.

She offered me a sad smile and reached out to gently pat my hand. "I'll leave you alone for a little while. Your brother and your friends are welcome to stay here as long as they like, so don't worry about that. We're all going to do our best to make things work out." She patted my hand once more and then she was gone.

Left alone, my mind swam with ugly thoughts. If Elizabeth had never woken up, would my father have finally found a cure? Would Cooper be completely normal now? Would I? Would I have gotten him back years ago? What would my life be like now?

Would I still have Kurt? Or would the tests killed him like they killed his fake alternate ego? Would he be dead now, cold and rotting somewhere unimportant under the mud and dirt?

My stomach churned.

I need him.

Go find him.

I went.

He was in his backyard staring at nothing in particular and sitting boneless in a wicker chair. I knelt down in front of him. "Kurt..."

He looked at me and that was all it took. I didn't hesitate to crowd into his space by crawling into his lap and straddling his thighs and holding onto him tighter than I should have. "I'm sorry," I told him. "I'm sorry, Kurt. I'm sorry. I'm sorry." I kept going until I had said the words so many times that they came out like gibberish.

Then we were quiet until Kurt broke the silence.

"Take me somewhere else."

"Okay."

Somewhere else wasn't far. Just fifteen minutes away from his house, really, was a great somewhere else. There were trees and tall grass that was unkempt and overgrown, and after I drove his car right into the middle of the yellow and brown mess that was the frost bitten overgrowth, we got out of the Navigator and climbed on top of the roof to fulfill Kurt's request to look at the sky.

The sky was gray and dull, but it wasn't too bad to look at with Kurt's left arm pressed up against my right.

No one had stopped us when we left his house that time, but that might have only been because I told Carole that we were leaving for a little while—that Kurt needed out and so did I.

It took him a while, but eventually his fingers curled around mine.

"I really do love you, Kurt." Again, it was probably the wrong time, but I had to say it. "You don't have to believe me."

"I don't." *I do.*

"Tell me you love me back," I begged.

"I don't." *I do.*

In light of Carole's story, I was only just beginning to understand how much.

"Even though my family ruined yours and my father tortured you for months? Even though your mother is dead because of him?"

"No." I heard the tears in his voice. *Yes.*

"I'm sorry."

He rolled into me, and instead of curling our fingers together, we curled around each other and he sobbed on me. I held him, feeling like the worst sack of shit in the world.

At that time, there was nothing else to say.

"We have to go back."

"Ask me if I want to."

"Do you want to go back?"

"Yes." *No.*

"We can't stay here forever."

"We can if we want to." *I wish we could.*

"Kurt."

"Blaine..."

"Don't make me. Please. I just—I can't. Not right now."

I kissed his forehead. "I wouldn't make you."

Silence for a little while. Then,

"Do you think he hates me?"

I winced. I wasn't good for advice about that kind of stuff. "Do *you*?"

"No." *I don't know. I think he hates that I let myself be close to you. He hates that I trust you so much.*

"I'm glad you do." I didn't know what else to say. I had never seen him so wrecked. I didn't know how to fix it—for him or for myself.

"He didn't say anything bad." *He said that I compromised what my mom did for me. That's like saying I don't care that she died. That I don't care that she's gone.*

He started crying again and I could only pull him close and wait it out. I ran my fingers through his hair and waited for it to be over. I told myself that, soon, it would. But time passed and he was still crying and all I could think was that I wasn't made for comforting.

"What was I supposed to do?" He asked with a thick voice that was congested with upset and tears. "How was I supposed to stay away from you? Like it would have been so easy. It would have." *It would have been impossible. It is impossible. I feel sick every time you're too far away. He doesn't understand what that's like. He doesn't know how hard it was to see you every day and know who you were and what that meant. He doesn't know what it's like to need to be close to someone that you're supposed to avoid. But I can't avoid you and I can't stay away from you. The room feels like it's shrinking when I don't have your hand to hold.*

His truth hurt, of course it did. But it made me think of something. Something that Cooper said the first time we ever talked about Kurt. "...What would you do if you *could* stay away? Would you want that?"

He seemed to sense the weight behind the words—that it was a question that held the promise of possibility. He went stiff next to me and his voice was full of caution when he asked, "What are you talking about?"

I wanted to make it better. I needed to make it better because I didn't want to hurt him anymore. And my thoughts were all over the place—what I wanted for myself was selfish, but what I wanted for him was a totally different story. I wanted everything for him, even if it meant that I got nothing. And realizing that made it obvious that doing the selfless thing was the right thing to do—or some misguided shit like that.

"Cooper has a theory. He thinks our need to be close to each other has something to do with our abilities. Like how opposite attract." I took a breath. "So... If you took my ability away then maybe you could let me go. But... would you do that?"

He jerked away from me and leaned up to stare at me with panicked eyes. "Yes." *No! I need this. I need us, I need you. I don't want to change what I feel. That wasn't what I meant. And it's not just your ability. It's you. You're supposed to be for me and I'm supposed to be for you. I believe that. You can't just make me take that away!*

I was relieved to hear that, but it made me crumble inside. "I don't know what to do. I don't know how to make it better."

"You can." *You can't. So just be with me.*

"Okay."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The Proper Way to Change

In one of her poems, Elizabeth wrote about writing and how it can help you feel free when you're feeling trapped. I can't tell you exactly what she said word for word—I don't have the book anymore and I never took the time to memorize anything—but I'm starting to think that maybe this *is* helping. Writing this all down, I mean. I feel different now than I felt when I first started. I feel less angry—less like I'm going to snap at any moment and destroy everything and everyone around me until I finally stop screaming. I still feel empty, though. I don't know how to make that go away. Every time I write about being close to Kurt my chest aches and I feel like maybe I should cry. I don't, though. I can't.

I don't want to talk about the present anymore. The past hurts a little bit less.

I'll get back to that...

As the hours passed, it got colder. Eventually we got down from the top of the Navigator and moved to the back seat. Kurt laid himself on his back while I cranked up the heat so we could get warm. When the temperature was comfortable, I sat down in the space between the front seats and the back, but Kurt reached over to grab a fistful of my sweatshirt and tugged until I was practically on top of him.

"I'm crushing you," I pointed out, feeling stupidly embarrassed.

"Hurts," he mumbled. *Feels good.*

I pressed my cheek against his chest and said nothing. There really wasn't anything to say until a few minutes later, when a question formed in my mind that wouldn't let go. "Does it hurt when you take an ability away?"

Kurt stared up at the roof of the car and ran his fingers slowly down my back. When he got to the bottom of my sweatshirt, he pushed his hand underneath the material and I felt his warm skin against mine. He dragged his hand up and then down, making my eyes feel heavy. "I don't know." *It doesn't hurt physically. It just feels wrong and uncomfortable—like I'm doing something I shouldn't be doing.*

"How many times have you done it?"

His hand stilled on my back. "Only a few times." *A lot.*

I hesitated to ask my next question, but asked anyway in the end. "Because they made you?"

His whole body sagged underneath me. "No." *Yeah.* "Carole told you everything, huh?"

I leaned up to look at him. He refused to look back. "Well, I—yeah. I thought you knew. I figured when I mentioned my father before that you knew she told me. You know, about your past."

"I didn't." *I did.*

I frowned. "So then why do you look so..." I tried to think of the right word. Defeated fit, but I didn't want to say it. I didn't need to, though. He seemed to already know it.

"I don't know." *I knew she was going to tell you, but I didn't really think about how I would feel about it until now. I guess I was hoping that maybe she would tell you and we would just never talk about it or something.*

"You don't have to tell me anything you don't want to, but I won't lie and tell you that I'm not curious," I admitted. Then I panicked. "I mean—shit. I don't want you to feel obligated to tell me. I just—I would like to know, if you would like me to know. I guess. I don't know." I groaned. "I don't know what I'm saying. I don't know what *to* say."

He finally looked at me with sad searching eyes. "Why do you have to say anything at all?"

I sighed. "I don't know. I just do. I mean, none of that matters to me. Whatever fucked up shit they did to you or made you do, I don't care about any of that. You're still you. To me, anyway. That will never change no matter what."

I pushed myself closer to him, needing him to understand. "You've done everything for me. I've never felt anything like this before and everything sucked before I met you. I told you before, you're like the other part of me. Why else do you think we have to be so close to each other all the time? Why else do you think it didn't hurt me at all when I took your omission? Why else do you think I met you? You're the only one who could have fixed Cooper. You're the reason why he's safe from my father right now. All of that has to mean more than whatever fucked up shit went on in our lives before we met."

He kissed me when I was finished. It was nothing too heated or anything like that; it was sweet, I guess is the word. It was his hand on my cheek and my bottom lip slotted between both of his for a quick second of soft connection before the sensual retreat and a quiet smacking sound.

He dropped his head back down on the seat and looked straight up. "I have to tell you something." *I want to tell you something.*

My eyebrows rose at the sudden turn in the conversation. I got the feeling that whatever he wanted to say had nothing to do with his time as one of my father's prisoners. "O...kay."

He made that face that he would make when he couldn't get his words out. "Help me out a little."

"What do you want to tell me?"

"Nothing." *I used my ability on you.*

My mouth fell open and one word tumbled out of it breathlessly: "What?" I hadn't been expecting that at all. "When?"

"I don't remember." *It was the night when you were drunk. The night you kissed me for the first time.*

I stared at him blankly.

"I did it on purpose," he went on. His eyes begged me to just listen long enough for him to explain. *I didn't mean to do it.*

It took me a second to really comprehend what he was saying. Everything about that night seemed hazy and so far back in the past that it was unimportant. Then again, everything that had happened before Cooper and Brittany escaped seemed hazy and unimportant.

Still, I struggled to concentrate, to think back and remember that first kiss and then the next day when I had opened up to Kurt for the first time—vulnerable and scared by the window sill—terrified that he would hate me for invading his private mind without his permission.

"What do you mean you didn't mean to do it?" I found myself asking him in a rush, as if getting the words out as fast as I could somehow mattered in the grand scheme of things. "How did you not mean to do it?"

"I don't know." *I didn't even know you had that ability. I only sense one ability from you, and that's your lie detection—being able to take an omission is just a minor facet of that, I think.*

I shook my head, trying to understand. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"Nothing." *I was feeling really vulnerable that night. It was the first time we had separated since we met and I felt lost and alone and I just wanted to be near you again. I was scared of the fact that I couldn't handle being away from you. And then when I finally gave in and I left my house to go back to Dalton, I had to face a two hour drive with nothing for me to do but think about how I felt about you... and then when I finally got there you were drunk and you were asking a lot of questions that I didn't want to answer, and I sort of panicked I guess. So I tried to tone down your ability a little—just enough to protect myself. I didn't even really mean to do it. I sort of did it before I realized what I was doing. Not that that's an excuse... but what I'm getting at is, when I tried to tone down your lie detection, I'm pretty sure that I somehow altered your ability to hear omitted lies, which is why it didn't hurt when you took mine.*

He trailed off after that, his thoughts getting confused and flustered to the point where they were mostly just noise in my head. I needed some space, though. I pushed myself off of him.

I was trying not to get pissed, but all I could think of was how much shit he gave me for that whole incident. He had looked so betrayed when I told him that I had willingly poked around in his brain for a truth he had no intention of giving me. At the time, I understood why he got so angry with me, and I hated myself for ruining his trust.

But all of that was bullshit, wasn't it? I asked myself. He had ruined my trust first.

I stared at him in disbelief. "You stopped speaking to me for weeks because of that and now you're telling me that you did the same thing?"

He didn't look proud of it. "No." *Yes.*

I felt blindsided. "Two fucking weeks, Kurt. Do you know how fucked up I was over that? And what you did to me was worse! *I came clean!* I apologized over and over and you *still* acted like I was the only one who did something wrong!" I bit out a harsh laugh. "And that's without bringing up the fact that you actually *changed* something about me. All I did was listen in on what you were thinking, but you actually messed

around with my brain. That's about as personal as it fucking gets." The hypocrisy of it made me want to punch something. "Do you know how fucked up that is?"

"I don't." *I do. I'm sorry.*

"Yeah. *Now* you are." I scoffed. "Just—why are you even telling me this *now*? Why not then? Why did you let me think that everything that I was the only one who did something wrong that night?"

He gave me his typical response and the truth followed: *It's really hard to explain, even to myself. I guess I was angry at you for different reasons. Once you told me that you could hear omitted lies I went into a panic. All of a sudden you were able to know things about me that I wasn't willing to share with you and that scared me. There were things about myself that I couldn't tell you—not just about my feelings but about my past. I felt like if I told you one thing that I would have to tell you everything and I just wasn't ready. I was angry that you ruined things.*

Until that point I had been lying to myself about you. I kept telling myself that the name Anderson was a common name. It didn't mean that you were related to him. It didn't mean anything. But I always knew that wasn't true. Deep down, I knew that I was lying to myself, but the lie worked. And then you told me about your ability and for some reason, I knew I couldn't lie to myself anymore. It felt like you had given me an ultimatum—either stay with you despite the danger, or cut you out of my life—and I hated you for doing that.

"And you chose cutting me out was your best option?" I snapped.

"Yes." *No. At first I was going to try to make it work. "I don't know why it didn't." But then in the hallway after that whole mess with Sebastian...*

I rolled my eyes. All I could think was: *Seriously? He was going to bring that up again?*

His truth continued: *You got this look in your eye. It reminded me of the way your father would look at me when he was getting desperate for answers, and I just knew that you were going to try to take my omission again. That was when I decided to cut you out. That look used to terrify me and seeing it on your face was just...*

I shut my eyes. My stomach felt like it was filled with glue and sawdust. "Stop. Please stop. Please, Kurt."

But of course, he couldn't just turn his brain off. It didn't work that way—the truth was harsh and unforgiving. It didn't pause to consider feelings and it didn't hold back. His mind kept tangling and twisting inside mine until I understood just how terrified he had felt that day—terrified because of me. Terrified because I reminded him of his worst nightmare, which only meant that my own worst nightmares had been confirmed.

Kurt wrapped his arms around me through it.

"I don't want to be like him," I whispered brokenly.

"You are," he said, and I knew it was just so that his truth could tell me, *You're not*, but the lie was overpowering and it came at me with enough force to make me feel absolutely disgusted with myself.

His hands were on my face. "Blaine."

Feeling pathetic, I looked up at him. My heart felt like it was beating fast enough to break. I wanted to believe him, but it was hard even though I knew that he was telling the truth.

"I just don't understand. Are you trying to make me doubt us or something?"

"Yes." *No!*

"Then what was the point of that? Didn't I just say that I thought being able to hear your omission without feeling any pain was one of the things that made us right for each other?"

"There was no point." *I'm trying to tell you that maybe you're relying too much on this preternatural connection we have with each other. You keep going back to that as the reason why we're together, but maybe we're just good together because you and I have a lot in common, and we want to be together, and if we somehow lost our abilities we would still be together. Our abilities are important, Blaine, but they don't define everything that we are.*

I didn't know what to say to that. There was a bigger picture in Kurt's speech, one that touched on my warped upbringing and the reason why I suddenly found myself so disconnected from Cooper just because he could no longer hear my every thought, but I was too scared to look for it

My lack of response seemed to make Kurt impatient. "Ask me how I feel about you."

In that moment, I *really* didn't want to.

"Ask me," he said again, more forcefully.

"How do you feel about me?"

"I don't know." *I love you. I love you and I don't think you're anything like your father. You're beautiful and your mine and I love you because you're you.*

He kissed me not to long after his unspoken confession of love, and it was desperate and everything our kisses hadn't been in what felt like much too long. It was that opened mouth neediness that was somehow still soft and loving.

He grabbed at my shirt the same way, his hands pushing the material up fast to reveal skin that he would touch slowly with his lips and tongue in a way that no one else had before—in a way that all of the begging sluts I had fucked in the past assumed I would never want to be touched. It was a touch that lingered and somehow made me feel calm, but it was a lot for the emotional state that I found myself in—almost too much.

"What are you—" I started and he stopped me.

"No. Let me do this."

I pressed my lips together, holding my protests and insecurities in. It wasn't long before my reasons for stopping him got hazy and my lips parted so that soft moans could fall out.

His fingers went where his mouth wasn't, seeking out skin that hadn't been given any attention. His hands moved against me in a way that was more than touching—they were soothing and stroking, telling me that everything was okay in that moment that it was just us and nothing else mattered.

"Beautiful," he whispered, breathing the words right into my skin.

His lips closed around my nipple, teeth gently teasing, as his fingers undid the button on my jeans and pulled the zipper down. He pushed my pants down enough to uncover my underwear but didn't seem interested in pushing them down any farther than that. I let my head fall to the side and I closed my eyes, taking my time, letting myself feel.

His hands trailed down my thighs and settled at my pelvis, framing my underwear-covered cock without touching me there—close enough to make me moan and far enough away to make me burn. His mouth made its way down. His tongue was hot and the muscles under my skin jumped up, wanting to be as close as possible to the wet heat. He nipped at me, gentle, but not teasing—exploring.

When his mouth was close enough to my cock to make me twitch, he curled his fingers under the waistband of my briefs and pulled them down. There was no talking, or requests for permission. There was just doing and showing and giving and taking, and his tongue was the first part of him to ever touch me there.

He licked me once, one long stripe along the underside of my cock that made me whine and buck my hips up for more, but he took his mouth away and sat up to pull his shirt off, denying me.

Our eyes locked and I looked at him desperately and in awe. He didn't smile at me. Instead, there was a softness in his eyes as he leaned down to kiss my lips, telling me silently that he loved me. He told me again when he kissed my eyebrow and then my cheek. His soft, silent *I love you's* made the backs of my eyes ache with pressure and I closed them before my vision could start to swim. He kissed the tip of my stinging nose, and then left another on my jaw before going back down and wrapping his lips around the head of my cock, kissing me there as well.

His mouth was inexperienced, and his teeth clipped me a couple times. He was tentative and didn't take me in as far as someone with experience could have, but none of that mattered, and when his jaw got tired too quickly for me to come it still didn't matter. It wasn't about him giving me the best head I had ever gotten. It was about something *more* that I was too embarrassed to admit at the time, even within the privacy of my own mind.

"It's okay," I panted to him when the burn he was feeling in his jaw became an obvious struggle. I ran my hands through his hair and swiped my thumb over his cheek. "You can stop, Kurt. It's okay."

He pulled off and licked me one last time before pressing his forehead against my naked thigh. He took a few resting breaths through his mouth, pressed a kiss to where his lips could reach, and then he sat up. He unbuttoned his own pants with shaking hands and pushed them down fast before pulling them off completely. His briefs followed before he finally decided to rid me of my own.

I looked at him.

I wanted to tell him that he was beautiful, and that he deserved something better than fucking around in the backseat of his car, but the words got stuck my throat. His eyes were soft when he looked at me and conveyed another silent message—a promise to take care of me, no matter what.

I wondered when everything had gotten so switched around. I was supposed to be taking care of him. I was the aloof one—the one who didn't give a shitting fuck and didn't need anybody. Or, at least, that was supposed to be who I was. I wondered when that part of me had gone away.

But then, whether Kurt had changed me or not, *he* was the one who deserved to be taken care of. He was the one who had suffered the most. He was the one who had lost the most, and, I stupidly thought, he was the one who needed the most.

But there he was, despite whatever I thought he needed or deserved, with his beautiful everything eyes, promising me soft touches and loving comforts and whatever else I wanted as long as I agreed to be his to give them to.

I reached for him, wanting him close. He caught my wrist and kissed me there before shifting so he was kneeling between my legs.

He looked down at me before he very deliberately pressed our hips together. Everything blurred at the feel of him. We both moaned when he rolled his cock against mine, and for a second we lost ourselves, wrapped up in how fucking good it felt—I groaned and used my legs to mash him against me, moving my hips in languid circles, shuddering with my eyes closed and my mouth open—and his eyes rolled back into his skull and he threw his head back, grunting as he forcefully pressed against me again and then again, both of us forgetting the other.

"Oh, god," he groaned, guttural. With his eyes squeezed shut, he swallowed thickly before his tongue peaked out to wet his dry, swollen lips. "Shit," he whispered.

"Yeah," I breathed, in my own world where keeping my hands on his hips and getting off was the only thing that mattered. "So fucking good like that."

Then he fell against me and everything changed. He broke through the lustful fog in my mind with the softest whisper of my name and his lips soft and gentle on mine. His hips slowed down and refused to

adhere to the fast pace my hands were still trying to make him go. He breathed into my mouth between kisses that trembled and helped me remember that it was about being together.

I relaxed my legs around his waist, going boneless, and allowed myself to feel the way he touched me with his whole body. We breathed hotly together and moved together, holding onto each other as if letting go meant that the other would vanish forever. I circled my arms around his neck, and he pressed his palm against my cheek and cupped my jaw in the way I had always secretly dreamt of being touched by another person—by someone who loved me—by someone like Kurt—by *Kurt*.

We taught each other how it felt to be completely wrapped up in someone else—too close and too hot to breathe properly, but too beautiful to ever dream of stopping.

Our movements were lazy, and the buildup was slow. Neither of us was concerned with how much time has passed, or how much time *would* pass before we finally gave in to the languid licks of pleasure. Everything was delicious and I wanted it to last for a thousand forevers.

