

A romantic couple is shown from behind, embracing on a beach. The man is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and the woman is wearing a dark and light striped shirt. They are standing on a sandy beach with gentle waves in the background. The sky is filled with soft, warm colors from the setting or rising sun, creating a bokeh effect. The overall mood is intimate and peaceful.

Hail to Whatever You Found in the Sunlight
That Surrounds You

by: water_nice

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by

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Kurt/Blaine || AU || NC-17

On the third of August in Blaine Anderson's ninth year, something momentous happens: he sees a boy crying on the beach and decides to do something about it. What he gets in return is a best friend, a confidant, an ally to help him through the ups and downs. They spend one month together every summer. One perfect month until they are old enough to escape together. Eleven Augusts and the letters in between.

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eBook by klaineficspdfs.tumblr.com || klaineficspdfs.livejournal.com

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Chapter One

Nine – August 2003: The Summer When They Meet

On the third of August in Blaine Anderson's ninth year, something momentous happens: he sees a boy crying on the beach and decides to do something about it.

He's just coming back from buying ice cream at the little shop on the boardwalk where Cooper worked for a month the summer before, only to be fired for giving out free cones to girls he thought were pretty. And Cooper thinks a lot of girls are pretty. Blaine takes a bite of his pistachio ice cream and wonders just how many cones Cooper gave away during that month. He's probably lucky the ice cream shop is still in business.

The wind is strong and Blaine looks out at the water, the white caps huge and the surf crashing loudly against the shore. There is sand in the air and he knows it will likely get in his eyes and in his ice cream, but he hops off of the wooden planks of the boardwalk anyway and starts down the beach. There aren't many people around today because of the weather. He likes it better sometimes when the ocean is wild and roaring and he doesn't have to listen to other kids shrieking and playing and their parents scolding them. It's peaceful.

So he's a little startled when he comes across the boy. He's small like Blaine is, huddled in on himself on a large piece of driftwood that's shaped a bit like a whale toppled over on its side. Blaine tries to make a lot of noise as he approaches; he shuffles his feet and clear his throat, but the sound is swallowed by the wind and the waves. The boy flinches when he finally notices Blaine standing there and Blaine feels guilt twist up in his belly.

The boy looks sad. His full pink lips are turned down at the corners and his eyes are red and swollen. At first Blaine thinks that maybe he got sand in them and has been rubbing at them when he should have just gotten some water to rinse them out instead (a lesson he learned the hard way), but then he notices the tear tracks on his cheeks. As he watches, another tear leaks out of the boy's blue-green eye and slides slowly down his rosy cheek to finally drip off of his wobbly, crooked chin.

"Hi," Blaine says in a quiet voice, as not to spook him. "Are you all right?"

The boy's eyes widen and Blaine steps back a bit, worried that he is frightening him. "I... um... yes. I'm okay," he says. His voice is light and airy and pretty, like delicate silver bells. Blaine feels himself blushing and looks down at his dish of rapidly melting ice cream. He should leave the boy alone. He said he was okay and although Blaine doesn't believe him, he's heard his father say that it's rude to stick your nose in other people's business enough times that he can hear his voice repeating the phrase perfectly in his head. He looks back up and the boy is still watching him. He doesn't look scared now, just curious. His tears seem to have stopped falling and Blaine decides that answers the question for him. If he can make the boy stop crying then he really shouldn't leave, nose in the wrong place or not. What if he turns around and heads back to the house and the boy starts to cry all over again? That wouldn't be right.

He walks over and seats himself next to the boy on the smooth, sun-warmed wood. "My name's Blaine," he says, and offers a hand. His mother always says it is important to be a gentleman in every situation.

The boy pauses for a moment before taking Blaine's outstretched hand in a firm grip. "Kurt," he says.

Blaine smiles at him. "Would you like to share my ice cream? It's pistachio. In case you're allergic to nuts or anything."

Kurt gives him a shy smile and looks down into the bowl of melty ice cream. "I think there's sand in it," he says, and he laughs a little.

"A little sand won't hurt anyone," Blaine tells him, and he laughs some more. Blaine's heart swells. He's making him feel better!

Kurt shrugs his shoulders and looks back into the bowl. "You only have one spoon," he says, but he reaches for it anyway.

"I promise I don't have cooties or anything."

"I know," Kurt says. He lifts the melted green ice cream to his lips and sucks it from the spoon. "I can tell. You're very clean and I like your bowtie."

He passes the spoon back and Blaine takes a bite himself. "Thanks. My older brother tells me it's stupid to wear a tie on the beach, but I like it. It's not like I'm going in the water today or anything. It's too cold."

"He sounds like my cousins," Kurt says sadly and takes the spoon back from Blaine. "They're always telling me I dress too fancy and they try to get me dirty on purpose. Well, they used to. Nobody really talks to me now."

Blaine furrows his brow. He had been doing such a good job of making Kurt happy and now he's all sad again. "How come?" he asks, hoping it's the right way to make Kurt smile at him.

"I, um..." Kurt's eyes are tearing up again and Blaine sits up straighter and holds up his hands.

"You don't have to tell me if you don't want to," he reassures, his own eyes wide. He doesn't want to scare Kurt away. He's the only boy his own age that he's met this summer who isn't dumb.

Kurt smiles at him, but it's a sad smile. "It's okay," he says. "It's just... I used to come here with my mom every summer to visit her family. My grandparents own that house up there."

Blaine turns his body in the direction Kurt is pointing, towards the large, white shingled house with the red door. Blaine has always admired that house and made up stories about the people who lived there. His parents said they were "locals" as if it was a strange thing to be. Blaine always thought that living in this place all year round must be the best thing ever. Excitement grips him – maybe he'll be able to see the inside of the house now that he knows Kurt!

"I like that house," Blaine says, his calm voice belying his excitement.

Kurt smiles again. "Me too. Well, I did before. Now everyone is so weird around me, because I'm here without her. At home my dad talks to me and we cook together and try to laugh, but here... They're all silent. Sometimes I hear them talking and as soon as I walk into the room they stop. And they all stare at me, like I'm gonna, I don't know, break apart like one of my grandmother's china dolls."

"How come she didn't come with you, Kurt? If they're being mean, you should call your dad to come get you." Kurt's eyes get watery again and Blaine is reminded of the waves not ten feet in front of them. Kurt shakes his head sadly and Blaine realizes his mistake a second before he begins to speak.

"My mom... she died a few months ago. That's why I'm alone this summer. They still wanted me to come. Only they're too afraid to talk to me or about her. They think I can't handle anything that reminds me of her, which is dumb, because nothing could remind me of her more than this whole stupid place."

Kurt places the spoon back into the bowl of now entirely melted ice cream and crosses his arms over his chest and stares out at the water. Blaine doesn't know what to say. He's never met anyone whose mother had died before, besides old people. Not a kid like him. How was that fair? If he ever lost his mom... He can't even imagine being stuck with just his father and Cooper. He doesn't want to.

"I wish there was something I could do to make you not sad," he says, voicing his thoughts aloud. He knows he can't now, though, not when it's something so big. How could he possibly make *that* better? He kicks his feet against the driftwood whale and glares at the sand. How is it fair? People's mothers aren't supposed to die until they're really, really old. Like when Blaine's great grandmother had died and they went to the Philippines for her funeral, even though he'd only ever seen her twice, and one of those times he was too young to even remember.

He feels a soft touch on his shoulder and looks up into Kurt's wide eyes. "Thank you," Kurt says.

"For what?" Blaine didn't actually do anything. Kurt had hardly even eaten any of the ice cream.

"For not saying that you're sorry. I hate that. Why do people tell me that? They're not cancer; they didn't kill my mother."

Kurt's eyes are filled with tears again. Blaine can see them pooling in the bottom corners and sparkling in his eyelashes. He frowns and places his dish on the driftwood behind him before turning fully to face Kurt and taking his hands. "If cancer was a thing I could find, I would beat it up and throw it in the ocean just for you," he says.

Kurt gives him a wobbly smile and Blaine feels that, at least, he's made him the tiniest bit better. "Well, maybe we should just become doctors so we can make the other people with cancer better when we're older," Kurt says.

"Blaine! *Blaine!* Where are you, you little shit!" It's Cooper. His words are muffled by the wind, but he still sounds mad. Blaine checks his watch. He was supposed to be home ages ago.