I lost track of how many times I told him that I loved him. A number didn't matter, though. However many times as it was, it was the same amount of times that he said it back to me with either his eyes or his lips or his hands.

Eventually, with his hand wrapped around both our cocks, he came, gasping and wet, his lips on my neck, but didn't stop moving until I was able to come too. He rolled against me as I rode it out, trying his best to prolong my pleasure as I shook and clung to him while he licked into my mouth.

He kept kissing me, even when I had recovered enough to break free of the mantra of his name playing on repeat in my head. He didn't let me go and I held him just as tightly.

We kissed and touched until both of us were hard again and I felt strong enough to flip him onto his back and return the favor, neither of us caring about the mess we were making on each other as long as it was one we made together.

I could have spent forever wrapped in his arms, kissing and coming in that way that meant more than just getting off, and then doing it over again. But the sun had almost set on our somewhere else. The car windows were fogged with our heat, and our bodies were tired. And, yes, our slew of problems was still

there—all of them hidden away in whatever grooves they could find, waiting for the worst time possible to come crawling out.

"We have to go back, gorgeous," I whispered.

His arms tightened around me, his body still hot and sweaty. He put his hands in my hair as if it would somehow make it so that we wouldn't have to leave.

"Kurt..."

He buried his nose in my neck, his eyelashes slipping against my skin as he closed his eyes against reality, and I decided another minute or two couldn't hurt.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

The Proper Way to Prepare For the Expected

If you want to prepare for the expected you should do the exact opposite of everything I do below. I hadn't prepared myself for shit, but I should have. I should have expected what would happen after we returned to Dalton. It should have been obvious...

We didn't start getting ready to leave until the next morning.

Kurt was one of those people who stocked the trunk of his car as if he was waiting for the zombie apocalypse to start at any given moment. He had towels, bottled water, clothing, a first-aid kit stocked with toothbrushes, combs, deodorant, hairspray—the list goes on, really. Some of the stuff was pretty useful and some of it, not so much—before we finally went to sleep the night before, we used the towels and bottled water the night before to clean ourselves of all the come we had splattered on each other, but I would be damned if I ate any of the dried vegetable chips he had, or dressed in any of his clothing (like he would have let me anyway).

The toothbrushes were put to good use. It was fucking freezing out, so we only cracked the window open enough to spit the unneeded toothpaste in our mouths onto the grass before rolling it back up and huddling close together for warmth.

We dressed each other.

Kurt was quiet as he zippered and then buttoned my pants. I busied myself with fixing his shirt, which was inside out. Once we got his shirt on, he helped me into my hoodie, taking a minute to kiss my lips once my head was all the way out, but not to pull the hood off my head. I pushed my arms into the sleeves and then pulled him back for a longer kiss, hoping to tell him that even though everything might not be okay, I wasn't going anywhere.

He pulled back before we could get lost in each other again.

The ride felt shorter going back. Kurt looked like he was ready to fall to pieces. I felt like an asshole for making him do something he obviously wasn't ready for, but I didn't see how we had any other choice.

When we got inside, Kurt headed straight for the stairs, his hand gripping mine tightly, refusing to let go. I knew that I should probably find Cooper and make sure that he was okay, but I couldn't make myself tell Kurt that he had to let me go. We had been together for a full 24 hours, but it didn't feel like it was enough. My edges were still too frayed and I needed more of him so that I could start to begin feeling normal again.

Carole's voice calling for Kurt at bottom of the stairs stopped us. "Kurt? Kurt, honey, I need you to come back down here. Everly's been awake for a few hours now and we all need to talk."

It was the last thing either of us wanted, but when Kurt turned around suddenly without a word, I followed him to where Carole led us into the living room.

It was a tense atmosphere there—worse than the night before. Kurt kept his eyes on the floor and stayed behind me for the most part. Burt sat in his chair looking as if he would rather be anywhere else—his expression went from angry to ashamed and back again. Santana took one look at me before she looked angrily away, leaving me completely confused. Even more confusing was Everly, who sat on the couch where she had been lying unconscious the night before and Logan who was as far away from Everly as she possibly could be, standing on the opposite side of the room with her arms folded protectively around herself. Finn was off in a corner, looking like an outsider who had been forced into a world that he didn't belong to.

Kurt held my hand tight. Neither of us moved to sit down.

Carole sighed. She looked tired, like she had been fighting battle after battle for days and was nearing the end of her ability to soldier on. "Okay. I'm just going to talk. This is what is going to happen: Brittany and Cooper are going to be staying here for as long as they need to. Santana is going to be staying here as well so she can be with Brittany. Everly will go back to work tomorrow like nothing happened. Kurt will go back to Dalton as planned and Blaine will go with him. Whether anyone likes it or not, Kurt and Blaine *are* together—"

"No," Brittany whispered. "No, no, no, no, no..." Her face crumpled and tears started to fall. "I don't like it, I don't like it."

Santana immediately wrapped her arms around her and pulled Brittany to lay into her shoulder. "Shh, baby, shh. It's okay."

She whimpered and shifted around until she was practically in Bitches' lap. "It's that scary one. The one with the hand. I don't want it."

Carole walked over to the two of them and put a gentle hand on Brittany's arm.

"No, no, no, no."

"Oh, not again." Carole said softly. "You poor thing. Logan, go get her some warm water with lemon. That seemed to help last time."

"Last time?" I couldn't help asking.

"She's been like this all day," Carole explained when San stayed quiet. "The first time was pretty rough."

Santana took in a shaky breath as Brittany whimpered into her neck. "I'm sorry—I—She's been... getting worse. She's never been this bad, though."

Carole gave Santana a weak smile. "I'm sure it's just because she's in an unfamiliar place."

"Yeah," Santana said, but didn't look convinced.

I took a step closer, needing to know how I could help. "San..."

She stopped me without bothering to look at me. "Don't, Blaine."

Logan returned with a steaming mug in her hand. "Here," she said passing it to Santana.

Bitches took it and gave the shoulder Brittany was leaning on a gentle shake. "Britt-Britt... I want you to drink something for me."

Brittany shook her head, but pulled away from Santana's shoulder anyway. "I don't like the the hand," she whimpered.

Santana pushed the mug against Brittany's lips. "I know, baby, but drink this, okay?"

Everly watched it all with piercing eyes. "She needs professional care."

Logan's head whipped around so fast that it made my own neck feel stiff. "From who? *SIIPA?*"

Bitches pressed her lips into a thin line as Brittany drank with both hands wrapped around the mug. "I don't see how this is any of your concern," she said with a glare in Everly's direction and a gentle, soothing hand on Brittany's back.

Carole quickly jumped in with damage control. "Santana is doing very well with Brittany, Everly. She loves her, and that is more than we can say for any professional."

The damage control didn't work.

"It would be better if she didn't have to deal with this at all," Santana snapped in a deadly, biting tone that she reserved for whenever she was about to act like a real asshole.

I heard Kurt suck in a breath behind me.

"Watch it," I threatened.

"Watch what, Blaine? Watch the person I love fall apart more and more while your boy toy stands there and does nothing when he could make it all go away?"

"You can't ask him to do that!"

"Why the fuck not? *You* did!"

"Stop it!" Carole ordered and Santana and I shut up. "That's not helping anyone, and the both of you are hurting Kurt and Brittany more than you are each other."

Brittany had gone back to whimpering in Santana's shoulder and Kurt just looked sick.

"Listen," Carole continued. "A lot of trust has been broken in this family since yesterday. Obviously everything isn't going to get fixed today, it might not even be fixed next week, but it's not going to help if we all start shouting things at each other that we'll only regret later. Right now, what we all have to do is go on living our lives as normally as we can to avoid getting any unwanted attention. That means that everyone who has school tomorrow is going. Everyone who has work tomorrow is going."

"Can I go upstairs now?" Kurt asked almost the second the last word left Carole's lips.

Carole looked up at him with a sympathetic frown. "Of course, honey. You and Blaine should leave soon anyway."

He was out of the room before she stopped talking and she let out a sigh. She looked up at me. "Maybe you should go help him get his things together."

I didn't hesitate to do as she suggested. I was halfway up the stairs when Cooper stopped me.

"Blaine, wait up."

I stopped and looked back. As soon as our eyes locked, the unfair resentment came rushing back too fast for me to try to fight it off. I didn't know how to react to him. I kept thinking awful things and then reminding myself seconds later that it didn't matter what I thought around him anymore, which only made me think more awful things.

I don't know how to be your brother anymore.

Then, after the guilt was gone and the anger flared back up, an uglier thought: *I kind of hate you right now.*

That one made me wince even as it spurred on more thoughts. *You knew what Kurt was going to do. Why didn't you stop him? Why did you let him make you into a person I don't know?*

Why am I so angry that I got what I always wanted?

Why did Kurt have to lean on you when he was broken?

Cooper looked up at me with sad eyes. "We're not okay, are we?"

"No." Maybe there was a bit of the old me left after all.

"You going to tell me why?"

There were so many reasons.

"I don't know."

"You don't know if you're going to tell me or you don't know why?"

I glared at him. "You tell me."

Understanding flashed in his eyes and he shoved both hands into his pockets. That, at least, was familiar.

"I'm still me, you know."

"Are you?"

"If you couldn't detect lies anymore, wouldn't you still be you?"

"No," I said too quickly. Then I changed it to, "Yes," and finally ended with, "I don't know." I scowled.

"Wasn't that the whole point? To become someone different?"

He didn't answer that. "There's something else bothering you."

That surprised me. It must have shown on my face, because he let out a terse laugh.

"I don't have to read your mind to know what you're thinking, Blaine," he pointed out in a quiet voice.

I hadn't thought of that, but for some reason knowing it didn't do much in the way of making me feel any less like a dick. Obviously losing his ability hadn't changed the nature of our relationship in *his* eyes.

But why? What did he know that I didn't?

Our abilities are important, Blaine, but they don't define everything that we are, Kurt's phantom truth reminded me. I closed my eyes against it.

"I have to go check on Kurt," I said—my excuse to leave.

Cooper narrowed his eyes at me. "I'll go with you."

"Why?" I asked too harshly.

My borderline hostility didn't surprise him. "You know, I knew it bothered you when I helped him Friday night."

"What do you care? You don't even know him."

"I care because you care, dumbass. He's the person you love. I care about anyone you care about." He folded his arms across his chest, daring me to go against that bit of logic. "Plus there's also the fact that I'm straight, which, last time I checked, means that even if he wasn't jailbait, Kurt isn't my type."

I had known that he would say that. I also knew why my response would be, and I struggled to keep it locked inside where it belonged.

Don't say it.

If you say it, you'll sound like an idiot little kid.

Don't. Say. It.

"Yeah, but you could be *his* type," I grumbled, scowling at the ground. *I'm so fucking stupid.*

Cooper rolled his eyes. "Oh, please, little brother. You're a hot piece of ass, and you know it."

I snorted as his truth changed 'hot piece of ass' into a more literal phrase. "If that isn't the most incestuous thing you've ever said..."

"Then I'm really not doing my job right," he said with a shit eating grin that fell away with a sigh. "Look, Blaine. If you had been there for him, he would have gone to you without a second thought. I'm not trying to be judgmental or anything, I'm just giving it to you the way it is. Trust me; you're the one he's looking at when he thinks no one else is watching. Not me."

"He does that?" I had to know. Not that he could have lied to me, but still.

"Yeah," Cooper said softly. "He does. And it's everything I ever wanted for you."

Hearing it made me feel less cold and confused inside.

"I'm going to go back to the living room," Cooper suddenly announced, getting my attention back on him and away from the lovesick, doped up place I had been settling into.

"No," I said. "I'm being an asshole. You can come with me."

But Cooper shook his head. "Nah. I'm not the one who Kurt needs to see right now. I should go see how San is doing anyway."

I sighed, remembering the cold stare she had sent my way when Kurt and I walked into the living room. "Everyone is pissed at someone."

"Hey. I'm not pissed at anyone. I'm not pissed at *you*. You're my little brother. No matter what, okay? If things are weird for you right now, I get it. When they stop being weird..." He shrugged. "It's not like you don't know where to find me."

Typical Cooper—always taking care of me, always running over with an emotional band-aide to slap on that dark side of myself that liked to try and knock me down.

But then, I wondered how he could have possibly been any other way. All he had ever had was me. Or, me and the voices in his head driving him insane.

I might have grown up to be a dick/man-whole, but at least I had friends.

Cooper never had any friends.

"Hey, Coop?"

He had already started back down that stairs and he stopped to look over his shoulder at me. "Yeah?"

"I'm glad you're out of there."

Emotion instantly welled up in his eyes, and I thought for a second that he might lose his calm façade and break down, but he managed to stamp it all back down with a carefree grin. "Hallelujahs, little brother," he said, closing his eyes and pushing a hand up in the air like he was praising Jesus or some shit like that. "Hallelujahs."

I rolled my eyes at him. "You're an idiot."

He cackled like a mental case and skipped down the rest of the stairs sing-songing, "You loooooove me!"

I left Cooper to his insanity and continued up the stairs.

By the time I got to Kurt's room he had already changed his clothes and almost had everything packed. I helped him finish the little bit that was left.

As we made our way out of his room (I was carrying my backpack and two of the four bags he had packed), I wondered whether we were going to say anything to his family before we left. I got the impression that he felt bitter enough about everything that had happened to leave without a word. Either way I didn't really care what we did. Bitches was best left alone when she was pissed (not that I really wanted to see her after the way she attacked Kurt), and I had already said goodbye to Cooper. I wasn't concerned what anyone else, really. Except for maybe Carole, but she was waiting for us at the bottom of the stairs when we turned the corner.

"We'll see you both on Friday," she said when we were both all the way down and then pulled Kurt into a tight hug.

"Your father loves you very much," she told him, and Kurt stiffened a little but didn't respond otherwise.

After she let go of Kurt, she hugged me. "Find a way to make him smile a couple times this week, okay?" she said quietly so Kurt wouldn't hear.

She didn't let me go until I nodded.

The ride back to Dalton was hell. Kurt had insisted that I drive, and as soon as we were in the car and out of the driveway, his entire demeanor changed. He seemed dead set on putting his mind off of everything that had happened that weekend, and he used me to do it. His lips and tongue hardly ever left my neck, and his hand was a constant pressure on my thigh as he teased me up and down my leg. More often than not for those two hours I was hard as a rock and half a second away from humping the damn steering wheel for some relief. I refused to pull over, though—the last thing I needed was to pull over on a crowded highway and get carted off to jail for public indecency.

Once we got back to Dalton, we went to Kurt's room to drop off the clothing store he had insisted on taking home with him. As soon as the bags were out of our hands, I had my mouth on his and was all but dragging him to the closest bed, which—thank god—happened to be Kurt's because as soon as the high wore off, I would have regretted having sex on Sebastian's cum soiled sheets. As it happened, though, we didn't make it to Kurt's bed either. He stopped me just before I could get close enough to shove him down on it.

"Shower," he managed to say around my tongue.

"We'll shower after," I tried to change his mind. "Can't wait anymore."

"Who said anything about waiting?"

"Oh, fuck yes," I said because sex in the shower was pretty much awesome, and the mental image of Kurt dripping wet and panting was already orgasm worthy, so the real thing would be ten times better.

It wasn't until I dropped my towel down on the bathroom floor that my skin started to really crawl and I decided that a shower was a pretty great idea, sex or no sex. Towels and bottled water only took a person so far, after all. I could only imagine how Kurt must have felt. He was way more into the whole keeping immaculately clean bit than I was.

I held my hand under the spray, waiting impatiently for the water to heat up. "Fuck, I feel disgusting."

Kurt hummed his agreement from behind me where he stood with his forehead resting between my shoulders. He had his arms wrapped around my waist and his bare chest was pressing hot against my back.

I had already pulled off all of my clothes, but Kurt still had his briefs on despite the fact that no one else was in there with us and I had locked the door to make sure it stayed that way—while I didn't really care whether or not we had an audience, I knew Kurt would.

"Shit. It's still kind of cold, but can we just... deal with it? I can't fucking take this anymore."

"Feeling disgusting or being naked with me?"

I nearly groaned. Then his tongue pressed against my spine and nearly was no longer an issue. "Fucking hell." I breathed through my mouth. "You're not even naked."

"I'm not?" he asked, voice husky, as his bare cock pressed between my ass cheeks.

"F-fuck." No one had ever been so close before. I was surprised to find I wanted him closer. Maybe even fully inside me. I wasn't sure, though. That wasn't something I had ever wanted to experience before.

It was too overwhelming to think about, so I spun around and shoved my tongue down his throat again, taking control of the situation.

He let me kiss him for about half a minute, before he took it back. With his hand firmly gripping my ass, he pulled me into stall. The lukewarm water felt like ice, and Kurt left me wanting when he took his mouth and body away to pull the shower curtain closed.

When he turned back towards me, he had his hand wrapped around his cock and his eyes went straight to my lips. My whole mouth went instantly dry as he stroked himself slowly and I wondered what had happened to my blushing virgin because it sure as shit wasn't kissing that he was thinking about while he was ogling my lips like that.

He crowded into my space, pushing me against the wall. I hissed at the feeling of the unforgiving tiles against my too hot skin. My hiss turned into a moan when his cock found mine, his hips rolling lazily. His mouth devoured mine for a few seconds before his hands were pressing on my shoulders, trying to move me down. I dropped onto my knees with a loud groan. I felt almost frantic—like everything depended on getting it now now now now and even that wouldn't be fast enough.

But there was too much. There was his cock right in front of my face, and his wet skin that seemed to go on for miles and miles, waiting to be touched. And then there was the fucking *look* in his eyes that made me want to give him whatever he wanted for the rest of our lives.

In the end, I wrapped my hands around as much of his hips as I could grab and leaned in close. I opened my mouth against the bit of skin on his stomach that I could still reach while on my knees and licked a long stripe across his abdomen—just because I could. His muscles jumped at the feel of my tongue on him and he moaned loud and long.

Then his hands were on my head, his fingers twisted in my wet hair as he tried to steer me towards his cock. I nearly broke then. My tongue ached at the sight of him, thick and flushed dark at the swollen tip, leaking steadily and begging for me to lap it up. I could fuck him with my mouth hard and fast and he would probably come right down my throat in less than a minute, but I knew wasn't what he needed. I saw the shadows in his eyes that he wanted me to chase away—the way he had chased mine away for me the day before.

I knew that the sooner this was over, the sooner his mind would go back to whirling with everything that had happened. *Now now now now* would have to wait.

"Blaine," he whined above me, pushing his hips forward, pushing the tip of his cock insistently against my lips. "Please."

"Jesus." I shuddered at the words and, without really thinking, my lips wrapped around just the head and I sucked hard, tasting him like I wanted to. Like I fucking needed to.

Kurt gasped above me, high pitched and fucking hot as hell. He tried to push farther into my mouth, and as much as I would have loved to let him fuck my face until I couldn't breathe, I pulled off and shut my lips up tight.

Kurt let out a frustrated noise.

"Not yet, baby," I told him. I looked up at his pleading eyes. "I want to do something else with you first. Something we haven't done yet. Let me?"

"Do it."

I kissed his hip. "Turn around, gorgeous, and I will."

He did it without hesitation, panting. I grabbed hold of his ankle and pulled gently. "Up," I said, and he turned his head to give me a slightly nervous look, but lifted his leg and allowed me to direct him until he had his knee resting on the empty soap tray that was built into the corner of the stall.

When he was finally arranged the way I wanted him, I allowed myself to look, and the sight of him all spread out and exposed for me went straight to my already throbbing cock. "Holy fuck, gorgeous."

Kurt looked back at me from his spot where he was huddled against the wall, his eyes wider than anything, and his face an angry embarrassed red.

I really had no chance of stopping myself from nipping him gently on one of those firm cream- colored globes.

"Ah!" he hissed and it was like music to my goddamn ears.

"You're gonna taste so fucking good," I moaned because I knew the words would crawl right under his skin and twist his insides.

His entire body jerked at my prediction and his face got even redder. He looked absolutely wrecked shy by it with his hands curled into fists against the white tiles, his hips spasming every few seconds so that his cock bumped against the cold ceramic. Basically, he looked too erotic to be allowed. He looked fucking forbidden. He looked beautiful.

It was too much and my control broke. I ached with urgency as I leaned forward, letting my lips fall open without a fight.

"What are y—*ohhhhh... fuuuuck*, Blaine. *Blaine*. Again. Do it again. *Yes*. Don't stop."

I had no plans of stopping. Kurt was just about fucking himself against the wall at that point. He seemed torn between moving his hips forwards to rub against the cold tiles and rocking them back to press himself more firmly against my tongue.

I had to fist the base of my cock and squeeze to stop myself from losing it completely. I focused instead on spreading him open with my tongue. Above me, Kurt was moaning like it was his birthright and he sounded fucking delicious.

When I pushed my tongue inside him as far as I could, Kurt hiked his leg higher and grabbed his own ass, spreading himself wider. "More," he gasped in a choked up voice.

'More' had always been the plan, and I figured he was wet enough by then, so I slowly worked my middle finger inside of him alongside my tongue. Lube would have done the trick better, of course, so it was still a little abrasive, but Kurt didn't seem to mind. All it took was two gentle but insistent brushes against his

prostate and he was coming all over the shower wall. I used my free hand to turn him around enough that I could wrap my mouth around him for the last bit of it, groaning as he shot what was left into my mouth.

His cock slipped out of my mouth when he fell against me, spent and breathing hard. His chest was flushed in that glorious red-dusted way that made me want to lick him all over to see just how red he could get. I didn't, though. He was in his own headspace and I sat there and soothed him through it with my hands running up and down his spine as he taught himself how to breathe again, his cheek pressed against mine and his lips were on my neck, open and wet but not moving.

After a while, his hands settled on my thighs and gently squeezed. "Blaine," he whispered into my skin. "Can I?"

I shifted so that I was sitting rather than kneeling, my back against the wall. "Okay."

He sucked me slow, his head bobbing up and down carefully as he taught himself a bit more about how to make me come with his tongue and his lips. That time his jaw didn't get tired because it didn't take me long. I was so wound up from watching him fall to pieces that I was quick to do the same—about fifteen seconds of stimulation and I was shooting off into his mouth. I warned him when it was about to happen, but he seemed to get caught off guard by it anyway. He swallowed messily, not catching it all, but fuck if it wasn't one of the hottest things I had ever seen.

When he pulled off, he licked his lips with a slight frown on his face like he was considering something.

I couldn't stop myself from grinning just a little at how goddamn cute it looked. "What?"

"I don't know." *Yours tastes different from mine.*

I couldn't help it—my eyes bugged out at that. "You've tasted your own cum?"

His cheeks went a little red, giving me my answer, and my brain was instantly flooded with images of him tentatively licking his own cum-soaked hand and then considering the taste, that same adorable, considering look on his face.

"S-shit, Kurt," I muttered, closing my eyes. "It's like you're actually trying to kill me." I opened my eyes to trail them down his glistening body. "Keep talking like that and I'll press you up against the wall again."

The flush on his chest got darker. "I can't believe you licked—" he couldn't say it, but his eyes got dark despite the slight uncertainty there.

"Did you like it?"

He responded with a tentative 'no' which, of course, his truth corrected with the opposite.

"Then who cares what I licked? You liked it. I liked it. That's all that matters. Making each other feel good is all that matters, okay? We didn't do anything wrong."

"Okay."

"We should probably get out of here."

Instead of answering, Kurt leaned towards the curtain and pushed his arm through, searching blindly for something. I held him with my arms around his waist so he wouldn't topple over until he pulled his arm back in. He passed me the cucumber body wash that he had in his hand. It didn't escape my notice that he had left my unscented bar of soap where it was encased in a zip lock bag sitting on top of my towel.

"What's wrong with my soap?" I asked and received the exact look you're probably imagining in your head right now. "Damn, okay, okay. I got it. Girly smelling liquid soap, good; practical unscented bar soap, bad."

His eyes narrowed at me. "Are you comparing me to a girl?"

I grabbed hold of his mostly soft cock and tugged on it gently, smirking when he moaned a little. "What do you think, gorgeous?"

He shot me a *fuck you* with his eyes and batted my hands away before he proceeded to wash himself. I sat back and watched. He lifted an eyebrow at me, but didn't question it.

Slowly, I stood up. Without breaking our stare, I caught his wrist. His skin was the softest skin I had ever touched. It felt better than velvet and I loved it. I loved *him*. I loved the way he looked at me and the way we finally understood each other. "You know, you really are gorgeous," I told him softly.

"A-Am I?" he asked, and his voice shook.

I nodded slowly. "Uh-huh." I leaned in and kissed him once. "Not just that, though. You're everything."

He pressed his forehead against mine and closed his eyes. "How can one person be everything?"

I shrugged. "Dunno. You manage it somehow, though."

His arms twisted around me and he held me tight. "I wish I could say how..." Of course, he couldn't finish that statement, but I understood it.

"You don't have to say anything. I know how you feel."

"But won't you want to hear it? Don't you want that?"

I shook my head. "I don't need it." I curled myself closer. "This is what I want."

I felt his smile and then his kiss against my neck.

"I thought you wanted to get out of here," I teased him and was rewarded with a job to the left side.

While I pouted, he poured some soap into my palm. I didn't make a big production of it—I scrubbed my hands over my skin, Kurt ran some shampoo and conditioner through our hair and then we were out.

We got dressed and things started to feel almost normal again. Dalton was a great place to go when you wanted to forget. It was ostentatious and beautiful. It made you forget that the real world was outside, waiting. Better than all that, though, were Kurt's eyes. The shadows were barely visible by then and he looked happy. I wrapped myself around him and was content to pretend.

I would have liked to wake up in Kurt's arms the next day and then kiss him awake. I would have liked to argue with him about whether we had enough time to mess around before we had to get out of his bed. I would have liked to walk to class with his hand in mine and kiss him senseless in the hallway where everyone could see, just to make him blush. I would have liked to eat lunch with him in the lounge and listen to him complain about how Dalton was robbing its students of their creativity by forcing them to adhere to a dress code that only Peter Parker would appreciate. I would have argued that I looked hot as shit in my blazer (thanks for noticing, gorgeous), and he would have rolled his eyes, but kissed me

anyway—and if I hadn't been able to convince him to fuck around with me that morning, then I would convince him to do it then, quick, hard, and fast before we had to get back to class.

We would go to warblers practice and Kurt would sing and take away my ability to breathe normally. Wes would praise the musical gods for sending him Kurt in our hour of need, and Sebastian would sneer like the bent prick that he was, and I would reply with some witty insult designed to put him in his place (use your imagination because I don't feel like using mine).

What I'm getting at here is that it would have made me happier than a hipster decked out in grandpa's thick-rimmed glasses to have one goddamn day where fate didn't drop down from its perch on the You Suck tree and punch me in the throat.

As it was, I woke up that Monday morning wrapped up in Kurt to find my father's eyes blazing down at me in abject disgust.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

The Proper Way to Open the Floodgates

Today wasn't a good day. I'm just going to get right into it. I need that...

"Still screwing everything on sight, I see," was the first thing my father said to me. The words seemed to bubble over his lips like acid and plop down on the bed where they slowly crawled over my skin, licking and burning.

My entire left side trembled and shuddered.

Just the left.

That's weird. Isn't that weird?

How long until everything went to hell?

How long had he been standing there? How long had he been watching us? What had he seen?

My eyes dropped to his hands and my heart instantly felt like it had been run through a meat grinder and then forced back inside me.

Too close.

His hands were dangerous and they were too damn close.

Stupid. I had been so stupid. Cooper had escaped, the Lopez house had been demolished, Brittany was missing, and Santana was nowhere to be found. All of that meant I a huge target had been painted on the back of my head, and somehow I failed to realize that my father would be the first one to take aim at it.

I should have expected it. I definitely should have planned for it.

I should have stayed the fuck away from Kurt.

Kurt.

Kurt was pressed up against my entire left side. He had his arms twisted tightly around my chest, squeezing hard enough to make my bones feel the pressure.

I wasn't the one trembling.

My thoughts kicked into overdrive.

Kurt must have woken up before me. He must have seen. He must have lost his mind.

He had his face hidden against my neck. His breathing stuttered unevenly in panicked shock—in and out and in and out way too fast and much too faint. He was going to start hyperventilating.

I clutched at the back of his head, terrified of what had happened before I woke up. Had my father seen Kurt's face? Had he recognized who Kurt was? Was he even *able* to recognize Kurt?

I had to find out how bad it was.

I had to pull my shit together and I had to do it alone because that time Kurt definitely couldn't help and Bitches wasn't there to hold my hand.

I swallowed my panic as best as I could and tried to ignore the way my heart was beating hard and fast against my ribs.

"What do you want?" I asked. I tried to sound indifferent.

Did it work?

My father peered down at me and I noticed that he looked more unhinged than he usually did. He didn't answer my question. Instead, he let the silence lag and waited.

Then, slowly...

"Get up, Blaine."

Kurt's nails bit into my skin at the sound of his voice. I wished that he would stop talking.

Doesn't he hear how hard Kurt is breathing? Does he think that's strange?

He continued speaking. "Either get up and come with me or get rid of your whore."

Relief ballooned in my stomach. If he had recognized Kurt he definitely wouldn't tell me to get rid of him.

Despite the relief, we were still caught in a really bad situation. I looked up at the man looming over me.

He was still standing way too close.

I watched his hands wearily. I wondered if Kurt knew what those hands could do. I wondered if he knew how dangerous those hands were to him specifically.

With the way we were arranged on the bed, Kurt was closest to him. Was that why Kurt was so blatantly terrified, or was it my father's presence along that was too much for him to handle?

I knew why *I* was terrified. It was definitely those hands.

All it would take was one fleeting touch, and Elizabeth's sacrifice would be for nothing.

Don't freak out until you have a reason to.

Deal with this. Worry about everything else later.

Quickly, I gripped Kurt's arm and tried to make him let me go. He clung to me.

Any other time it would have made me smile.

Please let me go. Please.

He didn't hear me, of course.

Forcibly, I freed myself from his hold and got off of the bed as fast as I could, making sure to launch myself over Kurt so that I was standing between him and my father. I grabbed the first pair of jeans I saw (mine) and tugged them on, thankful that unlike Kurt, I was at least wearing underwear.

As I pulled them up, I glanced at Sebastian's bed and my heart sank when I found it empty. Not that I thought he would be any help whatsoever, but I might have tried to delude myself into thinking that he *might* have if things got bad enough.

Quickly, I grabbed hold of the blanket that was barely covering Kurt's naked hips and threw it over his head, hoping that *out of sight, out of mind* was a reliable phrase.

In the time it took me to get to that point, my father must have gotten impatient because the next thing I knew there was a hard hand wrapped around my bicep and I got flung like a ragdoll. I smacked hard against a nearby wall and I grit my teeth at the shocks of pain that ran up my shoulder. The son of a bitch had me pinned in a second.

My father, who was much bigger and taller than me, easily held me against the wall with both hands pressing hard against my arms. I hated being trapped, and being trapped by *him* made me feel like I could start clawing my own skin off, but I trapped that down, trying hard not to completely lose my shit.

"I thought you wanted to have this conversation in private," I said in a bored, dry tone that should have won me an academy award given the nine kinds of crazy I was feeling inside.

As crazy as I felt, however, my father looked worse. He looked completely out of his head. He had always been a closeted loose cannon, but losing control of Cooper had messed him up worse than I ever would have thought. His hair, which was usually styled back with crisp precision, fell over his forehead in wisps and was bunched up in different places as if he had been tugging at it for hours. There was stubble on his face and the snide grin he usually sported when he was looking at me had been traded in for a stone cold expression.

Someone had taken one of his toys away and he didn't like it.

"You're quite a difficulty to track down, *son*," he ground out, his voice scraping like sandpaper. "Hardly ever in your own room, nowhere to be found on the premises at all since Friday night. But you know all about what happened Friday night, don't you, Blaine?"

I shrugged as best I could. "Lots of things happened Friday night. You'll have to fill me in."

He pulled me away from the wall only to shove me back into it. "Where. Is. He?"

I looked up at him with grossly exaggerated wide-eyed wonder. "He who, Daddy?"

His grip on my arms tightened. "You always were a little shit, Blaine. The biggest little goddamn shit I ever fucking saw."

I grinned at him, knowing it would eat him alive to see it. "You're fucking crazy."

His eyes flashed and he slammed me again. That time it hurt like a bitch and I couldn't stop myself from grunting in pain.

"You had better *watch* that mouth of yours. One day your grandfather won't be around anymore and there will be no one to stop me from throwing you and that goddamn mouth into a D5 cell where your fag ass will rot."

I rolled my eyes. My grandfather had no love for me. He merely found me useful. That, and the two of us had a common dislike for my father. The basis for our dislike varied, however. I disliked my father because he was a prick. My grandfather disliked him because, for all my father's finesse and charm, he turned into a deranged berserker when things didn't go his way. As for my grandfather's opinion of me, I was too obstinate and unpredictable for his liking. Important to note, though, Adam Anderson was a man who had been taught that in order to maintain control of anything—whether it be a business, a family, or a top-secret government organization that specialized in the preternatural—one had to portray oneself as being strictly composed in all facets of life. He had made it his mission to uphold the façade the Anderson family was a solid, well-disciplined unit that existed in a constant state of hunky dory happy time. In other words, berserker and obstinate teenager or not, my father and I were tolerated but watched very, *very* carefully.

But more on my grandfather later. For now, back to my father's monologuing.

"Andres Lopez called Friday night to tell me that his home was ripped to shreds and his daughter was missing."

I snorted. Add another prick to the pile. "Because he's *so* concerned for her safety, I'm sure."

He continued as if I hadn't spoken, but I could tell by the vein that was slightly protruding against the skin of his neck that he wanted silence. "Not to mention her little girlfriend somehow escaped the D4 reservation."

"And?"

SLAM

"And," he got even more in my face, "you know *exactly* where this is going."

"Actually, I don't, because even if I did know where he was, I can't think of one single reason why I would tell you. And how would you make me tell, Dad? Hmm? Would you threaten Cooper? You seem to like holding him over my head, and it's worked for you so far, so why don't you try that. Threaten Cooper. Let's see how that well that goes now." I smirked, taunting him in the hopes that he would leave if he got angry enough. I glanced over his shoulder at Kurt's bed. Kurt was still huddled under the blanket, but he was completely still.

Please be okay. Just a little longer.

"But, hey," I continued, "don't get too upset. If Cooper doesn't work out, you can try Santana. She and I are pretty close—we've been friends for years. If you can't find her, though, I'm sure you can use Brittany S. Pierce as bait to lure her out."

Sometime in the middle of my sarcastic rant, reality really began to sink in. Seven years. My father had held Cooper over my head for seven years. He had manipulated and controlled me for *seven years*. That was damn near half my life.

Not anymore.

Hell, not ever again. He was never getting Cooper again. He couldn't get Santana, he couldn't get Brittany, and I would kill him if he ever even so much as glanced at Kurt.

He had nothing else on me. He had *no one* that he could use to control me anymore.

That last thought broke my control. I felt like I could have destroyed the entire world and not given a damn. I felt hysterical and shouting in the bastard's face seemed like the only thing worth living for.

"*But why stop there?* You can always use my piece of shit roommate to blackmail me! Just make sure you keep him when you're done because he's always been a massive pain in the ass. Or maybe Headmaster Bennett—I've always had a special place in hell for him—he would be *perfect* blackmail material! Or—even better—use that douche bag Sebastian Smythe, or maybe the mailman for our New York apartment, or some random whore off the street, a fucking pair of pants, or, hey! I got it! One of the guys that I fucked for a few hours and then threw away like nothing! There's still plenty of them limping around the fucking school! Why not them, *Dad?* I'm sure they'll work!"

I was almost screaming at that point, and I had taken it way too far. It was one thing to poke the bear. It was another thing to poke the bear, dump fish slime on yourself, and then put your head in its mouth.

I might have lost it just a little bit.

It was exhilarating, though, and I couldn't stop. I didn't *want* to stop. I wanted to rub his nose in it until there was nothing left but a gaping hole on his face.

I opened my mouth for more when the door opened.

I cut off midsentence by it, and my father and I both turned our heads to find Sebastian standing in the doorway, looking at us with a what the fuck written all over his face.

"Umm..." Sebastian said, and my father pushed me away from him with a violent shove.

He didn't say anything when he left the room, which should have been worrying, and would have been if my mind hadn't instantly jumped back to Kurt.

I didn't dare move though, not until at least a minute went by without him coming back. It was probably the only intelligent thing I did that day.

"What the fuck was that?" Sebastian asked after a stretch of silence that had been filled with confused staring.

I ignored him and rushed over to Kurt.

"Who was that guy? Why the hell were you screaming your head off?"

When I pulled the blankets back, Kurt was curled in on himself with both hands clamped tight over his mouth and his eyes open wide.

"Holy shit! What the fuck did you do to him, Anderson?"

I easily ignored Sebastian; the disturbing sight instantly cleared my mind of everything except for one person.

"Kurt," I said turning him towards me. His breathing was still way too fast. "Kurt, baby, it's okay. It's okay, he's gone now. Kurt." Nothing. "Damn it." I whipped around to face Sebastian. "Don't just fucking stand there! Get some water or something!"

Sebastian wasn't my favorite person, but he left and came back in record time. I would have kissed him if I didn't think I would throw up right after. I held out my hand for the glass of water he held in his.

He put two pills in the center of my palm.

"What the hell is this?"

"Valium. I got it from Jeff's brother."

"From *Cam*? Are you out of your fucking mind? I'm not giving him that!"

"He swears it's clean, and it's the only thing we've got."

"Jesus. Kurt, I need you to take these pills okay? They'll help you calm down." I pulled Kurt into a sitting position so that his back was against my chest and pressed the pills to his lips. His lips parted and he did the rest of the work himself.

"Fuck!" Sebastian swore, his eyes on Kurt's hips, which were barely covered at that point. "Fuck, is he *naked*?"

I snatched the glass from Sebastian's hand and tipped it against Kurt's lips. I tried to hold it steady, but my hands shook. "Why?" I asked Sebastian as a means of distraction. "Are you worried about damaging your virgin eyes?"

"Well, no, but..." Sebastian's eyes traveled appreciatively down Kurt's chest.

"Do you fucking mind, Smythe?" I snarled and reached down to pull the blanket up higher.

"Not in the slightest. Never knew he looked like *that* underneath all those clothes. No wonder why you've kept him around for so long."

"He's not my fucking pet," I snapped. "I don't 'keep him around' and I sure as shit don't spend time with him because of how he looks naked."

"So... what, you meet Kurt and that's it? No more fucking around with whoever you want? Just one guy for the rest of your life?"

"I don't need to fuck anyone else."

Sebastian scoffed. "Please. When did you turn into such a Lifetime special anyway?"

"Oh my god, Sebastian, shut up. Just shut the fuck up. You are so annoying."

He didn't of course.

"You *really* don't miss fucking other guys? Not even a little bit?"

"For fucking—*No*. Kurt means more than everything. Those other guys meant less than nothing. Why the hell would I want to go back to that? It's no contest."

Sebastian, of course, looked at me like I had just agreed to have sex with him. "Seriously?" he asked, sounding genuinely intrigued.

"Seriously," I grit out. Genuine or not, Sebastian was annoying and I had no desire to spend the morning discussing my feelings with him.

I ran a hand through Kurt's hair. He seemed to be calming down a little. Whether that was because of the drugs or my father's continued absence, I didn't know.

Sebastian let out an annoyed huff. "Well, I don't get it. Monogamy is boring."

I scowled at the weasel-faced idiot. "Do I look bored to you?"

"You look worried."

I snorted. "Yeah, well."

Sebastian moved to sit on the edge of the bed. I eyed him.

"Shouldn't you be leaving now?"

"Why? Do you want me to?"

"Yes, actually."

"My room, not yours."

I grit my teeth.

"So was that guy trying to rape you or something?"

"*WHAT?*" I shouted. "*Fuck* no!" I shuddered, trying to shake off the feeling of *wrong*.

Sebastian shrugged, unfazed by my outburst. "He had you pushed up against a wall half naked with your pants undone. Hummel is all naked and doesn't strike me as the threesome type. Especially not with some forty year old."

"That was my father, you shithead."

"Is he a perv or something?"

"Are *you*?"

"Not in some creepy incest way."

"Ugh. Why are we talking about this? Why are you even talking at all? I don't care if this is your room. Just fuck off, Sebastian."

"Hey, don't get all high and mighty with me. You're the one who was half naked with your pants undone in front of your damn father."

"Not by choice, asshole!"

Sebastian looked like he was going to say something, but Kurt turned suddenly in my arms and Sebastian kept quiet.

"Kurt?" I asked, my hands already in his hair, pushing it back.

Unsurprisingly, Kurt said nothing. He shook his head and held me tighter.

I wished he would look at me.

"I'm sorry," I whispered because it hit me again that it was all my fault. Kurt had been right to try to stay away from me when he figured out who I was. Not for the first time since I discovered how much of a mess everything turned out to be, I wished that there was a way to go back in time and tell myself to leave him alone. "I'm so sorry."

"I don't think sorry is what he wants to hear," Sebastian said softly, his voice gentle in a way I had never heard it before.

"How the fuck would you know?" I damn near yelled.

Again, Sebastian wasn't fazed in the slightest. "I don't know. I don't even know what's going on exactly, but look at him."

I did.

Sebastian went on. "He's holding you like you're more important than breathing in and out. Obviously he doesn't think you need to apologize for anything."

I hoped he was right. Then again, I figured that if Sebastian was capable of saying something that made sense, anything was possible.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

The Proper Way to Deal with the Devil

I used to have this recurring dream.

I'm a kid again—two maybe three years old. I can feel the hot sun on my face and the grass tickling the back of my neck. I'm sprawled out on the ground, crying and alone in the shadow of a house that fails at pretending to be alone. It's quiet—the kind that's scary.

My mother suddenly appears and her long black hair falls all around me like a curtain. She smiles and presses her hands to my face. An unnatural calm seeps into me and the world is right and wonderful again.

Just like that.

I had always hated that dream. Not only because my mother was in it, but because sometimes I couldn't help but wonder whether it really was only a dream...

My eyes flew open and latched onto the ceiling above me. For a second, I was disoriented and I half expected to find myself looking up at a clear blue sky. That strange sense of calm from the dream still clung to me as if a dream actually had the ability to refuse to be forgotten.