"Uh-oh, that's my brother. I gotta go. He jumps down from the driftwood whale and grabs his Styrofoam ice cream bowl. "Will you meet me here again tomorrow?" he asks in a rush. He can still hear Cooper shouting in the distance, but it's getting farther and farther away. He's going in the wrong direction and

maybe Blaine can get back to the beach house before him and avoid being sucker punched in the arm over and over as they walk.

Kurt nods and smiles. "I'll be here in the morning unless it rains. Ten o'clock?"

Blaine grins at him as he backs away. "See you later!" And then he turns and runs as quickly as he can up the beach towards home.

~*~

He sneaks into the house, slipping off his sandy shoes at the door and leaving them on the plastic mat with the grooves that his mom put there specifically to keep the sand from being tracked through the house. His mom hears him anyway, even all the way from the kitchen. She's got ears like a hawk, which is a pretty weird expression, because Blaine is pretty sure that birds don't have ears at all. He must be getting it wrong.

"There you are!" she says, half-scolding, as he slumps into the kitchen. She is cutting vegetables on a large, square board and he lifts himself onto one of the stools across from her. "Where have you been, Blaine? I was getting worried about you. I sent Cooper out..." She waves her knife in the vague direction of the beach.

"I must have just missed him," Blaine tells her. He studies his hands when he says it, though she is not watching him. He doesn't like to tell lies, but it's not *entirely* untrue. He did miss Cooper. On purpose, but still. "I was down on the beach. I met a new friend there and lost track of time. I'm sorry."

"That's okay, darling. Just pay more attention next time," she says, and begins chopping a leek.

"He was sad," Blaine continues, "so we shared my ice cream."

"Why was he sad?" she asks distractedly, moving on to something leafy green and sweet smelling.

"Because his mom died and he's here visiting her family all by himself."

She stops chopping. Blaine looks up at her face to find her watching him, her dark eyes looking wet. He sees her throat move as she swallows. "Are you okay, Mama?"

"Yes," she answers, her voice a little hoarse. She clears her throat and smiles. "That's just very sad, Blaine."

"Yeah," Blaine agrees. He thinks about Kurt again, huddled on the driftwood with tears running down his face. It isn't fair. "I love you, Mama," he says quietly.

"I love you, too, baby." Her voice is strange. She starts chopping again; the repetitive noise of the blade hitting the wood is soothing. Blaine looks out of the large kitchen window and watches the boughs of his favourite willow tree thrashing about in the wind. "Why don't you invite your new friend over to play?"

He snaps out of his daze and whips his head around in her direction. "I can?" He's never had friends over to play in the summer. Cooper invites people all the time, but Blaine's not sure if he's ever actually had permission.

"Of course you can," his mother replies. She smiles at him before taking all of her cut up vegetables over to the sink.

"You'll like him, Mama. He's a gentleman." His mother glances at him over her shoulder and nods, showing that she is still listening even though she is otherwise occupied. "I like him," Blaine continues. "His eyes are the same colour as the sea water."

~*~

So of course it rains the next day.

Blaine is up early, antsy to see Kurt again, and when he looks out the window his bright smile crumples in on itself. He sighs deeply and pads downstairs. He'd even gotten ready and put on his best bowtie and everything, and now he isn't going to get the chance to play with Kurt at all.

"Why does it have to rain?" He pouts into his cereal.

"To make things wet, stupid," Cooper says.

"Cooper!" their mother scolds. He mimes zipping his mouth closed, all the while giving Blaine the evil eye. As soon as her back is turned, he tosses the crust of his toast and hits Blaine in the face.

Blaine wipes the crumbs from his cheek, glaring at Cooper but not daring to speak. There are a million things he would love to yell in his brother's dumb face, but he has never plucked up the courage to utter a single one of them.

"You boys find something quiet to do today, all right? Your father is here from the city and he needs some peace before he has to go back to work next week."

"Yes Mama," Blaine says. Cooper parrots his words in a whiny baby voice.

~*~

Blaine has been trying to be quiet. He has been trying to keep himself occupied, really he has. There are only so many things a boy can do in a house at the beach on a rainy day and he's pretty much exhausted all of them by lunchtime.

He's sitting on the living room sofa counting the peaks in the ceiling's plaster. It has come to that.

"Stop bouncing, Blaine!" his father grumbles from the armchair. "I'm exhausted just watching you. This is supposed to be my vacation."

"Sorry," Blaine answers in a quiet voice. He stops his legs from moving and sits up straight. "I'm just bored. I was supposed to meet Kurt outside, but it's raining."

"Who's Kurt?"

"My new friend."

"Right." His father looks up from his book and makes eye contact with Blaine for the first time since he's begun speaking. Blaine has no idea how many full conversations he's had with his father where he never once looked at him, but he knows it's a lot.

"Your mother said something about that. You can see him tomorrow. Now, go up to your room and play. I spend a fortune on toys and guitars and all sorts of nonsense and you hardly touch them."

There is a note of finality in his father's voice. The conversation is over. His father's light eyes leave Blaine's face and focus back on his book. It's no use for Blaine to speak up and tell him that he doesn't even

like toys anymore and he didn't bring any with him. He does like his guitar, but he can't start lessons again until they get back home at the end of the month, and he's already perfected the chords that his teacher showed him. He would play the piano if there was one at the summer house, though his father would probably yell at him for making too much noise if there were.

He sighs quietly and leaves the room, going in the direction of the kitchen instead of the stairs. His father isn't paying enough attention to notice.

~*~

The next day the rain is still falling steadily.

Blaine spends the morning avoiding his father and Cooper. At ten o'clock he's sitting listlessly on a kitchen stool that he has pulled over to the window and staring out at the willow tree, whacking his feet into the legs of the stool in a steady rhythm. *Thunkthunkthunk tha, thunkthunkthunk tha*. He's so dazed by his watching and his thumping that he startles when a foot settles on his calf and stops its movement.

His mother is standing over him with a funny look on her face and her hands clutching a pair of rain boots and a rain coat. Blaine's favourite polka dot umbrella is nestled in the crook of her arm. "Let's go and find this friend of yours, shall we?" she says.

Blaine can see Kurt's grandparents' house from his own, so he doesn't know why it feels like it takes so long to get there.

As they approach the cherry red door of the house that has peaked Blaine's curiosity for years, he feels a swooping in his belly – a mixture of nerves and excitement. His mother presses a finger to the doorbell and he can hear it chime within. Footsteps approach the door and he can make out voices – someone calling out to another person, their call growing louder the closer they get.

Blaine huddles under the safety of his umbrella. He still has it up even though they are under the shelter of the wide veranda and well out of the cold drizzle that is drenching everything it touches.

The door is opened by an older woman with straight grey hair and pretty blue eyes, a smile on her thin pink mouth. "Hello," she greets, and looks curiously from Blaine to his mother.

"Hello, Mrs. Tinsey," Blaine's mother says. He looks at her in confusion. How does she know the lady's name? "I'm Marisol Anderson from down the road. My son, Blaine, was wondering if your grandson would be able to come over and play. They had planned to go to the beach, but with all of this rain... He's been coming down with a severe case of cabin fever."

The lady laughs and nods and motions them inside. "Believe me, I know all about that. I've got four grandkids here this week and they're going to bring the house down if the rain doesn't let up soon."

Blaine closes his umbrella and follows his mother inside, standing next to her on the mat so he doesn't drip water all over the shiny wooden floor. The house is just as nice inside as he imagined it would be: bright colours and dark wood and a wide staircase with a bannister all along the upper floor so you can see downstairs. It's so high you could almost climb out and jump onto the dangling chandelier. Blaine wonders if Kurt ever thinks about doing just that when he's standing up there.

The lady is speaking again and Blaine gets a nudge from his mother. "Oh... excuse me?" he says. "Sorry."

Mrs. Tinsey smiles serenely. "I just asked which of my grandsons it was you were looking for."

"Oh... um, Kurt please."

A look of surprise crosses her face for a second but she quickly covers it with another smile. "I'll go and get him."

In just a few minutes Kurt is there with his grandmother, following her out through a swinging door. Blaine can hear the laughter of other children start and stop and start again as the door sways back and forth on its hinges.

"Hi, Blaine," Kurt says quietly, looking up nervously at Blaine's mother and back in his direction. "Thank you for inviting me."

Blaine looks up at his mother, smiling at her, silently communicating *see, I told you he's a gentleman*. Blaine's mother appreciates such things in a world where she says chivalry is far too often lost. Blaine likes that word: chivalry.

Blaine's mom smiles down at Kurt and nods. "It would be our pleasure, dear," she says. "I'll just give your grandmother our number in case she needs to get in touch and we can bring you back in time for dinner." The two women nod at one another and Kurt shuffles over towards Blaine.