Kurt's concerned face came into my line of sight.

"Bad dream," I told him before he could ask.

His concern shifted into something darker and he nodded solemnly. I knew he was thinking about his own bad dreams—the ones he had had every night since my father's unexpected visit on Monday.

By Tuesday night we had practically moved ourselves into the student lounge. Kurt wanted nothing to do with either of our dorm rooms and while I couldn't really blame him, it wasn't the solution I had wanted for the problem.

No matter how many times I suggested that maybe we should call his family, Kurt refused.

By Thursday night I had given up on trying to change his mind. Now that it was Friday we would be on our way back to Lima in a few hours. We just had to get through the rest of the day.

"What time is it?" I asked and he held his phone in front of my face so I could see the time.

6:30.

That meant we had an hour before classes started.

I rolled off the couch and got to my feet, stretching my arms high above my head as soon as I was upright.

When I opened my eyes again, I noticed that Kurt was already dressed in his uniform. "You showered already?" I asked, surprised. He had kind of been my shadow for the past few days.

He shrugged apologetically.

"Oh," I said, a little thrown off. "Uh... I guess I'll see you third period then."

He answered with a small placating smile.

I frowned. "You okay?"

Again with that same smile and I narrowed my eyes at him. Both of us knew perfectly well that a smile was just a smile. It wasn't a lie and it wasn't the truth. It just was.

"Kurt," I started but he stood up and kissed me, effectively shutting me up. After a minute of indulgence, I pulled away with a scowl. "I'm not stupid, you know."

"Really?" he asked cheekily and I gave him a harmless shove.

"Brat. You absolutely suck at being subtle. Stop trying to hide the fact that something's bothering you."

"Is that what I'm doing?" he asked, trying to look innocent.

I snorted. He was being a little shit is what he was doing. I wasn't stupid enough to tell him that, though. "You're sure as hell doing something."

He said nothing and leaned down to pick up Elizabeth's book from the table. He placed it in my hands.

I looked down at the small book and then back up at him with a raised brow. "It's your turn," I reminded him. "I had it yesterday."

He shrugged, kissed my cheek, and left the room.

I sighed and placed the book in my backpack for safekeeping before heading off to shower.

Whenever it was my turn with Elizabeth's book I usually spent first and second period reading to myself but I was too distracted that day. I kept thinking about that damn dream.

The silence got to me every time. It was creepy as shit and the memory of the deafening lack of sound always left me cringing for hours.

I hated silence.

After Cooper had been taken to the D5 facility, silence had reined in our house. I remembered how it used to make my ears ring, almost as if my body was trying to make up for the lack of noise.

It might not have been so bad if our house was normal sized—it was the kind of place that was too big for ten people, so you can probably imagine how ridiculous it would have been for a family of four. To call it ostentatious would have been putting it lightly.

Overwhelming was a better way to describe it. Overwhelming and silent.

It hadn't always been that way. When I had Cooper with me, the house was more like a playground than anything else. It was the perfect place to play hide and seek for hours without getting tired of having to use the same hiding places again and again. The two of us made more than enough noise to make up for a silent mother and an absent father.

Back then we got away with being as noisy as possible. Debora Burke, our nanny— who we called Old Bat behind her back and sometimes to her face—mostly left us alone because she was afraid of Cooper for two

very specific reasons. One, his ability terrified her (she was convinced he was possessed by the devil), and two, he looked almost exactly like our father and Carl Anderson scared the ever living shit out of her.

Of course, when he was gone all that changed. Suddenly there were too many corners, too many shadows, too many rooms that could be hiding some terrible child eating monster that could reach out and grab me as I walked by. I learned to hate all the places I used to love, especially when my mind started playing tricks on me by feeding me imagined whispers that had me spinning around to confirm that I really was alone. Just thinking about those days of being trapped inside that damnable mansion made me feel a cold sense of *wrong* that would start in my stomach and move slowly outwards until even my fingernails felt poisoned by it.

With Cooper and my father gone (if my father came home at all, it was only on the weekends), Old Bat became queen bee and according to her, silence was the gateway to God's good graces.

No one was allowed to make a goddamned sound. No music, no talking, no nothing 24/7.

So I escaped to Dalton my freshmen year of high school and never looked back.

By the time I met Kurt, I hadn't been back to that house in over two years.

I spent my summers and vacations away from Dalton doing whatever with Bitches and staying with anyone who didn't care how long we stayed. Those places weren't exactly the Ritz Carlton, but they served their purpose and thanks to my "job" as my father's lie detector I had seen a lot worse.

Plus, almost anything was better than living alone with Old Bat and my mother.

I could never understand why my father hadn't just divorced her. He didn't love her, I was positive of that. Sometimes I wondered whether she had an ability. My father was so obsessed with the preternatural that it wouldn't have made sense for him to have a wife without some sort of preternatural curse. It was no secret that he liked to collect people with strong, useful abilities, but I had never seen my mother do anything other than sit in her favorite chair and smile out her window.

When I was seven, I asked Cooper what was wrong with her.

He only had one thing to say on the matter: *Dad*.

When he said it, the look on his face scared me so I never brought it up again.

Unlike me, Cooper never had anything bad to say about our mother. In fact, whenever he spoke about her, he would get this sad, almost wistful little smile on his face—almost as if somewhere deep inside of him existed good memories. If that was the case, he never shared them with me. It was almost impossible to imagine her behaving like a normal human being. Like I said before, all she ever did was sit there and smile. Like a doll.

I remembered one time, about two months after Cooper had been taken, I snuck into my mother's section of the house. She had just finished her lunch and Old Bat had left her alone to bring her tray back to the kitchen. It was the only time of the day that she would be left alone I was desperate to hear a voice that wasn't mine. I hoped that maybe if it was just the two of us, she would talk to me—I remember thinking that she didn't even have to say much. Just a few things so I could stop being so lonely.

I pulled up a chair and sat myself down in front of her. I begged her to talk to me for almost an hour until the old bat came back and found me there. She dragged me back to my own room as I kicked and screamed in protest. My ass hurt for days after the punishment the old bitch dished out.

After that I went to see my mother only one other time—right after my first interrogation at SIIPA. I had been nine years old and the experience had been anything but pleasant. I went straight to my mother's room after the car dropped me back home and screamed in her smiling face until my throat felt raw and it hurt to swallow.

Old Bat tried her best to take me out of the room, but I was a lot stronger at nine than I had been at seven. By the time I was finished screaming, the dumb bitch was breathing just as hard as I was. Mother, however, hadn't batted an eye. She just sat there and kept on smiling the entire time.

An adamant nudge against my shoulder brought me out of my reverie. I looked to my left to find Kurt frowning concernedly at me for the second time that day. I hadn't realized that the bell had rung.

Sebastian, who was also in the class and couldn't seem to function unless he was practically breathing down our necks, stared at me with an amused expression on his face. "Are you strung out or something?"

I scowled. "Do I fucking look like I'm strung out?"

He chuckled at that, that stupid arrogant smirk on his face. "Well, you're certainly acting like it. I called you twice before Kurt nudged you."

Ever since my father's visit Sebastian had been a constant pain in the dick. It seemed like I couldn't go anywhere with Kurt without Sebastian tagging along.

I didn't know what was worse—Sebastian's constant presence or the fact that Kurt seemed to mind it less and less as the days passed.

I decided not to respond to Sebastian and wordlessly held out Elizabeth's book to Kurt.

Kurt looked at the book and then back up at me, clearly confused.

"You might as well take it for the rest of the day," I told him. "I'm too distracted to read."

Kurt's eyebrows furrowed in a silent question, but I shook my head. I really didn't want to talk about it. Especially not in front of Sebastian Smythe of all people. Kurt, of course, didn't look pleased with my refusal to say anything on the matter.

"Hey, don't look at me like that, gorgeous. If you can keep secrets then so can I."

His displeasure turned into a full on glare.

Sebastian made a sound of disgust. "You guys are kind of sickening. It's a little disturbing how you can have silent conversations with each other."

"Don't be jealous, Smythe. It's not our fault that you can only get guys who are living on the wrong side of forty and desperate to go anywhere near your clap infested hole."

As per usual, Sebastian's eyes sparked with pleased amusement at the insult. The fucker was always so happy to be insulted. Sometimes I wondered why I even bothered.

"Don't be crabby, Anderson. It's not my fault that you haven't fucked anyone besides Hummel in two mon—ow! Jesus, Kurt!"

I snickered as Sebastian rubbed the abused area on his head where Kurt had attacked him with Elizabeth's book. I shut up real quick when Kurt shot me a look.

'Whipped!' Sebastian mouthed at me when Kurt had his head turned.

I shrugged because it was probably true.

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"I can't believe that sectionals are next week," I complained to Kurt as we made our way towards my car. Stubborn to the core, I had both his and my hand stuffed in my pocket partly because it felt wrong not to be touching him in some way when he was within reaching distance and partly because I didn't want to walk into a pole or something—I had my eyes fixed intently on my phone.

Kurt snorted indelicately. "Yes, Wes seemed to really appreciate the fact that you forgot." *For a second I actually thought that he was going to throw his gavel at your head.*

"Pfft. Yeah, right. He's got a boner for that fucking thing. He wouldn't any more willing to part with it than he would his own dick."

Kurt hummed.

"What? You don't believe me? It's true. Besides, you can't really blame me for forgetting. We've had a lot of shit to deal with lately. The last thing on my mind is some stupid high school singing competition."

"Right," Kurt said, "because you're not competitive at all and you hate singing." *You're excited and you know it.*

"Yeah, yeah—" I started to grouse but cut myself off when Kurt suddenly stopped short.

"Who's that?"

I looked up from my phone and my mouth dropped open. "Fuck."

Kurt's grip on my hand tightened. "Blaine?" he prompted.

I had to swallow a couple times before I could answer. "That's my grandfather."

Kurt took a step closer to me and I couldn't tell whether or not he had done it involuntarily. "What does he want?"

"I don't know," I admitted.

Kurt took another step closer towards me, but kept his eyes locked on the old man who stood about one hundred feet away.

Adam Anderson wasn't a tall man by any means, but he wasn't short either. He was average. *Everything* about him was average—or at least it seemed that way.

He wasn't a particularly striking looking—not in his face or in the way he dressed. He wore a nondescript black hat and coat and he had arranged his body in a relaxed position that was not only nonthreatening, but looked completely genuine. If you passed by him on the street you probably wouldn't notice him, and if you did by some chance, you would easily forget him not long after.

That was the way he preferred it.

"What do we do?" Kurt asked.

I don't know.

"Just—just act normal," I said and started walking again. "He's going to try to shake your hand. Don't let him."

"Why?"

"He can sense abilities with touch." *Just like my father.*

"Oh god," Kurt said, sounding sick.

"We'll be okay," I lied because my grandfather was dangerous in ways my father only dreamed of being. "When I let your hand go, I want you to stop walking and take out your phone. Pretend to be doing

something with it—it doesn't matter what, just don't look up at him—even if he tries to get your attention."

When we were a good twenty feet away, I let go of Kurt and kept walking. He stopped like I told him to.

"Blaine!" my grandfather greeted with an open smile that looked one hundred percent trustworthy. Like the rest of him, he had an unremarkable voice that was easily forgotten. I had to remind myself that he sounded that way only by choice. If he had a mind to, he could have instant command of any room full of people.

He held his arms out for a hug and I indulged him. Unlike my father, he wasn't someone to fuck with. Everything Adam Anderson did was for a reason.

Don't get me wrong—I didn't roll over for anyone, not even a man like my grandfather. I just knew how to play the game.

His hold on me was light and easily broken but I didn't dare pull away until his hands gave me that gentle push that told me he was done.

"Hello," was what I said.

He chuckled softly. "Now there's a painfully generic way to greet a person. *Hello* is such a tired, dreadful word—and so overused."

To that, I said nothing and Adam grinned widely.

"Still such a cheeky bastard. I'm afraid you get that from your father. Your bad manners, too," he said as he peered around me to look over at Kurt. "Aren't you going to introduce me to your friend?"

"I assume you came here for a specific reason?" I asked, stepping into his line of sight.

He blinked in surprise at my abrupt tone before his face lit up with delight. "You see!" he cried good-naturedly. "Such a blatant show of disrespect." He shook his head with an indulgent smile. "I swear it will never cease to amaze me how comfortable you young people are sometimes—you all can't be bothered to conduct yourselves with even a modicum of civility. Well, I certainly remember how manors work... Nice to meet you!" he called out to Kurt, waving jauntily.

I forced myself not to look back and check to see if Kurt was doing what I told him to. Instead I watched my grandfather's face.

He frowned a bit before stark determination sparked in his eyes despite the fact that I knew he probably didn't give a shit about who Kurt was.

"Excuse me!" he called, a little louder that time. "If I might have your attention, young man! I don't believe that we've met!"

Nothing.

My grandfather looked back at me with something that resembled delighted intrigue. "Ha! I tell you, it *never* ceases to amaze me," he repeated with a happy grin. "Times have certainly changed."

I stuffed my hands in my pockets. My grandfather, of course, caught the motion and his glee became slightly subdued.

He cleared his throat. "I see you are getting impatient with me. Perhaps you will introduce me to Mr. Hummel later."

My body flared hot with horror at his unexpected use of Kurt's name and I couldn't stop my surprise from showing on my face.

The silver haired man smiled gently. "Oh, yes, Blaine, I know your friend's name. Kurt Hummel. You two know each other quite intimately, yes?"

Quickly, I pulled myself together. "If you're asking whether I've fucked him, then the answer is yes. But so what? I fuck a lot of people."

"Yes," he mused slowly, pursing his lips. "Yes, I've heard as much."

I shot him a bored look. "Did you come here to talk about my sex life?"

He laughed outright at the question, head thrown back and all. "Definitely not! No, there are some things a grandfather need not know about his grandchildren," he said with a wide smile that made his eyes crinkle at either side.

"What do you want to know then?"

For a moment the smile seemed frozen on his face. It faded slowly but didn't disappear completely. It ended up a secretive little grin that he directed down at the ground. "My son is a complete idiot, Blaine." His eyes flashed up to mine. They danced with an sardonic kind of amusement. "Have I ever told you that?"

"Not in so many words," I said dryly.

"Well, then, I'll say it again. My son is a complete idiot." He clasped his hands in front of him and leaned back against my car. The repositioned stance made him a bit shorter than me. "Would you like to know why?"

I didn't bother with a yes or a no. I knew he would tell me anyway.

"It's because he underestimates you."

I shrugged. "He would disagree."

Adam laughed wistfully. "Yes. Yes, he certainly would, wouldn't he?" He heaved a heavy sigh. "Ah, but isn't that always the way—always the same endless cycle of idiot fathers underestimating their idiot sons."

He shook his head and took his weight off the car to stand up at his full height once more. He walked towards me, almost passing me completely before he stopped and laid a heavy hand on my shoulder. "Say hello to your bother for me."

He patted me twice on the shoulder as a black car rolled up next to him as if he had willed it there himself. He opened the back door and paused to look back at Kurt.

"It was nice to meet you, young man!" he called and then laughed lightly at Kurt's lack of response, shaking his head in disbelief. He got into the car and shut the door and the driver drove away.

Without taking my eyes off the car, I called loud enough for Kurt to hear, "Come here, Kurt."

He hurried over to my side. "What happened?" he asked breathlessly.

I grabbed his hand and started back towards the school. Kurt barely cooperated and I had to pull.

"Blaine, what's going on?" he asked, glancing back at my car. "Where are we going?"

"We're staying here this weekend."

"What? Why?"

I didn't reply. I just kept walking.

"Blaine? Blaine! Stop. Answer me!"

I turned back to him and let every single bit of panic I felt show on my face. His eyes flared wide.

I turned back around.

Kurt didn't say another word.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

The Proper Way to Tell His Story

I did the best I could with it...

I barely felt the difference between the cold outside air and the much warmer inside air when we made it back inside Dalton's illusion of protection. I held Kurt's hand tightly and led him towards the dorms.

I needed to find Sebastian and I needed to do it fast.

"We need to call your dad," I explained to Kurt without him having to ask. I could feel his eyes on me and all the questions that he kept locked up behind his lips seemed to poke out and prod sharply at the back of my head, demanded answers. "But not with your phone or mine."

It took him a few seconds to ask the one question I knew that would inspire: "Why?"

Why? Because my family was insane. That was why.

I needed him to call Burt and make sure that everything was still okay in Lima. Then we needed to tell them to get the hell *out* of Lima.

"Let's just find Sebastian."

"Sebastian?"

"Yeah," I said distractedly. "For his phone."

"Blaine!" someone called and I groaned. Trent.

I didn't stop walking.

"Hey, wait up a sec!" he tried again, though I could tell by the way his voice trembled with movement that he was already making his way over. I didn't slow down until I came to Kurt and Sebastian's dorm. The door was open and Sebastian wasn't there.

Fuck.

Trent caught up to us sounding like he was out of breath. "Man, you guys can sure move fa—" he started, but I cut him off.

"Have you seen Sebastian anywhere?" I demanded.

Surprise showed on Trent's face before he could comment on it and he frowned in confusion before his mouth finally caught up with him. "Sebastian?"

Annoyance rippled through my stomach and I practically growled, "Yes. Where is he?"

Trent swallowed. "Oh—um, I don't know where he—" he swallowed again and held out a manila folder. "This is for you."

I huffed. "Put it in my room then," I said and turned, pulling Kurt as I went to continue looking for the weasel faced bastard. He was always around when I didn't want him to be, but the one time I needed him, he was nowhere to be found. It was fucking irritating is what it was.

"N-No, wait," Trent went on and ran to catch up. "I was told I had to give it to you directly."

That got me to stop, and when I did, Kurt almost ran into me.

I looked sharply at Trent. "*Who* told you?"

Trent bit his lip, looking guilty. "Actually, he didn't really say," he admitted. "He seemed trustworthy and kind of nice...I guess, so I didn't think to... to ask." He winced and then added in a rush, "But he said it was really important..."

"Of course he did," I growled, annoyed at being fucked with.

If you think Kurt is dramatic, Adam Anderson was twice as bad. Everything the man did had to be shocking and over the top in some way or he just wasn't satisfied.

I snatched the envelope out of Trent's hands and when he didn't leave right away, I asked, "Is there some reason why you're still here?"

"O-Oh!" Trent said, as if he only just realized that he had completed his task. "Sorry."

Kurt waited until Trent was gone before whispering, "Are you going to open it?" He barely moved his lips when he spoke and I only just realized how many people were walking around in the hall.

"Not here."

I turned back and pulled Kurt into his dorm for the first time in five days. I shut the door behind us.

I locked eyes with Kurt. He was standing in front of me taking deep, steadied breaths. He had his right hand resting against his pale neck and a strong sense of déjà vu hit me like a wall. Had it really only been a little over a month since that first night I saw him in the student lounge?

His lips turned up in a small smile he probably meant to look encouraging.

I dropped my eyes back down to the large envelope in my hands. I turned it over to the back. My name was written on it, but nothing else.

I turned it back over and unwound the string that was wrapped around that circular cardboard button thing. I never understood why people used the button when the metal clasp was so much easier to open and close, but then I thought that was probably why my grandfather chose it.

I pulled open the flap and reached inside.

There were two things inside. One was a large 9x11 picture of my mother and the other was a folded note, but I ignored the note in favor of reading the message that was written in elegant loops directly in the picture.

Perhaps you'll remember this woman.

I frowned at the words, not understanding what the hell he could possibly mean by *that*. Of course I fucking remembered her. She was my goddamn mother.

Then I heard Kurt gasp and the picture was suddenly ripped out of my hands.

I looked up to find Kurt with the picture held so tightly in his hands that he was crumpling the sides.

"Oh, god," he whispered.

I stared at him.

I didn't understand, but my body recognized the sense of foreboding well enough to respond with feelings of dread.

He looked back up at me with wide, *wet*, petrified eyes. "Do you know her?" he asked.

I felt my mouth open and close. The answer was yes (obviously) but that wasn't what tumbled past my lips when I finally found my voice. "*Do you?*"

I wasn't sure whether he even *heard* my question. There was something wild in his eyes.

"*Who is she?*" he demanded.

"My mother."

Those two words seemed to pull all the breath right out of him. "Mother," he repeated robotically.

I didn't know what to think.

Perhaps you'll remember this woman. The words ran through my mind again, at that point still just as strange as they had been when I read them. For a second I stupidly failed to make sense of anything, but then the reminder of his horrified stare was like a shot of clarity injected directly into my heart. There had been nothing even remotely close to confusion on his face when he had read the words.

It's for him, I suddenly realized.

The message was for Kurt.

I studied his face carefully. He looked like he was a million miles away, trapped in a dark place that he desperately needed to get away from but couldn't.

"How do you know her?" I tried to ask as gently as possible.

"I know her," he said in a tone that indicated he was still in the grip of whatever nightmare had gotten him. *I don't know her. Not really.*

I frowned. "What do you mean?"

He blinked and his eyes found mine. "Nothing." *I don't know her name. No one ever told me who she was—I was only ever told what I was supposed to be doing. I saw her every single day, but I don't even know what her voice sounded like.*

No, he wouldn't. I only ever heard her say two words: darling boy.