"Thanks for coming to rescue me," Kurt whispers, sneaking glances at the adults to be sure they aren't listening in. "My cousins are all crazy and I wasn't sure how much longer I could stay inside, rain or not."

Blaine grins at him and nods in understanding. "Guess that makes you my knight in shining armour," Kurt says and fingers the sleeve of Blaine's rain-speckled jacket. Blaine's grin widens to impossible size.

Blaine's house is cold and dark and quiet as a tomb after the sunshine and warmth of Kurt's. He feels shy when he leads Kurt in through the front door and takes his jacket and umbrella to hang on the hooks.

Blaine's mother smiles and promises them lunch in a little while before disappearing into the kitchen. Blaine wonders for a moment where Cooper and his father are, hoping to avoid them. He takes Kurt upstairs to his room where it is highly unlikely that they will be bothered by either.

~*~

The rain clears up during the night and they begin to spend all of their time at the beach. They meet up early in the mornings and stay away from home for as long as they can before someone comes looking for them. Sometimes Blaine brings them a picnic, and sometimes Kurt does. Anything to keep away from their summer homes: Kurt being treated like a glass figurine and Blaine wanting to escape the constant arguments he continuously overhears between his father and Cooper. This morning's argument had been particularly bad with Cooper storming out of the house after a good half hour of shouting.

Blaine knows what they're fighting about, hears the words shouted so often that he knows both sides of the argument by heart. And yet, it confuses him. Cooper has always been his father's favourite son and he's never even attempted to hide his preference. He's always found Blaine somewhat of an enigma: gentle and passionate and too quick to cry. Blaine has tried to follow his lead and study up on his interests so they will have something in common. He even once attempted to copy his father's mannerisms, figuring that maybe his father liked Cooper better simply because they looked alike, but his father didn't pay enough attention to notice. Sometimes in the quiet of the night, Blaine secretly wonders if his father wishes he had never been born. Cooper has told him enough times that he had been an "accident" for him to know that he hadn't been part of his parents' plans.

So maybe Blaine should feel vindicated that his father has been so angry with Cooper all year and that they yell themselves hoarse at one another. But he mostly just feels sad.

“What's wrong?” Kurt asks. He has stopped trying to coax the hermit crab into the larger shell and is watching Blaine with wide eyes. The hermit crab takes advantage of their moment of distraction and scuttles away.

“It's escaping,” Blaine says halfheartedly and motions at the crab.

Kurt doesn't look away from him. “You seem sad,” he says. “Was your brother being mean to you again?”

Blaine shakes his head. “He was fighting with my dad. Well, they were fighting with each other.”

Kurt's eyes widen further. “Like...”

“No, not like that. Just yelling and stuff. And Cooper ran out and slammed the door and then my mom was crying and... I just hate it sometimes. So I made us an extra big picnic so I don't have to go back there until dinner time or even later.”

“Okay.” Kurt watches Blaine for a moment. It's silent besides the crashing of the waves and a lone gull screeching overhead. Blaine likes these silences with Kurt. He never feels like he's in trouble or someone thinks he's weird and he never needs to fidget.

Kurt reaches into the pocket of his shorts and pulls something out. He keeps it clasped in his hand, looking out at the water. After a while he shifts closer to Blaine and opens his hand. On his pale palm rests a perfect shell. It's like a miniature conch: one side open and twisting around to its patterned, rounded end, the myriad colours swirling together in a beautiful pastel wave. It looks like the ocean itself. Blaine wonders if you can hear the whistling winds trapped within. “I used to pick shells with my mom when we came here. I left the house early this morning and automatically started looking for them, I dunno why. Guess it's like a habit or something. But I don't want to keep them anymore; it makes me too sad. I tossed the other ones I found into the water, but this one is too pretty to throw away.” He looks up from the delicate shell and into Blaine's eyes. “You should have it,” he says. He takes Blaine's hand and turns it over and presses the shell into his palm.

Blaine feels as though he has been given the most perfect, special gift. He closes his hand around it reverently. “Thank you,” he breathes out.

~*~

The In-Between – Year One: Assorted letters and a piece of glass.

Dear Kurt,

I'm so glad you thought to give me your address before you had to go back home to Ohio. (The worst day of my whole summer, by the way.) This way we can be friends all year and not just at the beach!

I'm sending you a piece of beach glass I found the day you left. I hope beach glass isn't something that makes you sad. It reminded me of you because the color looks a bit like your eyes. But only when they are sorta green like they sometimes get.

Sorry this is so short but I need to finish before my mom goes to the store so she can mail it for me. I'll write again soon! Write to me too!

Sincerely,

Blaine Anderson

~*~

Dear Blaine,

Thank you so much for the pretty piece of beach glass! It's the same shade of green as my dad's eyes and he laughed and told me it's a part of an old beer bottle but that's my dad for you! Mrs. Deidre that teaches me piano is going to help me make it into a bracelet. She knows how to make friendship bracelets too so I'll send one for you in my next letter.

The funniest thing happened tonight – Dad tried to cook us chicken because it was raining so he couldn't use the BBQ and it was RAW. It should have been gross, but we both laughed instead. Sometimes I feel guilty for laughing. But not when I was with you. I know that my mom would want me to laugh so I shouldn't feel like that. Anyway, Dad ended up ordering pizza and it was good. I think I need to learn how to cook some new things because he says he's hopeless. Just between you and me I agree with him. He did help me bake cookies though. Mostly he just took the pans out of the oven and I did all the hard stuff.

I need to go to sleep because I am going shopping for school stuff in the morning. I'll put this in the mail then!

Write soon!

Kurt

~*~

Dear Kurt,

So, remember how I was telling you that my brother and my father were fighting? Well, they had the worst, biggest fight yet and now Cooper is gone.

He moved away. He told me he was going the day before it happened and he was actually nice to me. He gave me some of his CDs and sheet music that he didn't need anymore and said he was going to be famous in New York.

My father and him have been fighting for ages because he wants to be an actor and a singer and doesn't want to go to college and be "bored to death for the rest of his life" (~~er that!~~). ~~What~~ Cooper graduated from high school in June my dad was mad because he never applied to any colleges at all. So now he's gone to New York to get a job as an actor, even though my dad says that it's foolish and impractical. I miss him. I know I shouldn't, because he's mostly mean to me and he sits on my head and threatens to spit on me and he punches me in the arm and leg and calls me names and tries to make me swear. But it's so quiet here now. Since my dad stopped being so angry nobody has really talked much.

Can I tell you a secret that I can never tell anyone else ever except you? I think being an actor or a singer or both would be a cool job. I want to do it too. But now I'm afraid. Maybe if Cooper does well they won't be mad at me. He is a very good singer.

Sorry if all I did was complain in this letter. Write soon! I miss you even more than I miss Cooper.

Sincerely,

Blaine Anderson

Chapter Two

Ten – August 2004: The Summer When They Capture the Flag

Blaine has been pacing the boardwalk in front of the Tinsey's house for forty-five minutes. Kurt is arriving today – was supposed to be arriving half an hour ago. When he finally sees a car loop around the crescent and back into their driveway at the fifty-two minute mark, he has to remind himself to stay calm. Kurt's family haven't seen him in ages, too. It wouldn't be fair for Blaine to go and steal him away as soon as he gets there.

But Kurt is soon running towards him anyway. “Blaine! Blaine!”

Blaine runs to meet him halfway. They stop when they've reached each other, both panting and grinning. “I missed you!” Blaine says and Kurt's cheeks colour.

“You too.” Kurt looks behind him to where a few other kids around their age have come out to greet him. He gives them an appraising look before turning back towards Blaine and leaning in. “I'll tell you a secret – I only came back this summer to see you.” He leans away from Blaine again and Blaine feels a little bit lonely. They both give Kurt's cousins one backward glance before linking arms and heading for the beach.

~*~

There are more kids at the beach this summer. Whenever Blaine and Kurt try to wade in the surf or catch crabs or poke the dead jelly fish back into the waves to see if they will come back to life, there are always kids trying to coax them into this or that game. They play Frisbee and volleyball and Kick the Can a few times. They're even convinced to play an increasingly violent game of Red Rover that ends in Kurt with a bloody lip and his older cousin, Daniel, calling him a sissy and telling him to go be a girl somewhere else. A tall girl with freckles and long, windblown hair yells that *she* doesn't cry over split lips and it quickly results in a tussle – the new kids versus the yearlies.