That wasn't the time to be thinking about that, though, so I pushed it to the back of my mind.

Kurt had said that he saw her every day. I was damn sure he didn't mean in passing on the street or sitting at a nearby table in his favorite coffee shop.

"When you say that you saw her every day," I started carefully, "do you mean when you were in the testing facility?"

"No," he said. *Yes*, his truth disputed, and he looked so ashamed of it that I could practically see his spirit shatter in his eyes.

It was the one subject we avoided and it was painfully obvious in that moment that avoiding it was no longer a possibility. I *needed* to know, and if the look on Kurt's face was anything to go by, he knew he would have to tell me.

It was a hard conversation to have, and not only because it had clearly been traumatic for Kurt, but because he was forced to choose his words painstakingly thanks to the constraints his condition placed on him. It was a hard thing to watch because it was obvious to me that he wanted to get the story over with as quickly as possible so he could go back to keeping it hidden in the dark pits of his mind where it belonged.

I'm actually going to do something I had thought of as a copout until now. I'm only going to include Kurt's truth. His lies don't belong here. It nearly destroyed me to have to listen to him verbally diminish his own suffering and glorify my bastard father just so the real truth could be heard. I'm not going to put myself through that again. Not for anyone or anything. I could barely handle it then and I sure as hell wouldn't be able to deal with it now.

This is what he told me:

Dad was working late that night so mom and I were eating dinner by ourselves when the doorbell rang.

I stayed at the table while she went to answer it—I was making a teepee out of my utensils or something childish and stupid like that. I just remember being really absorbed in what I was doing when heard a really loud thump. I thought it was weird so I called her name—just to make sure she was okay.

When she didn't answer I remember thinking that maybe I should go check on her but before I could even push my chair out there was a team of people dressed all in black in the house. Their faces were hidden and all of them had guns and I just remember the panic.

I didn't start screaming until one of them grabbed me and started pulling me towards the front door—that was when I saw my mother. She was lying on her back in front of the open door with blood seeping out of her head onto the floor.

They must have put me out after that because seeing her on the floor is the last thing I remember about that night.

I woke up on a cot in a small room. There was a woman sitting in a chair next to me and she had a hand wrapped around my wrist. I felt extremely calm and happy. She smiled at me, and I remembered smiling back at her despite feeling under all the happiness that everything was wrong.

That was when your father came in. He told me his name and he said that I was very important. He told me that I was going to help him change the world.

Nothing really made sense after that. For a while, every morning when I woke up the woman with the curly black hair and the smile would be there with her hand on my wrist. I would be forced to feel false happiness meant to keep me calm. For the rest of the day I would have to practice using my ability. It wasn't horrible at first—it was just monotonous and boring. After I ate in the morning they would move me to a smaller room with a table and then they would bring people in and sit them across from me. Then I would answer questions. Does this man have this or that ability or can this woman do this or can she do that?

Before I was taken, I never used my primary ability. Using it wasn't hard, though—just confusing. I didn't understand what the point of it was and no one would talk to me or answer my questions. For the most part I was happy, though, because of the woman with the smile. The happiness didn't feel right because I still knew

that I missed my parents and that my mother was dead and I wanted to feel sad about those things, but the woman wouldn't let me. I tried my best to feel the way I wanted to feel, but I couldn't.

Empathy is a very broad term and therefore empath's themselves are part of a very broad classification. Some empath's like you, your father, and your grandfather, can merely sense the essence of another person. You can sense the truth when other people lie, but you can't force them to tell the truth. Other empath's, like me and the woman with the smile, can take everything about a person and change it until the only thing that's left of that person is what we want them to be. I learned to hate everything about that kind of empathy. It's one of the worst things one person can do to another and once I began to recognize that my own ability had the potential to be ten times more manipulative than the woman's, I became terrified that one day they would make me use it.

They did, of course, and I've never been able to figure out whether or not it was my fear that made trying to alter another person's ability feel so inherently wrong. Sometimes I wonder whether it would have felt just as wrong regardless of my own opinions on the matter. Either way, the process was emotionally damaging—both for me and the other person.

They started me off small—or at least that was how your father put it. I woke up one morning with him sitting in my room next to the woman with the smile. It was the first time I had seen him since that first morning and he told me that I had done a very good job with everything so far, but that now it was time to push.

He went with me to the room with the table when I was moved after the morning meal. There was a very large, very muscular man sitting in the chair across from mine. He had handcuffs on his wrists and a muzzle looking thing over his mouth. Your father asked whether I could sense his ability and I could. The man had the ability to manipulate water—nothing crazy; he couldn't make it move or anything like that, but he could alter the temperature and turn it to ice and back if he wanted.

Once your father knew that I could sense the man's ability, he told me that it was my job to take that man's ability away.

Once he heard that, the man started crying like a baby and I wanted to cry too. The woman with the smile was still making me feel happy, but I hated myself so much at that point that I could almost feel something that I thought was like sadness. It felt amazing and everything almost fell apart but then your father was there, threatening the woman and urging her to fix my emotions so that I would do what he wanted. Her

hand was like a vice around my wrist, but her empathy didn't seem to be working like your father wanted it to, so eventually he took matters into his own hands and told me that I had two options. Either I took away the man's ability or he would find my father, bring him here, shoot him right in front of me, and then I would have to take the man's ability away anyway.

It took me hours to do it even though after your father's threat I was tried as hard as I could to give him what he wanted. It was the hardest thing I had ever done.

Your father was shouting with rage, the man in the muzzle was sobbing openly, the woman was still smiling, and I felt like two people had grabbed a fistful of hair at either side of my head and started pulling with all their might.

I did it, though. I took away a piece of someone, and he stared right into my eyes and cried the whole time but I did it anyway.

Your father checked the man to see if there was any trace of his ability left, but I already knew there was nothing. He smiled happily at me and ruffled my hair and called me a good sport.

I was seven years old and I hated myself.

The next couple months got worse. Once they had confirmation of what I could do, I was in a laboratory every single day with men in white coats draining my blood for testing and hooking me up to monitors while I took away ability after ability. Some people were happy to have me take their abilities away, but that didn't matter to me, I still hated doing it. Most of them, however, hated me just as much as I hated myself.

I lost interest in eating and feeling falsely happy all of the time started to make me even more depressed even though I was forced to feel happy about that too. Everything in my life contradicted itself.

I had four brain surgeries. After the second one I didn't care when they shaved half my head.

I fell into a routine. Wake up to the smile of the woman with the curly black hair, eat the morning meal, watch as someone came to take the woman away and wish that her damned happiness would leave with her—it never did—go to the lab, take away abilities, lie still while the scientists perform their tests and think about Dad, eat a midday meal, take away some more abilities, eat an evening meal, go to sleep, repeat. That was how it went until one day there was a small change in the routine. Instead of being asked to identify the ability of whatever person they put in front of me before I would take that ability away, the order was

changed to, 'This is so and so, who is a D-whatever and has the ability to blank. Your job is to make so and so's ability stronger before you take it away.' It took me a long time to be able to do it, but I was eventually I mastered that too.

After almost five whole months of constant manipulation practice, I had been in the PC testing facility for nearly eight months and I could manipulate D5 abilities without having to initiate any sort of physical contact, but something was wrong. There didn't seem to be an end in sight. Everyone just wanted more more more and I wondered what would happen when my luck ran out and I wasn't able to give them any more. I worried over it every single day, wondering when it would happen and what they would do to Dad because of it. But again, despite all the worry, thanks to the woman with the smile, I was happy.

I woke up a third time to find your father in my room. He told me that now it was time for the final phase. He said if I succeeded that I would be allowed to go home and see my dad again. I was eight by that time but I wasn't stupid. I didn't believe him.

That day no one came to get the woman with the smile after morning meal and she followed me to the lab.

Your father sat her down across from me and told her, 'turn it off' and just like that, for the first time in seven months, the happiness was gone and everything was properly horrible and depressing and there was nothing to keep me from drowning in it. I blacked out.

I woke up crying three days later and your dad was furious. He dragged me to the lab and he sat me in front of the woman with the smile and he told me that he wanted me to give her a second ability. He said he didn't care what ability it was—weather control, teleportation, everlasting energy—it didn't matter as long as she was able to do something that she hadn't been able to do before and I needed to do it now or they would rip my dad to shreds and I would watch.

It wasn't normal manipulation. It felt wrong and unnatural and it hurt. After hours of nothing, my nose was gushing blood and I had popped a vessel in my eye, but the lab coats kept looking at their monitors and insisting that with just a bit more strain I could do it. Your father was completely out of control—screaming and throwing things. At one point I'm pretty sure the staff kept assuring him that I could pull it off just to calm him down, but he only got angrier the longer it took.

None of that was as bad as the woman with the smile because at that point she wasn't smiling. She was screaming and crying and gripping her head with both hands as if someone had crawled inside her skull and was trying to force his way back out.

I said before that I was doing something unnatural. It felt like I was doing something to force every single cell in her body to change into something they weren't supposed to be. It was agony, but it was possible—I could feel it. If I wanted it bad enough and if I pushed myself far enough I knew I would be able to do it.

But I was getting tired and it physically hurt to see her in so much pain. I had forgotten what it felt like to feel real anguish and it was unbearable. I didn't want my dad to die, though. I thought that they had already killed my mother and I screamed over and over again that I was sorry even though eventually she passed out and I was close to going over the edge too. It was like a black ink had started to fill my vision and I felt dizzy.

Then in an instant everything got really confusing. My mother showed up and the atmosphere turned cold. Mind control is a very dangerous, very powerful emotion and you can feel it right down to the center of your bones, but I was so lost. All I could think was that I had finally broken my mind completely and I was hallucinating. I was so tired that I was slumped in my chair at that point. The last thing I remember is how cold her voice sounded when she gave your father his first command: 'quiet.'

When I woke up the next day I was back home and my mom was dead. For good that time.

Kurt sat against the wall with his knees drawn up to his chest and his arms looped around his legs. He looked off to the right somewhere, but it was clear that he was still just as lost in his memory as he had been when he started the story.

He looked just like a painting. A beautiful painting of the saddest boy in the world.

That had been my first thought when he finally finished.

I was sitting practically on the other side of the room and I was afraid to move any closer.

My second thought was that Kurt had seen the woman with the smile—my *mother*—more times in those eight months than I had seen her in my entire life. He *knew* more about her than I ever had. He knew she had an ability and he knew what that ability was. He had seen her when she was in pain. He had seen her happy. He had seen her cry. He got to see her every single day and I hadn't seen her in over two years. She was more his mother than she was mine.

I didn't know how I was supposed to deal with that.

Was I allowed to be upset about it? Was I allowed to care? Was it wrong that I was jealous of that fact that Kurt had parents who loved him? Was it wrong that I was jealous of the fact that my mother had shared a part of herself with him that she had never bothered to share with me?

And then there was my mother's point of view. Had she thought of me at all when she was with Kurt? Had she looked at his big blue eyes and thought of my hazel ones? Had she been lucid enough to know that she had an angry little boy back home who was dying a little bit each day that he didn't get to see the one person who had taken care of him when no one else gave a damn?

My mother's picture—the woman with the smile—was on the floor at the tip of Kurt's fingertips.

I had my grandfather's note in my hand.

I opened it and read it out loud.

Blaine,

I thought I would write you a letter for two reasons. The first reason is that letter writing is a dead form of communication and I think that's a shame. This is my own small way of rebelling against modern technology. The second reason is that your father is a very nosy man. He has the technological means to keep tabs on anyone he wishes, including his own father and son. I would be immensely surprised if he hasn't been monitoring our cellphone conversations for years—not that I condone such an egregious encroachment on our privacy, but as he is an adult, I no longer have the ability to dictate to him—not that I ever did.

I realize I'm getting ahead of myself. Old age, you know. I shall get back on topic.

I assume that by now you've seen the picture I included of your mother. I also assume that Kurt is with you and he has seen it too. If he hasn't, this will be very anticlimactic—even if I'm not there to witness it myself. If you please, indulge an old man; if Mr. Hummel hasn't seen the picture, please pause in reading this to show it to him before you go on.

Now that we are all on the same page, this will be much easier. Kurt's reaction to your mother's photograph must have been incredibly unpleasant and I do apologize for that. Unfortunately, the unpleasantness must

continue. Running an organization as large and important as SIIPA is a sticky business. Occasionally, for the good of the organization, one must get his hands a bit dirty.

I'm rambling again. How the old mind wanders. Here is the black and white of it: I need use of your Mr. Hummel's extremely lucrative talent. I'll need it rather quickly—and by quickly I mean tomorrow, (the 14th). I realize that this is terribly short notice and I do apologize for the presumption that you will be free, but time is very much of the essence. If you are otherwise engaged, you may want to cancel whatever it is.

Now, I realize that you do not like me very much, Blaine, and that is a pity, but there is nothing I can do about it—you are almost an adult after all, and quite capable of making up your own mind about such things. The point is that I realize that you will be needing some incentive to come and meet me and here it is: it will be very much beneficial to the continued good health of Mr. Hummel's family members and current house guests (Burt Hummel, soon to be Carole Hummel-Hudson, Finn C. Hudson, Logan P. Hummel, SIIPA's very own Everly N. Sanford, Cooper M. Anderson, Santana J. Lopez, and Brittany S. Pierce) for you both to come by to my home tomorrow at 3pm. There is something especially important that I would like to discuss with you both.

Hoping to see you both soon,

Adam Cassius Anderson

"What time do we leave?" was all Kurt had to say on the matter. He looked tired and broken down.

"Twelve," I told him.

There was nothing else to say.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

The Proper Way to Discuss the Unknown Facts

My grandfather would say that a slow build topped with a dramatic climax is the way...

It took me longer than it should have, but I eventually pushed myself to my feet and went to Kurt. He didn't look up at me, which he could have refused to do for several reasons. It could have been because he was still lost in the past, or it could have been that he was angry at me for putting myself at the opposite side of the room as if he was some kind of pariah or something. Either way, angry at me or not, I dropped back down in front of him without hesitation and slid my arms around his neck.

For a moment he was completely tense—a long moment that clenched around my heart like a fist—but then he seemed to lose all ability to hold even the smallest bit of tension in his body and he sagged against me with a sigh.

"I love you," I told him, because after a story like that, I figured he needed to hear it—hell, after my reaction his story, he may have needed to be reminded.

He drew in a long breath at the words and he gently looped his arms around my waist and became even more boneless.

It felt good to hold him—calming in a way I can't really explain. It was a feeling that rolled slowly around my head, sleepy and relaxed. I felt like I could start floating.

"Again," he demanded softly.

"I love you."

I didn't really know what to do beyond that. My list hadn't extended beyond 1) hold him and 2) tell him I love him. But what needed happen next? What was I supposed to do? To say?

There were things in my grandfather's letter that we needed to talk about—disturbing things. The most disturbing was that he not only knew who Kurt was, but he seemed to know that Kurt was a PC. A lot of hows and whys cropped up in response to that, and those questions were only the tip of the iceberg. There

were plenty of other questions to consider. Like, how did he know about Cooper, Britt, and Bitches? Was he the only one who knew? Why hadn't he said anything?

And probably the most important question: what did he want Kurt to do?

Whatever it was, I knew it wasn't going to be good. It would probably be horrible in some way and leave the both of us scarred for life.

That of course, brought up more questions. Was there a way out of this mess? Could we somehow get a message to Burt? Had the Hummel family been taken already?

I guess I should have felt really overwhelmed by everything, and maybe at the time I was in shock, but all I really felt was tired and lethargic. I attributed the feeling with the calming effect Kurt had on me, which, in that moment, allowed me to forget about the large pile of shit the universe seemed to dump on us on a daily basis.

"Would he hurt them?" Kurt asked.

"No," I said truthfully. If Adam *did* have the Hummels, he would do everything he could to leave them unharmed—not because he wasn't capable of harming them, but because a body count drew unwanted attention and if there was anything my grandfather didn't like, unwanted attention was it.

Kurt sighed—probably in relief.

"Bed," he said and I nodded.

The bed sounded damned good. It sounded fucking amazing.

We could both get up, get in bed, and stay there until we died. Such a lovely, happy thought.

We got to our feet like old people—slowly and feebly with heavy limbs and slumped shoulders. We leaned heavily on each other as we walked and fell all over each other when we finally made it to Kurt's bed.

Covers were overrated so we didn't bother. We just fell asleep.

Kurt used his lips to wake me up. It felt nice and he tasted so good and I did my best to wake up fast but my eye lids were heavy and my body felt like it was beyond lethargic. We couldn't have slept for more than an hour if my sluggishness was any indication.

Kurt didn't seem to mind my grogginess, though. He merely moved his lips to other areas as he waited for me to fight off the remaining remnants of sleep.

He traced his tongue down my neck and my body responded to him with a slow building heat. He kissed me from my neck to my chest and then came back up again to dip his tongue in my mouth before he pulled back to look at me. A silent question presented itself in his eyes as his hands curled around my jeans.

When I nodded, he undid the button and pulled them down without bothering to unzip them first. I tried to pull his shirt up, but he danced away and shook his head. I was about to protest when he closed his lips over my nipple and bit me gently. I let my head fall back with a groan.

He didn't stay in one spot for long. He moved his mouth all over me, kissing and licking and sucking at my skin until I was both pliant beneath him and completely wound up. He didn't take my cock in his mouth, but he did press hot, open kisses from base to tip, leaving me whimpering and clutching at the sheets.

I didn't know what switch had suddenly been flipped inside that gorgeous head of his to make him use me as his own human sized popsicle, but when he leaned back to look down at me with sharp, appreciative eyes, I decided I really didn't care. A reason didn't matter as long as he kept looking at me like that.

As I watched him watch me I realized that I had never felt so vulnerable in front of another person before. I was completely naked and gasping for breath between his deliciously masculine thighs, and he was kneeling over me, still dressed with his lips red and swollen and his hair fucked up beyond help.

I rolled my hips up, desperate for some kind of touch, even if it meant I had to grind myself against the denim of his jeans until I came, raw and throbbing. He moved away, denying me relief.

"Kurt," I whined.

He ignored me and grabbed the hem of his shirt. He pulled it up slowly and I whimpered at the sight of his smooth skin and he shot me a look that made it quite clear that I was not allowed to touch. I gripped the sheets hard and he rewarded me by pulling the shirt completely off.

Next he unbuttoned his pants and shoved both them and his underwear down as far as they would go with him still straddling me, which, to tell you the truth, wasn't fucking far at all. It left just the swollen tip of his cock peeking out from beneath his partially removed clothes. It was like torture. The smallest bit of precum clung to the tip and my tongue ached at the sight of it.

He didn't bother himself with it. Instead, he dropped forward to press his mouth hard against mine. I groaned and opened up wide, loving the feel of his tongue shoved into my mouth as far as it would go. He ripped his mouth away from mine too soon only to whisper in my ear and stop my heart.

"Make love to me."

My cock twitched with overenthusiasm at the chance to own his perfect little ass, but doubt clouded my head and I jerked away from his fervently sucking lips.

"Kurt—" I tried, and gnashed my teeth together when he followed me and used his against my ear. "Damn it, Kurt, stop."

"No," he managed between biting licks.

I groaned and pushed hard at his shoulders. His legs might have been stronger than mine, but I had him beat at upper body strength, so it didn't take much effort to force him away from me and back on his knees. Keeping my eyes and mouth off his mostly hidden cock, however, was a different story. I grit my teeth and forced my eyes up to his face.

"Where did this come from?"

He huffed. "Is that really important right now?"

"Fuck yes, it's important. Why does this feel like an I-need-to-lose-it-before-I-die kind of situation?"

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Could you be any more overdramatic?"

"Yeah right. Because nothing you just did was overdramatic."

He shot me a look to let me know what I could do with *that* comment and I heaved a sigh.

"Kurt. Can you please just tell me what's going on?"

"There's nothing going on." *Maybe I'm tired of everyone controlling my life all the time. Maybe I want to make my own decisions.*

"And that includes fucking me?"

He scowled. "Yes." *No, that includes having you fuck me.*

I smirked, patronizing him just a little. "Yeah?"

He huffed. "Blaine."

With a heavy sigh, I let my head fall back against the mattress and I threw an arm over my eyes. What to do...

"Do you really, *really* want this? Because it's not like I can take it all back tomorrow if you decide that it was a mistake."

Kurt pulled my arm gently away from my face and made me look at him. "Why would it be?"

I shrugged. "I dunno," I said stubbornly.

He tipped his forehead against mine. "Please," he said and his lips brushed my cheek when he said it.

"Okay," I gave in because what else was I supposed to do? If I had said no, he would probably hate me for the rest of his life, especially after his little make-my-own-decisions speech. Saying yes meant that I got to give him what he wanted and I would get something that I wanted too.

And, fuck, did I want it. He had wrapped his hand around my cock when I pushed him away and had kept it there throughout our short conversation, ensuring that I stayed hard as a rock and desperate to come. He was a sneaky little shit.

As soon as I agreed, his mouth was on mine and he was rubbing himself against me.

"Hey, hey, wait a minute. Jesus, Kurt, fucking *stop* for a second."

He pulled away with a near growl. "What?" he snapped.

I smirked and kissed his cheek to placate him. "Calm down, gorgeous. It's not like we've got a time limit or anything."

He frowned as if that hadn't occurred to him. "Oh."

"Yeah. Oh." I kissed him again and gave his ass a smack. "Up."

He glared, but shifted off of me. I got up, ignoring his suspicious look, and walked over to Sebastian's side of the room. I figured that the prick had to have lube hidden all over the place, and the good stuff too. I was right, of course, and I stole it out of his nightstand drawer after making sure that it wasn't contaminated with anything that would have forced me to boil my hands. I grabbed a condom too, figuring that he owed me for being such a pain in the ass. I was tempted to take the rest of them, just to piss him off, but I refrained.

On my way back to Kurt's bed, I grabbed the chord that I knew Sebastian kept under his bed and used it to tie off the door so it couldn't be opened even if he used the key to unlock it—Smythe used to fuck around with his previous roommate's boyfriend. The chord kept said roommate out when Sebastian needed him out. And when Sebastian was fucking the roommate, it kept the roommate's boyfriend out too.

When I was finally kneeling next to Kurt, who was propped up on his elbows, I quirked an eyebrow at the look he was sending the bottle of lube.

"What?" I asked.

"Nothing." *We don't need that.*

I frowned. "Yeah, we do."

He huffed and kicked his legs until his pants were completely off. Then he grabbed my hand and brought it between his legs. I look up at him in surprise at the feel of his slick opening.

"Shit," I groaned, because the thought of him prepping himself was almost too much.

He smiled a little shyly.

I pulled my hand away to grab the bottle. "We still need it, though, gorgeous. If you had done this before, we might not, but since you haven't..." I shrugged.

Kurt nodded and slowly lowered himself completely down on the mattress. I frowned when he shut his eyes as if he was waiting for the inevitable.

If *that* was how he thought things were going to go down, he was going to be disappointed. I didn't call him out on it, though. Instead, I shifted forward and kissed him gently. He tensed up, letting me know he was less confident about the whole thing than he was trying to let on.

"It's just me," I whispered against his lips and he whimpered a little bit as he wound his arms around my neck, pulling me close.

Blindly, because like hell was I going to stop kissing him, I reached for the lube and pumped a good amount into my hand. I took a few seconds to warm it before I reached down to grip his cock.

He jerked at the wet sensation and moaned into my mouth as he thrust into my fist. I let him at it for a few seconds before I released him in favor of pressing a finger into his mostly open hole.

"Oh god," he breathed as he tore his mouth away from mine, panting.

I mouthed at his neck and his chest as I worked my finger in and out a couple times before pushing in a second. Despite his prep, he was still pretty tight and I told myself that there was no way I was going anywhere near him with my dick until he could take at least three fingers.

He got to that point faster than I would have thought, and not long after that he was frantically rolling his hips onto my fingers. He had an extremely sensitive prostate, if the way he thrashed and shook when I brushed my fingers against it was any indication. He nearly howled when I wrapped my mouth around his cock, my fingers still greedily probing his hot ass. When I brushed against his prostate that time, he jerked his hips up wildly, jamming his cock down my throat and abruptly came.

I swallowed all of it before I let him fall out of my mouth. I kissed his spent spit, come, and lube covered cock gently and asked, "Do you still want me to?"

"No," he panted. *Yes.*

I kissed him once more before sitting up to grab the condom. I made fast work of tearing the foil and rolling the condom on before I settled myself between Kurt's thighs. I kissed his lips as I pumped a more than generous amount of lube into my hand and spread it over my cock.

I pushed into him painfully slowly and he gasped at the feeling, holding me close with his fingers tangled in my damp hair.

"Blaine," he whispered, releasing my hair to run his hands up and down my back.

I panted against his neck and remained still. Tight. He was *so* tight.

"You okay?" I asked him, but really, I just needed a minute to process the overwhelming feel of him all around me.

"Don't move," he grit out.

"Does it hurt? Do you need me to pull out?" I started to ease myself out of him without waiting for an answer, but Kurt stopped me when he threw his legs around my hips. The quick motion forced me to jab myself into him and Kurt's body gave a full jerk in response.

"Ah!"

I grit my teeth and tried to ignore how good it had felt in favor of making sure he was okay. "Fucking hell, Kurt, how bad did you just hurt yourself?"

He took a few deep breaths. "Wait. Just wait."

I kissed his neck, trying to soothe him. "I won't move until you tell me to, gorgeous."

He nodded, but didn't ease up on the death grip his legs had on my hips. "Kiss me," he demanded and I did.

I kissed him until he relaxed his legs to the point where I could get my hand between our bodies. He gasped and went boneless at the feel of my hand on his semi-hard cock. I angled my head and pushed my tongue deep into his mouth.

It didn't take too much longer for him to start thrusting into my hand, which had both of us groaning when the movement forced me a little deeper inside him.

"Alright?" I asked.

"Again," he begged and I tried to copy the movement with a small thrust.

When he didn't make a noise of discomfort, I did it again, more languidly that time and Kurt let out a long groan. I responded by pulling almost completely out and then gliding back in.

"Ohhh. Fuck, that was good" (amazing, his truth corrected) "Again. Do it again."

I nodded and stopped sucking on his neck to get on my knees, breaking the hold he had on my neck as I went. I wrapped my hands around his hips and gave three quick thrusts.

"Yes," Kurt hissed, eyes shut and his head thrown back. His Adam's apple bobbed enticingly against his throat as he swallowed.

"Fuck, gorgeous, you look amazing like that."

His legs fell completely open and I gave a hard, but searching thrust. The first time I missed, but the second time I found what I was looking for and I delighted as Kurt practically screamed and arched his back for more.

"Look at me, Kurt," I demanded, fucking in and out of him. "I want you to watch."

He forced his eyes open with obvious effort and lifted his head. His eyes went wide at the sight of my cock going in and out of his body. His went from intrigued to dark to smoldering, and he pushed himself up on his elbows, watching hungrily as I fucked him.

"That's it, baby," I groaned. "Grab your cock for me. Yeah, just like that. Don't stop watching."

He didn't. He jerked himself hard and fast and I matched his speed, pounding into him as he nearly sobbed with it. I let out a groan at the dirty sound of his skin slapping against mine.

"Fuck, Blaine, *fuck*. Oh—Oh god, I'm gonna—"

"No," I growled and batted his hand away to squeeze just below the head of his cock with my thumb and forefinger. Kurt let out a broken moan at the sudden halt of his release. "Not yet, gorgeous."

His eyes flashed. "Fuck you!" he spat like the hellion he was, and I grinned.

"If you insist," I said and he frowned in confusion before I rolled us over so that he was on top.

He flailed for a moment, taken by surprise before he steadied himself with his hands on my chest. He glared down at me angrily.

I smirked and gave a sharp thrust into his ass. His eyes went wide and he stuttered out a moan before he could stop himself. He scowled at me when he realized what he had done, but I was way past being smug. My taunting thrust had forced my cock even deeper in his ass than before and I had only just managed to stop myself from coming.

"Come on, baby," I panted, goading him against my better judgment. "You wanted it. Take it."

He seemed to realize that I was hanging on by a thread and he smirked evilly down at me before he lifted his hips and then slammed his ass back down on my cock.

"FUCK!" I shouted and came right then and there.

He didn't stop for a second. He mercilessly fucked himself on me with delicious virgin sloppiness as I shot into the condom with brutal intensity. He barely made it another few seconds before he was coming in white streaks all over my chest.

He dropped down when he was spent, twisting at the last moment to avoid falling on my cum-splattered chest.

I let out a tired, high pitched laugh. "Fucking hell, gorgeous."

He panted next to me. "Did I hurt you?"

"Hurt me? Fuck no, you didn't hurt me. I don't think I've ever come so fucking hard before. Now I know to only have sex with you if you're pissed off."

I yelped when he pinched me hard in the side and grinned me he used on of his glares to tell me he thought I was an idiot, which was probably true.

I grinned dopily at him. "I love you."

He smiled in response and rolled over to kiss me. When he made to pull away, I grabbed him and brought him back, not finished with him yet. He laughed softly and let me have my way for a few seconds before he made his escape. He dodged my hand when I tried to get him back.

"Mess," he said, looking at my chest.

I snorted. "Who cares?"

He ignored that and cleaned me off anyway.

"That was my shirt," I protested halfheartedly.

"So?" he asked and I grinned, knowing what his opinion was about my clothes.

We got quiet after that, holding each other in the dim light, each of us thinking about what the next day could have in store for us.

"Is there another way?" he asked after a long, extended silence, and I didn't have to wonder what he was talking about.

"I don't think so."

He nodded resolutely and shifted a little closer.

I closed my eyes.

We got to my grandfather's house early. I would never have admitted it to Kurt—and probably not even to myself at the time—but I was afraid of pissing my grandfather off. I was positive that things were going to

go from bad to worse once we stepped inside Adam's mansion, and I figured 'worse' would only come sooner if we showed up so much as a second after three o'clock.

My grandfather's house was just as ostentatious as my father's, which didn't really make sense to me. Adam liked to give people the impression that he was just your regular, nobody special Joe Schmo on the street.

Your regular, nobody special Joe Schmo wouldn't have been able to afford so much as a single brick from the behemoth mansion Adam Anderson lived in.

Kurt stared up at it with an open mouth as we drove up the driveway.

"Does he live alone?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said, feeling embarrassed *for* my grandfather.

Kurt's eyebrows shot up. He didn't say anything else.

I had barely stopped the car when my grandfather came out of the house with a wide, welcoming smile on his face.

"I'm so glad that you two could make it!" he greeted happily once Kurt and I stepped out of the car. "How was traffic? I heard on the radio that—"

"Where's my dad?" Kurt interrupted.

Adam's eyes zeroed in on Kurt's face and his smile grew impossibly wider. "Mr. Hummel! It's so nice to finally meet you face to face." He searched Kurt's hands. "Cell phone tucked away this time, I see," he observed and then laughed at his own joke.

"But let's do this properly," he continued and held out a hand. "I'm Adam Anderson, Blaine's grandfather."

Kurt hesitated for only a moment before he shook my grandfather's hand.

We had discussed it on the way over the house and decided that if Adam offered to shake Kurt's hand that Kurt might as well just do it since it was clear that my grandfather already knew more about Kurt than he should have.

My grandfather's grin lost its friendly quality at the skin-to-skin contact. "So much power," he muttered and tightened his grip.

My hands curled into fists at my sides as Adam pulled Kurt closer and stared hard into Kurt's eyes.

"I can see why Blaine chose you," Adam observed quietly. "Just look those intriguing eyes burn. It's like looking at blue fire..."

Just when I was about to lose it, Adam blinked and the intensity was gone from his eyes and the tightness on his lips was replaced with a happy grin. He took a step back and released Kurt's hand.

"Look at us all standing out here in the November cold. I'm a terrible host. Come inside where it's warm."

He led us through the house, pointing out this painting or that 13th century vase to Kurt as if we were on some kind of fucked up tour.

We eventually came to his study and he instructed us to sit down.

"You may take the love seat if you wish, of course. I don't want you to think I'm prejudiced."

With a barely repressed snarl, I lowered myself to sit down on the biggest couch the room had to offer. Kurt sat down to my left and my grandfather took the seat behind his desk.

"Are either of you thirsty? No? You're sure now? It wouldn't be any trouble. I have an intercom system so the maids can hear me from any room in the house. Still no? Alright, alright. Suit yourselves." He pressed a button and leaned over the desk. "Mary, dear, would you be so kind as to bring me my coffee?"

Of course, Mr. Anderson, came the soft reply.

"Thank you."

He leaned back in his leather chair when he was finished showing off. "Now. I mentioned in my letter that I had something to discuss with you both, and we will get to that—eventually. Before we get to specifics, though, I would like to start with a small explanation. You no doubt have many questions for me and an explanation will save us some time, whereas a Q&A has the potential to drag on unnecessarily.

"Kurt—I'm sure you don't mind my calling you that—you're probably wondering how I know you, especially since we hadn't met until yesterday. You see, I don't share my son's obsession with this ridiculous cure business. SIIPA is a fine organization and it has run successfully for decades without one—a cure is, in my opinion, an unnecessary luxury—it could potentially have its uses, but we don't need it. Therefore, I'm sure it will come as no surprise to you when I say that I very seldom venture into the PC laboratories. Most of them are abysmally depressing and poorly run thanks to my son's inability to manage his emotions with any sort of fineness." Adam wrinkled his nose. "He got his berserker qualities from my ex-wife, I'm afraid." He waved a dismissive hand.

"Anyway, that being said, I *do* keep tabs on what goes on in the PC facilities to a certain extent. I keep track of each PC patient we have, but ultimately all I want to know is one thing: have we finally found the one we've been looking for?" Adam leaned forward, looking directly at Kurt. "Until you came along, the answer to that question was always no."

My mouth dropped open. "What are you saying? That they actually found a way to take away abilities without Kurt?"

Adam slammed his fist hard against the surface of his desk with a force that made Kurt and I jump.

"*That*," he exclaimed with a loud, excited shout of sheer (misplaced) jubilance, "is the mission dollar question!" *That is the most important question!* his truth boomed in my head.

A hesitant knock on the open door of the study interrupted the insanity and we all looked to find a young blonde woman standing in the doorway. She was dressed in a sensible (and modest) maid's uniform and held a tray with my grandfather's coffee in one hand. She bit her lip in an obvious show of uncertainty, probably in response to getting startled by my grandfather's sudden assault on his desk. From her jumpy demeanor I figured it was a miracle that she hadn't dropped the damn tray on the floor.

"Ah, Mary! Come in, darling. Right here on the desk is fine."

She smiled weakly and did as he instructed.

Adam watched her with a frown. "Oh, my. Did I startle you just now?"

"N-no," she lied unconvincingly and I scowled at her meek sounding truth.

"Come now, certainly by the look on your face I did. I do apologize. I got carried away."

"It's okay, Mr. Anderson, it's none of my business."

"Still," my grandfather insisted. "Why don't you take the rest of the day off? With pay, of course."

Her back went completely stiff. "But—but I couldn't—"

"Of course you could," he interrupted. "I insist. Now go on and enjoy the rest of your day."

"Well—I—"

He gave her a stern look.

"O-okay. Thank you, sir."

Adam happily sipped his coffee as she rushed out. He chuckled at the sight and put the coffee cup down.

"Now, where were we?" he frowned as if to think about it. "Oh, yes. The million dollar question: did Carl's idiot scientists come up with a formula or DNA based serum—or whatever those sciency types do— to take away abilities without Kurt's assistance? The answer is no." He leaned forward to point a finger at us, adopting Uncle Sam's ridiculous I-Want-You pose. "Why then, you may ask, if Kurt didn't provide us with a way to create a cure, is Kurt that so called one we were looking for? Well, that is because my son was never actually looking for a cure—not really."

What?

"I say not really, because I'm sure Carl would have been quite happy with a weaponized cure. He could have controlled the entire preternatural community with something like that. But, as I said, a cure was not his primary focus. What he was really after was finding someone who had the preternatural means to

provide him with an ability of his own choosing. What that ability would be, I'm not entirely sure—something all powerful and dangerous most likely."

I took my eyes off of my grandfather to look at Kurt. He was sitting ramrod straight in his seat with an expression of utter horror on his face. I looked back at my grandfather, getting the feeling that I was missing something.

Adam sat comfortably in his chair, his elbows up on the desk. "I see you've worked out the implications, Kurt."

"What implications?" I snapped.

Adam slid his eyes towards me. "I'm not sure how much you know about your boyfriend's time spent in the PC facility. I can assure you it was appropriately terrible. His stay, however, abruptly ended when Elizabeth Hummel stormed in and put everything to hell.

"Elizabeth had the ability to use mind control, you see. Your father crossed her, it backfired. He was left with an alternate memory of the entire incident. According to Carl and his entire staff, Kurt Hummel never stepped foot in the PC facility. In fact, Kurt Hummel is filed in our system as a D1 with the ability to breathe under water. Instead of Kurt, your father thinks that it was fourteen year old Angelo Alves who had the ability to manipulate abilities, and that Angelo died in the middle of an experiment after he spent eight long months in the PC facility. Mr. Alves, of course, is not a real person."

Adam grinned. "Elizabeth had always been remarkably crafty. Unlike your father, I learned that it was best to leave her alone. I stuck by that philosophy, even after she died, and allowed your father to believe the false memory she had given him. Like I said, I had no real interest in his work to begin with.

"Anyway, back to the point. The day Elizabeth stormed into the PC facility was the very same day that your father sat your mother down in front of Kurt and told him to give her a second ability. What I didn't know until recently was that Kurt had succeeded."

I was sure at that point that my own face mirrored Kurt's horrified one. My stomach was down at my feet and I was positive that I would never be able to pick it up again.

I turned back to look at Kurt and studied his face carefully, looking for signs. I needed to be sure that he hadn't known what he had done—that it had come as just as much of a shock to him as it had to me.

I wasn't pretty sure that he hadn't, but I needed to be sure.

"Did you know?" I demanded. "Did you know that you gave my mother a second ability?"

He turned his horrified eyes on me and I saw a hint of betrayal there, but I ignored it. I *had* to know.

"How can you even ask me that?" he whispered.

I said nothing.

"Yes," he forced out. "Yes, I knew." *No. I didn't know until today.*

Relief flooded me like a raging torrent and when Kurt looked down at his lap and refused to meet my eyes, guilt followed. I stamped it down and stared at Adam with narrow eyes. "You said you didn't know until recently. How recently?"

"The day the Cooper escaped from the D5 facility."

His hits hit me hard. "W-what?"

"Your mother," he explained calmly. "She got him out."

"How?"

"Teleportation—the absolute strongest form of it at that. Thanks to the very special young man sitting next to you, your mother can teleport anywhere in existence, and she can do it without having been to that place first. Not a single teleporter alive has the ability to do that." His eyes practically glowed when he looked at Kurt and murmured, "You are such a remarkable talent."

Kurt flinched under his gaze.

Adam grinned wide. "Come now, don't tell me that lovely fire in you can be stamped out so easily."

"None of this makes sense," I interrupted my grandfather's leering. "How could you not have known about my mother? Didn't dad—?"

"Your father hasn't touched your mother in years," Adam said, waving a dismissive hand. "And why would he? After Elizabeth got through with him he didn't know up from down. He had no recollection of the little experiment he had forced Kurt to perform on his wife and so that took care of that. Melissa continues to sit in her room smiling the day away. She still has her empathy—" he cut himself off with a frown and looked at me curiously. "Did you know about that? About her empathy?"

I nodded, but didn't mention that I hadn't known until the night before.

Adam shook his head regretfully. "She used to be such a strong, loving person. There was once a time when she had fire in her eyes, too. Your father stamped that out with his damned experiments."

My mouth dropped open. "He experimented on her?"

"Oh yes," Adam said. "In fact, she was the reason he started the PC labs. She was the first person to ever receive a PC classification. Carl thought that her empathy might be the secret towards controlling emotions." Adam rolled his eyes. "A bunch of tomfool nonsense, if you ask me."

He glanced at the clock sitting on his desk. "Oh dear. We are wasting time, I'm afraid. The board will be here in less than two hours and we must be finished by then. I'll cut to the chase. When Cooper escaped, your father acted like a rabid dog and threw a fit ridiculous enough to make a two year old jealous. His reputation took quite a hit for it," Adam scowled.

"But anyway, while your father went on a rampage, I drew up a list of all the potential ways Cooper could have escaped. Teleportation was at the very top and I kept going back to it despite that fact that I knew that there wasn't a teleporter alive who had the ability to do it.

"They would need to have made physical contact with Cooper for one, or been inside his holding cell at one point or another and no one fits that description. After all, the only people Cooper had ever come in contact with were members of our family, that Hispanic girl you are so fond of, and the staff members at the facility. Not a single one of those people could have done it, but there *were* two people who would have if they could—you and your mother.

"Well, as soon as I realized that, I remembered Kurt and what I thought had been a failed attempt at creating an ability. I went to visit your mother for the first time in years, and sure enough, I was right. I could feel her ability to teleport just as strong as I could feel her empathy."

Adam heaved a heavy sigh and leaned back against his chair as if exhausted. "And that, boys, concludes my explanation. It took much longer than I had anticipated." He smiled apologetically. "I do tend to ramble at times."

It didn't conclude anything as far as I was concerned. "What does all of this have to do with today?"

Adam nodded. "Yes, of course. On to the main event." He used the arm rests on his chair to push himself to his feet. "If you'll both follow me..."

I reluctantly got to my feet and Kurt did the same with stiff, jerky movements. He looked like he was walking to his death and I grabbed tightly to his hand and told myself that would never happen despite the sinking feeling that had taken up residence in my stomach.

My grandfather led us to a nondescript door in his study, which led to a well-lit glass elevator that looked out of place in Adam's modern-technology free home.

I nearly froze at the thought of climbing in that little glass box, my instincts screaming that we were walking right into a trap, but Kurt moved right past me and pulled me inside.

The elevator went down. It took us to a large room that was the definition of modernity. It was bright and open and didn't look intimidating at all except for one thing.

In the middle of the room, strapped to a gurney, was a thrashing male body. His wrists and ankles were bound and the cloth bonds wrinkled his expensive looking suit.

When we got close enough to see who it was, my eyes went wide in horrified disbelief and I turned them on my grandfather even as Kurt whimpered and set a death grip on my hand.

Adam smiled down at the raging, gagged man. "Hello, Carl. Your son and his boyfriend have come to visit you."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

The Proper Way to Watch Him Leave

I never knew something could hurt so much...

My father looked up at me with blazing eyes. His face was twisted in a scowl and the gag in his mouth prevented him from snarling like he obviously wanted to.

My mind got lost for a moment as I looked at him, or, more specifically, as I looked at that damn gurney he was strapped to. It was so out of place in the high-tech looking living room I was standing in that it seemed archaic and disturbing surrounded by all of the bells and whistles that modern technology had to offer.

I tore my eyes away from the sight of it to glare at Adam. "What the fuck is going on?"

My grandfather smiled and reached out to pat his son's hand. My father tried to jerk away from the touch, but the restraints wrapped around his wrists prevented it.

"Oh, nothing terrible enough to warrant that disturbed look on your face," Adam said in a reassuring tone of voice.

I seriously doubted that, but decided it wasn't the best time to tell him so.

"We're going to grant a wish," he went on happily, like it was some fun game that we were playing.

My eyes narrowed. "A wish?"

Adam opened his mouth to answer, but frowned instead. "That did sound rather juvenile, didn't it? Let me rephrase myself: We are going to give your father something he—Carl, do stop making that noise. It's absolutely savage-like, for one thing. For another, this pertains to you as well, so you might want to pay attention." He lifted his eyebrows expectedly and waited for silence in an I-can-wait-all-day-if-I-have-to-mister manor.

Breathing hard through his noise, my father stopped snarling around his gag.

"Thank you." Adam smiled. "Now, as I was saying, today we are going to give your father something he had always wanted. We are going to give him a second ability. Or rather, *Kurt* will."

My eyes were as wide and as shocked as my father's. Unlike Carl, however, who stared stupidly at Adam, once the message really began to sink in, rage overcame the shock and boiled the marrow in my bones.

"The *hell* he will!" I exploded.

Adam's brow furrowed. "There is no need to shout, Blaine, I assure you."

"Fuck you," I spat. "He's not doing it."

My grandfather smiled politely. "Actually, I have a very strong feeling that he will. You see, Kurt," he said in a smooth, snake-like voice as he leaned slightly to his left to peer at Kurt, "I can make life for you and your family quite difficult."

Kurt's fingers clenched around the fabric of my shirt, involuntarily pulling the collar tight against my neck.

"Get your fucking eyes off him!" I snarled, stepping to the right to block Adam's view.

Adam merely took another step left, smiled a completely ludicrous apologetic smile, and continued on as if I hadn't spoken. "Now, I do realize that threatening your family members is fighting dirty, but unfortunately I need this done regardless of what propriety dictates. You must understand: I am willing to go to whatever lengths necessary to see that I get my way."

I growled and stepped right again, and that time I grabbed hold of one of Kurt's wrists and pulled his arm around my waist so that his front was flush against my back. Not that it did much given our height difference, but it made me feel slightly better. "Do you even hear yourself? You're out of your goddamned mind! You don't even *like* him!" I raged, jabbing a finger in my father's direction. "Why would you want to make him even more powerful than he already is?"

A feral grin stretched across Adam's lips and I was so surprised to see the kindly old man façade drop without warning that I cut myself off mid-rant, forgetting every single insult that I had been about to throw at him.

"Why, indeed," Adam said in a sadistic tone. "Come now, Blaine. You're smarter than this. Your father has been a menace for far too long. And don't look at me that way, Carl, you know it's true," he admonished with a stern look in my father's direction. "That temper of yours has ruined this family's reputation for the very last time. If you thought that I was going to let you take over the organization after that childish fit you threw in response to Cooper's escape, then you are even more deluded than I originally thought. Such a disgusting public display of total loss of control. It's unacceptable."

He leaned in close to the bound man to whisper, "The truth is, I've already found a replacement for you. But not to worry, Carl, the business will stay within control of the family. Your cousin, Benjamin, in fact. You've never met him, of course—I cut ties with your uncle before Ben was born—but I can assure you that he's a very capable young man." Adam glanced up at me. "My brother was a worthless disappointment with a string of ex-wives and more children than he knew what to do with," he explained as if I actually gave a shit.

He continued, "Most of his ilk turned out to be just as disappointing and stupid as he was—a bunch of lowlifes going nowhere. After he sired his seventh mistake, I stopped keeping track of his offspring. That was a pity because by some happy accident, his eighth child turned out to be quite the prodigy. He is extremely intelligent, and most importantly, he has composure."

He turned back to my father to talk to him directly once more. "Anyway, as I was saying, Benjamin is quite perfect in all aspects for the job, and I have decided that he will be the one to run the organization when I step down."

My father roared at the words, the sound muffled by the gag, but the rage behind it was clear enough. He thrashed against his bonds.

Adam wrinkled his nose and straightened up before he gestured with both hands. "There now, you see? This is exactly what I am talking about. He is not fit to run a global organization."

The gurney threatened to tip over from the force of my father's weight as he flung himself left and right. Adam watched him with disapproving eyes before he finally heaved a giant sigh and moved back a step to lean against a nearby table.

"Oh, stop it, Carl. At the moment, you are still my successor." He glared. "For now."

"You see boys," he said, looking back at me and Kurt, "unfortunately, I have the damned board to think about. They have put a stop to each of my attempts to declare Benjamin as my legatee. Your *father*," he sneered the word, "has them all running scared with their tails tucked between their legs." He shook his head with a scowl. "They absolutely refuse to see reason and do what needs to be done. They're afraid he'll come after them in a vengeful fit of rage, I suppose. Blaine—you and I spoke about idiot fathers breeding idiot sons once. Well, my father had been idiot enough for the both of us. His most idiotic idea was no doubt his decision to equip the organization with a board of directors. All of them—a bunch of spineless moronic fools."

He went off on a tangent of complains then and I let him talk—he was a rambler and he liked to describe things to death, a trait that usually annoyed the shit out of me, but in that moment it had its uses. It gave me plenty of time to look around the room and search for a way to get us the hell out of there.

I figured that if I could just get us out of that madhouse, we could get away—we could figure out a way to hide Kurt's family. We could go to another country or something—somewhere safe and everything would finally be over. But there was no way in hell my father was going to get a second ability.

No. Way.

He was dangerous enough with only one.

Of course, there was a problem with my plan. There was no way out that I could see.

The damned elevator that had brought us down was shut tight and I doubted that I would be able to open it. Instead of the traditional up and down buttons that were typically used to control elevators, there was a key pad that obviously required some kind of code. Adam hadn't used a code to make it go down so I had no idea what it could be.

And since we were underground, there weren't any windows to escape from. It was like being buried alive with two psychopaths (albeit one who was tied up), and for the first time in my life I started to feel claustrophobic. The walls seemed to wobble and bend as if they were taunting me—or deciding whether or not they should start coming together.

"*Blaine!*" Adam said sharply and my eyes immediately snapped back to his.

I hadn't been listening and he didn't look happy about being ignored. In fact, I was surprised to find that he looked completely pissed off—almost feral.

The surprised look on my face must have sobered him, because suddenly his anger vanished and was replaced with his typical friendly smile. "I apologize. That was quite rude of me. I have to admit, I haven't felt this frazzled—no, not frazzled; anxious. I haven't felt this anxious in quite some time and, as a result, I'm afraid that I'm doing a terrible job of explaining myself."

He huffed out an apologetic sigh. "I believed you asked a question earlier. What was it again?" He frowned up at the ceiling, thinking. "Ah, yes. Why would I want to make Carl even more powerful than he already is? That's a good question, actually. The answer to that particular question carries an important lesson—perhaps the *most* important lesson—so please listen carefully, boys." The underlying threat in his voice was explicitly clear.

He paused to make sure he had command of the room—not that there was any question that he was king of the shit pile.

"In order to be in command of anything," he said, "you have to have power. For example, you cannot run a company without having power, whether it is power in money, in persuasion, in connection, in personality, whatever. Having just enough power will get you all the lovely things in the world you want. There is a downfall of course. Having too much power is dangerous. Too much power will result in all of those lovely things being taken away from you. Too much power always—and I do mean *always*—leads to a tragic end. Do you understand what I'm getting at? No? Let's try a different approach. What do we do with people whose abilities are 'too powerful?'"

After a beat of silence, he happily answered his own question. "We lock them up. We take away their human rights and we let them rot in a cell until they die. And why do we do this?

"Many would say that we do it for the good of humanity—to protect people." He rolled his eyes and wrinkled his nose. "I'm sure you know that's all hogwash. That's what people in denial tell themselves so that they can get to sleep at night. In reality, we lock up the powerful because we're afraid. We're afraid of their power and we're jealous of the fact that they have it and we don't. So what do we do in response to those feelings? We do what animals have done since the beginning of time: we eliminate the threat."

His words entered my mind with a click and triggered a memory from a while before. I remembered that Kurt had said something similar. *SIIPA locks people up in the D5 facilities because they pose a threat to a corrupted chain of command.*

Somehow, I knew that Kurt was remembering it too, and from the way he sagged heavily against me, knowing that his outlook on humanity (or lack thereof) was similar to Adam's didn't sit well with him.

"So," Adam continued, "that is what I am doing. I am eliminating the threat. As of now, your father has had just enough power for people to fear what he *might* do to them if they ever were to cross him. In other words, he's had a lot of power, but not so much that people would risk almost everything to get rid of him. That is a problem. I need him gone. So," he slapped his hands and rubbed them together, "if we were to give your father the ability that made him *too* powerful, the board would be forced to take action for fear of what he would do whether they cross him or not—they will take that risk because without it, they're doomed anyway."

He finished his little speech with a smile and I decided that he was sick. He was absolutely sick and I really didn't know why I was so surprised by it, but I was.

He paused to laugh. "My goodness, look at your faces. I'm quite sure that it's not as disturbing and insane as all that. After all, we *are* giving Carl what he always wanted, are we not? And the giving doesn't stop there. There's more.

"Just think of all the good things that will happen once he is gone. The family name will be saved from slander, an Anderson will still be in power, and I will die knowing that the legacy I have worked so hard to build will not be crushed by the delusions of a madman. More importantly, though, the both of you will be able to sleep easier at night." He smiled kindly—like how a kidnapper might smile as he stretched out a hand full of candy. "Cooper will be safe, Blaine—I give you my word that I will not attempt to bring him back to the D5 facility. I will extend the same courtesy to Ms. Pierce, of course."

"And Kurt," Adam said with and piercing eyes. "You could avenge your mother's death. You could avenge your own suffering. And if even that isn't enticing enough, just think of all the lives you will save by taking Carl out of the equation. He will never be able to hurt another person ever again."

Behind me, Kurt was stiff as a board. Adam studied Kurt's face carefully and must have found something he liked because he smirked just a little bit. Seeing it made my heart feel cold and dead.

I spoke up. "You say that like he'll die Kurt if does what you want."

He turned his eyes on me. "Perhaps," he said calmly.

"Perhaps?"

"Not by Kurt's hand, of course. Not directly, anyway. Really, it depends on what sort of ability manifests once the procedure is complete. I do have a preference, of course, and Kurt I would ask you to try your absolute best to honor that preference. You see, after Elizabeth's attack on SIIPA, a discussion had to be had—a discussion about what should be done in the event that another person with ability to use mind control was found. The worst case scenario? Immediate termination with no questions asked. It was a unanimous decision. This is news to you, Carl, since you were not present for that particular discussion." He sighed. "Had you not been raging over a lost opportunity at the time, you would have been there. Perhaps then you would have seen this coming. Once again, you can see that your berserker nature is your ultimate downfall."

He ignored my father's answering howls.

"Oh, and one more thing." He pushed himself from the table he had been leaning against. "Kurt, if you still are not convinced, allow me to be very, *very* blunt at this point. You might not be willing to do this, but I assure you that the fifteen armed agents surrounding your house at this very moment are more than willing to go into your home and kill every last person there. As I said before, threatening lives is a dirty way to do business and I do apologize for it, but I am out of options. It just so happens to work in my favor that you are out of options as well."

He clasped his hands together once again—that time with finality. "Well. I think that's enough talking for now. I believe I've said everything I needed to say. Let's begin, shall we?"

I pulled Kurt's arm more securely around my waist—whether it was to pull him closer to me or just to keep him from moving away, I wasn't completely sure. All I knew was that Kurt wasn't going anywhere. "He's not your fucking puppet. Fix your own fucking problems."

Adam sighed. "Always so difficult. You should know me well enough by now to realize that I always plan ahead for these sorts of things," he said. Then he called a foreign sounding name that sounded like gibberish to my ears and man I had never seen before came into the room—not by any kind of normal

means. No. The fucker had to step right through the goddamn wall like a giant Houdini. I say giant because the man, who had caramel colored skin and impossibly dark eyes, was fucking huge. Taller than Finn could ever hope to be kind of huge.

I instantly stepped back, taking Kurt with me.

We had to leave, I realized.

The man started for us, taking his time. He looked like the very definition of aloof.

We had to leave *now*.

"Kurt," I hissed from the corner of my mouth. "We're getting out of here."

Kurt said nothing.

He said nothing because he knew that there was no way that we were going to get out of there. He knew it, and, deep down, I knew it too.

I knew it, but it didn't matter. I still had to try. For my own sanity, I had to believe that I would get us out of there—that I could protect the person I loved and keep him safe.

But I could feel his resignation to succumb to the inevitable race through his veins like quicksilver. It seemed to seep from his skin into mine, making my body hum with it—I had to fight against it as I looked around for something to even our shitty odds.

"Blaine," Kurt said, and I knew he had already made up his mind.

I couldn't accept it. I twisted my fingers around his and held on as tight as I could. Time was up.

"Run."

I didn't give him the chance to protest. I shot off like a bullet, taking him with me. We got about six steps before the man was right in front of us. I took a sharp left to avoid him, but suddenly he was there again, even closer that time. He wasn't teleporting or anything like that—he was just really fucking fast.

I tried to dive away but he caught the back of my hood and sent me flat on my ass. I lost my grip on Kurt's hand when I fell, but I was back on my feet in an instant. The man was already reaching for Kurt when I dove and it was only by millimeters that he missed his mark as I tackled Kurt to the ground and away from the man's grabbing hands.

We fell hard, and I barely registered the impact before there was a hand on my hood for the second time. I gagged as I was hurled backwards.

I was sent flying—actually fucking flying—like a damned ragdoll right into one of those pointless decorative tables that people put potted plants on—only that one had a lamp on it and it went crashing to the floor as I landed hard on top of the wooden table. My landing was hard enough to break wood and each snap seemed to bite at my skin with a sting that was powerful enough to make my bones ache.

It hurt like an absolute bitch. My body seemed to go on shut down. That one instant of pain and I was ready to curl up and go to sleep just so it could go away for a while.

Obviously, that wasn't an option.

It was nearly impossible to force myself to stand up, but I did it. My head was spinning and I was exhausted, but I tried to ignore all of those things as I bent down to pick up a broken table leg. It was still partially connected to the rest so I had to pull with both hands until it came free.

I stumbled back at the sudden lack of resistance and somehow managed to stay on my feet.

It's funny how dramatic moments like this seem to go so fast. Just one thing after another—boom, boom, boom, done. The shitty part was that for as much as everything seemed to speed up, my body seemed to slow to a crawl.

I grit my teeth and turned to face the silent giant.

He was standing a few steps away, waiting—calm. I looked right into his dark eyes as I hoisted the table leg over my shoulder like a baseball bat.

As I walked closer, he didn't move. He didn't so much as get into a defensive position. He just stood there and waited until I was close enough to swing the makeshift bat as hard as I could.

It sailed right through his skull as if he wasn't even there.

It fucking figured.

With nothing to stop the momentum of the swing, I spun through and fell.

On my hands and knees, I swayed for a minute and waiting for the world to go back into focus. When I was no longer seeing two of everything, I looked up and just in time to catch the giant booted foot sail towards my face. I didn't even have time to register how much it hurt before I fell headfirst into a deep black nothing.

I woke up with that uncomfortable feeling you get when you spend too much time upside down—it's kind of like a hard pressure at the very top of your skull, as if your head is full so much blood that it might pop at any moment.

As soon as I opened my eyes, I found out why. I was laying on my back, arranged carelessly upside down on one of my grandfather's couches with my legs draped over the back cushioning and my head dangling off the edge of the seat. I could remember sitting that way on the couch when I was little just so I could watch TV upside down. I remembered thinking it was fun. If I could have, I would have gone back in time and smacked five year old me upside the head for being such a fucking idiot.

Gingerly, I lifted my head and the pressure from all the blood that had collected there rushed back to where it was supposed to be. Losing the pressure hurt almost as much as having it there did, but it was quickly forgotten when I heard a soft whimper from Kurt.

"Kurt?" I groaned and rolled blindly. I dropped down to the floor like a rock and for the first time I realized that the skin around my left eye felt hard and swollen. When I tried to open it, it refused to cooperate and it throbbed painfully with each passage of blood cycling through my veins.

I looked up just in time to see Kurt collapse into my grandfather's arms. He looked weak and sickly and his skin had turned a pasty white color.

"Easy," Adam said. "Easy. There you go. Rest there. Rest."

His words were comforting, but his movements were rushed and impatient as he lowered Kurt to the ground. As soon as Kurt was down, Adam was up and hovering over that stupid gurney with giddy excitement. I couldn't have cared less about what he was doing, though. All I saw was Kurt, who was sprawled out over the floor as if he was already dead. Blood dripped steadily from his nose and a vein stood out in the middle of his pasty white forehead.

I used my tired arms and legs to crawl to him and his big blue everything eyes locked on mine when I was half way there. *I'm sorry*, they said and I wanted to cry because that was all wrong. I was the one who I was sorry. I was sorry I had ever met him. I was sorry I had ruined the normal life he had made for himself.

When I was close enough to reach, I put my arms around him. I kissed him where I could reach—the corner of his eyebrow—and I closed my eyes and wished that we were in our someplace else, sitting in Kurt's car, and wasting the day away in each other's arms and looking out of the window and the big gray sky.

"Genius," Adam's awed voice broke into my wishes and crushed them to less than dust. "It's absolute genius." Excitement bubbled out of him with a laugh. "Do you feel that, Carl? Do you feel the power that's there at the tip of your tongue? You could have anything you wanted now—if I were to remove that gag, that is."

The gurney rocked and jerked, its wheels slapping angrily against the floor.

Adam went on calmly, as if he was strolling through the park in the spring. "I can't even imagine how frustrating it must be to have all that power and not be able to use it... I do believe that you are more powerful than even Elizabeth was." He took a deep breath through his nose, like he was hoping that somehow he could inhale the raw power he felt under his fingertips. "If you could talk then this would be my nightmare, wouldn't it? I would spend the rest of my life staring into space if you told me to. I can see that you want to, but," he tapped the gag, "you can't."

More angry slapping was followed by more calm talking.

"Still—you should be happy. Being that you need to speak to use your new ability, your tongue may very well be the only thing you lose when this is all said and done."

I wanted to kill him.

More than anything I wanted to kill him and I thought about how as I stared up at him and imagined all the possibilities.

He must have felt the disgust in my stare because he turned away from my father to look at me. He looked fascinated rather than scared—not that I can blame him for it. I was beat up and laying on the ground of fuck's sake. Not much of a threat there.

"Such anger," he murmured as he stared transfixed. "If you could, you would kill me right where I stand, wouldn't you, Blaine?"

I would. I knew I would.

He smiled sadly. "You would have been such a good successor had it not been for all that hatred you carry inside. Yet another loss we can blame your father for." He looked back at my father and the awe returned to his expression as he pressed his hands to his son's cheek. "Yes," he said as he closed his eyes. "Definitely more powerful than Elizabeth. Much more. Kurt did an excellent job."

He breathed in deep as he used his ability to study the power at his disposal. After a few moments he opened his eyes and glanced at his watch.

"It's almost time now. The board should be here any moment. Just one last thing." He looked at the two of us. "I'll need you both to separate now."

I held Kurt tighter. *Not happening, asshole.*

He sighed. "Always the difficult way with you." He called that foreign sounding name again and the giant man appeared like a shadow. Just seeing him made me feel absolutely drained of all life.

My eyes rolled shut against it all.

I'm so tired, I thought.

And I was.

I was exhausted. All I wanted was to sleep—right there, safe with Kurt.

"Just let us go," I heard myself say. "Please. *Please*. I need him."

Begging.

It was probably one of the lowest points of my life.

"I can't do that," Carl said. "Surely you must have seen this coming?"

"Seen what?" I asked sluggishly. It felt like the only ability I had left in me was to lie there and listen.

"This," he repeated as if that helped, which of course it didn't. "After our conversation about power, you must have known."

His voice sounded so close and when I opened my eyes, there he was, kneeling over us, looking at me.

"As much as I wish there was another way, certain abilities are just too dangerous. Do you know what I'm trying to say? I'm saying that *Kurt's* ability is too dangerous. It's an unnecessary risk and precautions must be taken."

"No," I moaned brokenly at the words as my stomach caved in.

"Yes," Adam insisted. "It has to be done."

No, I thought again. They would have to squeeze the life out of me before they could take him out of my arms.

"I cannot leave loose ends to unravel."

The sick part was that he wasn't even lying. I don't think he lied once to me in my entire life. He truly believed every disgusting word coming out of his mouth. If his evil truths had been physical things I would have shoved them right down his goddamn throat and held them there until he choked to death.

Finished with his games, he took a step back as the other man stepped forward.

It was around that time that I started repeating myself. It started with one choked 'no' and suddenly I could stop. I probably looked and sounded completely pathetic, but I didn't care. Kurt stayed completely silent and I grew louder. I kicked my feet when the man came down on us and tried to push him away but he forced us roughly apart without effort. I screamed as I attacked the man's legs as he hauled Kurt into his arms, and I screamed with my mouth stuffed full as I bit him with all of the force my jaw could allow.

Each time I managed to get a grip on him, I was able to hold it for only a second before he became incorporeal and literally slipped through my fingers—that was when 'no' turned into senseless screams—hoarse yells and grunts and inhuman sounds that should never have to be desperate enough to make.

Kurt didn't even try to put up a fight, but his eyes were so sad as they begged for me to stop.

And then suddenly everything changed.

One minute I was screaming like a mindless animal because that bastard had my entire everything in his arms and the next my mother was suddenly there, standing right next to the man who had Kurt, and my brain nearly short-circuited.

I couldn't process what was happening. I gaped at her, stunned into silence at her sudden, random presence that just made no sense at all.

I could only watch stupidly as my mother reached out a hand, taking no notice off all of the stunned and confused faces as she touched Kurt's cheek.

And then in that one second—*the very second*—that she touched him, the two of them were gone. The giant man was staring flabbergasted at his empty arms.

They were *gone*.

Completely and utterly gone.

As if neither of them had been there at all.

CHAPTER THIRTY

The Proper Way to Talk to Dolls

My mother always reminded me of a pretty doll...

Ever since I met Kurt I had stayed as close to him as I possibly could. It was like a compulsion—magnetic, automatic—a need more than a want.

Whenever he was gone, I felt his absence like a physical ache and a new kind of compulsion would set in—a compulsion to find him and be with him again. The top layer of my skin would hum with it until it seeped down into my bones and ate me alive.

I needed Kurt like I needed blood in my veins.

As I stared brokenly at the silent giant's empty arms, the air around me became thick and toxic and my blood felt crusty and dry as sand.

Kurt was gone.

But not the normal kind of gone—the supernatural kind. The kind that left very little possibility of finding him again.

Gone.

Gone.

I had no idea where he was, no idea where to find him, or even how.

He's gone.

I looked at Adam and I realized for the first time that the look on his face was wrong. It wasn't shock like I had originally thought. It was something slightly different—he looked surprised, yes, but surprised in a thoughtful, calculating way—a way that told me that he had been expecting my mother to show up, but hadn't been entirely sure whether or not she actually would.

He knew, I thought. That fucking bastard actually knew.

Something dark welled up inside me.

"Where is he?" I demanded.

Adam looked at me. He looked so calm—relaxed and at ease. It was difficult for me to make sense of it. Then he smiled kindly at me and on the surface it was just right—friendly and pacifying, but there was something deeper that was off; something about the twinkle in his eyes reminded me of a scientist who had just made a breakthrough discovery.

"I can assure you, I have no idea where he is."

"You knew this was going to happen," I accused and he chuckled.

"Not knew," he said with that same twinkling grin. "Suspected."

My hands were shaking again. I wanted to choke him more than ever. "What's the difference? You still had an idea."

"There is a huge difference," he said, but didn't elaborate. Instead, he sighed in an almost dreamy sort of way. "I must say this experience has been much more entertaining than I thought it would be. It's a pity that I can't take the time to really enjoy it." He checked his watch. "The board will be here any minute and the show isn't over yet. Not for me, at least, and certainly not for your father." He looked up at me through his lashes. "You, however, must leave now."

"No. I want to know where Kurt is."

He was back to looking at his watch. "And I've told you already that I do not know." He sounded distracted, like he couldn't waste another thought on the person whose life he had just destroyed. "Besides, you may want to keep in mind that wherever he is, he is safe so long as I cannot find him, so let us hope that your mother has hidden him very, *very* well. The moment he comes out of hiding, I will have no choice but to dispose of him. I meant what I said earlier—his ability is a dangerous one and because of the threat it poses, he must be eliminated. Fortunately for your Mr. Hummel, I cannot eliminate what I do not have."

He turned away from me and started for the elevator. As he put in the activation code, he started talking again and it took me a minute to realize that he wasn't talking to me but to his silent giant, who just stood there looking emotionless and gigantic. "I'll need you to escort Blaine outside. Once he is safe in his car, give the order for the Hummel's property to be cleared." The door of the elevator swooshed open and he stepped inside. He turned and winked at me. "I am a man of my word. Don't forget to say hello to Cooper for me." The doors closed.

Seconds after the elevator door closed, the seven foot giant was by my side. He wordlessly put his hand on my shoulder and forced me forward. I stumbled, but he kept his hand on my shoulder and steadied me as he walked us straight towards a wall. My stomach flipped when I realized that he meant for us to walk through it. It was more terrifying than it should have been—probably because every instinct I had was screaming at me to stop before I walked into solid brick.

I shut my eyes when we went through the first wall, but that made me feel sick to my stomach so I kept them open for the next one. It was like moving through water. The wood seemed to turn into an alien liquid and it made me wonder whether the man's ability was to make himself incorporeal or just everything else.

Eventually we were moving underground through liquid rock and dirt, and I discovered what it felt like to feel claustrophobic. The giant kept a strong grip on my shoulder, but I reached out and closed a tight fist around the fabric of his shirt. The fear of losing him and being trapped underground until I asphyxiated became very real. I tried not to wonder how I was still breathing and decided that it was better just to be damn glad that somehow I still was.

Eventually I got the feeling like we were moving up—like there were a series of staircases under the ground that no one knew about, but I didn't open my eyes (I had closed them again, dizziness be damned straight to hell) to confirm it.

Even though I had been breathing semi-normally the whole time, I took a deep gulp of air as soon as I felt the air on my skin. I blinked furiously and tried to regain my sense of what normal should be, but by the time we got to my car, even the ground seemed to be trying to turn to liquid under my feet, which started to seriously fuck with my head. It got worse when the stoic giant shoved me right through the front door of my car without allowing me to open it the normal way.

I sputtered a little and reached out with both hands until I felt something solid. It took me a few minutes, but once I felt less like an unstable basketcase, I put both hands on the wheel and took a deep breath.

It was a confusing few minutes. It's hard to describe exactly what was going on in my head, but I was in a kind of limbo. I sat there wondering what I was supposed to do. Only a couple hours before Kurt had been in the seat next to me. He had been *right there*. Close enough to touch.

He's gone.

I glanced in the rear-view mirror for a look at my face.

The entire left side was swollen, but my eye looked the most fucked up. The little bit of it that I could see was red instead of white, which looked pretty creepy in contrast to the hazel green color of my iris. Looking at it made it hurt more so redirected my attention elsewhere.

A quick sweep of the area told me that the man was gone.

My hands tightened on the wheel.

I knew I couldn't just sit there. I had to do something—go somewhere.

A kind of buzzing sound erupted in my ears.

I fished my keys out of my pocket and turned my car on. I drove.

The house looked exactly like I remembered it, even after two years—gigantic and standoffish.

I parked my car in the middle of the horseshoe shaped driveway and got out. I didn't have a key to the house—it was one of the first things I got rid of after I left—so I knocked on the door and waited impatiently.

I tried to stamp out all hope that by some one-in-a -million chance, Kurt was in there, just waiting for me to come get him, creeped out of his mind by my mother's endless grinning, but at the same time awed by her old-time fashion choices, which I knew he of all people would appreciate.

But that kind of hoping was dangerous—in my gut I knew he wasn't there.

The door opened a crack and a pair of cold eyes peered out at me before they widened in surprise. The surprise didn't last long and was quickly replaced by scowling suspicion.

The door opened all the way to reveal a stern looking old woman. Her gray hair was pulled back into a too-tight bun that brought back a lot of unhappy memories. When I was little I used to look at her tightly pulled back hair and worry that it would pull her ugly face right off her skull. I would have nightmares of her walking around with only a skull and that tight head of hair.

She had glared mercilessly at me when I was a child and she glared mercilessly at me then, like I was a squished insect that had come back to haunt her. I glared right back at her. I would have happily gone another thousand years without having to see Deborah Burke's stupid pulled back face.

She parted her crusted lips to talk. "What are you doing here, Blaine Anderson?"

I mentally cringed at her use of my first and last name. She had *always* addressed me like that—she always addressed *everyone* like that—always with their first and last name.

"I need to see Mom."

She stared at me, searching my face. Her upper lip curled. "That is absolutely out of the question. Just look at your face. Obviously you've turned into some kind of brawling hooligan."

"I wasn't asking your permission, O.B.," I said and shoved my way into the house.

O.B. was short for Old Bat—Cooper's idea, of course, but that didn't mean that I couldn't borrow it, especially since I knew she hated it.

My ex-nanny sputtered indignantly at being man handled by the person she used to bully and chased after me as I started walking towards my mother's wing of the house. "Impertinence!" she squawked like a chicken. "Impertinence! Get out of this house, Blaine Anderson! You made your choices. You do not live here anymore. Get out before I call the police!"

I rounded on her suddenly and she gasped a little as she stopped abruptly to avoid walking right into me. I grinned sinisterly down at her, pleased to note that for the first time since I could remember, I was the

taller one. When I was little, she seemed like a mighty giant who was fit to tear me down. She used to terrify me. Now the idea of it was laughable.

"Go right ahead, O.B.—call 'em. I'll use my satanic powers to flay the fresh from their bones. And then I'll do the same to you."

Her mouth dropped open and she stared up at me with weary eyes for a moment. Then her expression turned hard and smug. "I don't believe you, Blaine Anderson. Your brother was the abomination. You were just the scared little boy who cowered behind him."

Deborah actually didn't know anything about preternatural abilities. She didn't have one and she didn't know that they existed. She was just crazy religious and obsessed with the devil. In her warped mind, God had given her the power to see the devil inside of evil people, which was basically anyone that she didn't like. She was fucking batty—not that years of witnessing Cooper's telekinetic fits had helped her mental state, but I swear she was nuts long before my father hired her.

Thinking about my father made me think about everything that had happened that day and I let the grin fall off of my face. I stared at Deborah with cold, dead eyes and the smugness on her face fell away almost instantly. She took a step back.

"Do I look like a scared little boy now?" I asked, stepping closer to her, crowding her space.

Fear seeped in just before she closed her eyes. Her lips moved rapidly in what I can only imagine was a prayer.

I snorted and took a step back as I rolled my eyes. "Stupid bitch."

That time she didn't follow me when I turned and walked away without stopping to think about how much I had enjoyed scaring her.

I felt a thousand different emotions as I walked through the halls of my childhood home and they all twisted together in my stomach like one big knot. The knot ballooned when my eyes landed on the open double doors that led to my mother's rooms.

I couldn't see inside yet, but I knew that the room would be the same as it had been two years ago, and when I rounded the corner where the wall met the doorway, what I saw confirmed what I already knew.

Everything was exactly the same: the sitting room was the first room you entered when you stepped through the doors, where you would be forced to squint to adjust to the sudden onslaught of bright light from the setting sun. The entire back wall was lined with windows—just one right next to the other, all of them spaced only about three inches apart. The room was massive, so there were about fifteen of them that overlooked the lake in the backyard.

And there, sitting in the corner of the room, sat Melissa Anderson in her upholstered white chair—separate from all of the other white upholstered furnishings, as if the even the room recognized that she didn't really belong. Still, she smiled happily as she looked out at the lake below and studied the fallen autumn leaves that surrounded it.

My mother didn't turn away from her window to look at me, which wasn't surprising. Unless you obstructed her view, she would be content to stay lost inside herself all day long.

As I watched her watch the outside, the balloon in my stomach expanded a little bit more. The longer I stared at her familiar face, the more unfamiliar it seemed. Her features began to wash together and I started to imagine her with no face at all—just a blank head of hair that had taken my heart away from me. I frowned, trying to make sense of it.

I began to feel like I was teetering on a line. One side of that line was a very dangerous place to be.

Something cold gripped my heart and I tore my eyes away to take a few deep breaths.

I was going crazy.

Hesitantly, I peeked back at her. She looked normal again.

Keep it together.

Kurt wasn't there. He hadn't stepped foot in the house. I could feel his absence pumping through my veins, making me feel erratic.

I shook it off.

I walked towards Melissa. Someone—probably the old bat—had dressed her in a flowy white dress that made her look ghost-like.

No Face flashed before my eyes again and I blinked it away.

Slowly, I kneeled down in front of her.

"Mom."

With painful slowness, she turned away from the window and looked at me. When our eyes met, the stupid rhyme I used to chant when I was little came back to haunt me.

My raven haired mommy with eyes like a dolly.

Cooper hated it when I sang that song.

"Mom, do you know who I am?"

Melissa Anderson said nothing. She just kept smiling beautifully at me.

"It's Blaine," I told her. "I—I'm Blaine—your son." I paused to see if she would give me a reaction. I shouldn't have bothered. She didn't so much as blink. I started talking again. "You took someone away from me today—someone very important. I need you to tell me where he is."

Melissa lifted a white hand. She caught my curls in gentle fingers.

I reached up and pulled her hand away. "Mom," I begged. "Please. Please tell me. You've never done anything to help me in my entire life. I need you to help me now. I need you to take me to see Kurt."

"Kurt," she said.

My heart stopped.

My hand tightened involuntarily around her wrist. She didn't react to it, but the second I realized what I was doing I loosened my grip.

Easy, I told myself. Go slow. Be easy.

"Yes. Kurt. Where is he?"

"Kurt," she said again.

My heart fell. She was just mimicking me. Did she even know who I was talking about?

I studied her vacuous smile and her hazy eyes. Where would she have left him? Did he have food? Did he have a place to sleep? Was he alone? Was he scared?

She looked right into my desperate eyes and touched my cheek again. "Darling boy," she whispered. Then she giggled.

My shoulders slumped. I was in over my head.

I shoved my hand in my pocket and pulled out my phone. I unlocked it and pulled up the first picture of Kurt I could find. "This is Kurt," I said, turning the phone so she could see. "I need to see him. I need you to use your ability—the one he gave you—to take me to see him."

The smile on her face fell and she looked at Kurt's picture with sad eyes. "Kurt," she said again, and her eyes filled with tears. She reached into her pocket and pulled out a phone—Kurt's phone.

The balloon of emotions in my stomach popped.

"That's Kurt's," I whispered, staring at the black screen. I looked back up at her wet eyes and everything seemed to kick into overdrive. My heart raced faster than I thought possible, spurred on by the remaining fear and desperation that I felt inside. "What? Why are you crying? Is he okay?" I dropped my own phone and gripped her shoulders hard. "Tell me where he is!" I shook her.

She made a startled noise and gripped my face with both hands. I registered the feel of her fingers and a warm shock. Then, like the flick of a switch, everything stopped. Everything changed.

I stopped shaking her and smiled.

Everything was wonderful.

Everything was the best it had ever been. It was amazing, beautiful, fucking marvelous, and *wonderful*, and even those words weren't enough to describe how utterly awesome everything was—how awesome everything *felt*—how awesome *I* felt.

I looked up at her in adoration. She had made me feel that way. She had forced me to feel that way, just like she had forced Kurt all those years ago. She used her damnable empathy to confuse me emotions and make them her puppets. She made everything wonderful again.

I hated that she had done it, but at the same time I was glad that she had done it. In fact, I loved that she had done it, and I loved that I hated that she had done it.

The conflicting emotions messed with my head until I felt a cold frustration under my skin. It bashed against my insides, furious and trying to get out despite the fact that it was trapped under the much stronger feeling of false elation.

I was furious.

It was wonderful to be furious.

I giggled at the sheer joy I felt.

My mother looked at me with wide eyes. "Home," she whispered. "Go home."

Home.

What a wonderful suggestion.

I would do it—because it was so wonderful.

But where was home? I didn't really have one.

Kurt felt like home. I was sad that he had been taken away from me, but that was okay. Things were still wonderful. It was wonderful that he was gone and it was wonderful that I was sad about it. Everything was wonderful.

Home would be wonderful too.

Home was a wonderful suggestion.

I would go to Kurt's home, since that was the next best thing to being with Kurt himself. I could go to his room and wrap myself up in his blankets that smelled like him and it would make me sad, but it would still be very, very wonderful.

I smiled at my mother one more time, showing her all my teeth because wasn't that lovely?

Then I kissed her cheek and walked out of her room.

When I passed O.B. clutching a cross to her chest, I smiled at her too. She took a step back and held the cross out to keep me at bay. I laughed happily and gave her a hug and a kiss. She screamed in my ear so loud that it made my vision blur for a second. She shoved me roughly away and I stumbled back.

O.B. was such a bitch—it was wonderful.

The car ride was amazing. I smiled at everything that was wonderful, which was pretty much everything—all the trees, the other drivers that gawked at my car as I drove by, the birds in the sky—it was a miracle that I didn't drive off the damn road, but even that would have been wonderful so it wouldn't have mattered anyway.

It was completely dark by the time I got to Kurt's house. I drove up their long driveway at a slow, relaxed pace and took my time parking the car. After I got out I strolled up to the house with a smile on my face.

Logan was the one who answered the door. Her eyes got wide as saucers when they landed on my face. "Holy shit—Burt!" she called. *"Burt!"*

Burt ran over from somewhere in the living room, but he barely glanced at me before he was peering around me into the dark. When he saw nothing he set his wild, crazy eyes on me. "Where's Kurt?"

I remembered then that Kurt's family had been expecting us to show up for Friday night dinner. Now it was Saturday and neither one of us had called the night before to let them know that we couldn't make it. They had probably been going out of their minds, but I was too damn happy to respond the way I should have. Instead I grinned dopily at Burt and said, "Hiya!"

From behind her brother, Logan frowned in confusion.

Burt looked about ready to tear me to pieces. "Where's. My. Son?"

"Kurt," I provided with a smile. "He's gone."

"*What?*"

Logan reached out and grabbed Burt's shoulder. "Something's wrong. Go get Carole."

Burt breathed heavily through his nose—like a bull about to charge. "Not until I find Kurt."

"Fucking hell, Burt, just do it," she ordered, but her grip on his shoulder tightened.

"Blaine? Oh, god, Blaine."

Cooper.

He pushed both Burt and Logan out of the way and within seconds his hands were on my face. His fingers brushed against my bruised skin and I flinched at the pain, but kept smiling. He quickly pulled his hands back.

"Jesus, Blaine, what the hell happened to you?"

I beamed up at him. "Hi, Coop."

He frowned at me and turned back to look at Logan and Burt. "What's wrong with him?"

Logan scowled. "How the fuck should I know? He showed up like this."

Cooper turned away from her before she got all of the words out of her mother. "Where's Kurt, Blaine?"

"He's gone," I said again, still smiling. Inside my heart was breaking. *He's gone.*

"Where?"

"I don't know. Mom took him."

Cooper looked stunned. "What?"

"Mom took him," I repeated.

Burt pulled against Logan, who reached out to with her other hand to keep him back. When her grip failed, she darted around Burt to act as a human barrier between us. She stood facing Burt with her back towards me as she grunted with exertion to keep him away and yelled Finn's name.

"What do you mean?" Burt demanded, his face beat red. "Took him where?"

Carole and Finn came down the stairs. From somewhere else in the house I heard Brittany scream.

"Burt? Burt! Stop it!"

"What's going on?"

"Kurt's gone," I answered Finn with a happy wave.

Cooper caught my hand and forced it back down to my side. "Where did you see Mom? Did she touch you?"

"At Adam's house. And yes. She made me feel wonderful."

All the oxygen seemed to leave Cooper's body at once. "Oh my god."

Both Finn and Logan were holding Burt back now.

"Will somebody please tell me what the hell is going on with my son? Who is Adam? *Where is my son?*"

"Can someone please get Burt out of here?" Cooper yelled over his shoulder. He had his hands on both of my shoulders, and I sagged against him, feeling exhausted but still happier than ever, still wonderful.

Wonderful.

I hated that fucking word. But I loved it too.

Even the fact that my face was throbbing worse than ever was wonderful. Everything was so goddamn wonderful that I was sick of how much I loved it.

"Blaine's been touched by an empath."

"What do you mean?" Carole asked.

"My mother," Cooper said. "She can manipulate emotions. She forced him to feel happy—I don't know why—but it scrambles your brain. Like being both stimulated and sedated at the same time."

"Is it permanent?"

"No, but he should lay down. Jesus, Carole, look at his eye, look at his face."

She must not have noticed it before in all of the chaos because she gasped. "Take him to Kurt's room."

"Like hell!" Burt raged.

Cooper ignored him. He wrapped both his arms around my waist and practically dragged me up the stairs. I tripped and stumbled but he held me tight.

"You knew about Mom," I said, struggling to keep both eyes open. I was so tired that even smiling began to feel difficult. "You knew about Mom and you never said anything."

Cooper said nothing. He just kept leading me down the hall and I nearly sobbed when we stepped into Kurt's room and I saw his bed.

I had wondered whether it was possible for my heart to break even more. It turned out that it was. It was terrible and it was wonderful.

He's gone.

My eyes closed.

Everything is wonderful.

Everything went dark.