Blaine leads Kurt away, dabbing his lip clean with his hanky, glaring at them from over his shoulder.

The day after the Red Rover incident they avoid the beach and the gaggle of obnoxious kids that assemble there. Blaine's house is their new refuge, nice and quiet and no one calling them names or breaking out in fights over nothing. Blaine likes that it's quiet, mostly because it means his father is at home in Boston for

work and he's alone with his mom, but sometimes the silence gets to him and he finds himself wishing for Cooper. But Cooper is far away now – after being in New York for a few months he had met a girl and run away to California.

Blaine's mom has been working on recipes for a new cook book, which Blaine mostly loves. He gets to sample everything she makes, but sometimes she gets what she calls “blocks” and it puts her in a bad mood for days. Today she is making some sort of dessert pastries and she brings Blaine and Kurt an entire plate of them to try.

“I like your mom,” Kurt says once she is gone.

Blaine feels almost guilty, because he does have a really great mom. But he knows Kurt isn't mad about it. And Kurt has one thing he doesn't, too: a great dad. “Can I tell you a secret?” Blaine asks in a whisper.

Kurt nods very seriously and leans in towards Blaine, his berry pastry in the air near his mouth.

“She's the only person in my whole family who I do. Like, I mean. My brother Cooper is mean and my dad... well, most of the time he scares me.”

Kurt nods again, his face full of empathy. “I don't like most of my family either. Well, you've met my cousins...” He leaves it hanging there because, yeah, Blaine has met them. The ones he's spent time with are not fun to be around in the slightest.

~*~

That night when Blaine is in bed reading a book, his mother comes in and sits on the edge of his mattress.

“Blaine? Can I talk to you about something, sweetheart?”

Blaine closes his book and sets it to the side. She looks serious. Her eyes are sad.

“I heard you talking with Kurt today. I didn't mean to... but I did. And what you said –”

Blaine sits up, back straight. He feels panic bubbling in his belly. “Mama, I didn't –”

"It's okay, Blaine. I'm not mad at you, I promise. It's just... what you said, about Dad... Blaine, has he ever given you any reason to be afraid of him?"

There are tears in his mother's eyes now and Blaine feels a lump forming in his throat and prickling at the backs of his eyes. He gnaws on his bottom lip and watches her for a moment, worried that if he opens his mouth to respond he's going to start crying. He shakes his head instead.

"Baby, you need to tell me, okay? Please."

"No," Blaine manages. "He's just... he's so angry at me all the time. I'm not even bad. I don't think he likes me." His voice finally cracks and one lone tear escapes his eye and tumbles onto his cheek. His mother reaches out and wipes it away.

"Oh, honey, of course he loves you."

"But he doesn't *like* me. I'm old enough to know that isn't the same thing, Mama."

His mother shakes her head. "He's just stressed from work. It isn't your fault. I'm going to talk to him, okay?"

Blaine bugs out his eyes and begins shaking his head in protest. "I won't tell him what you said. I promise."

Blaine looks down at his bedspread and picks at a loose thread, avoiding her gaze. He can feel her still watching him, waiting for more. There is more, of course. So much more. He could let it spill out of him for days if he really wanted to. He doesn't. He feels like he hasn't given her quite what she wants, however, and Blaine hates to disappoint anyone, especially her. "Cooper says... Cooper says I was an accident."

"Sweetie, just because you were unplanned doesn't mean you were unwanted. Okay?" Her thin fingers reach out and take hold of Blaine's chin and she turns his face up so they are looking each other in the eye. "You were a surprise, Blaine. Not an accident. And surprises are my favourite thing in the world."

"Mine too."

She smiles and rubs a thumb across his cheek, wiping away any remaining tear tracks. "And I'll tell you a little secret – Cooper was a surprise, too. And a much more difficult one, seeing as your father and I had only just finished college and didn't even have jobs yet. You were an easier surprise, in every single way."

Blaine laughs a little and she pats him on the leg before getting up and pressing a kiss to the top of his head. "I love you, my baby. And you can always talk to me about anything, all right?"

"I will, Mama. I love you, too."

~*~

The next week, Blaine's mom reaches one of her "blocks". One morning at breakfast she gives Blaine money to buy lunch for both him and Kurt at the boardwalk diner and sends him on his way with strict instructions to leave her to her work.

They spend the morning trying to dodge the ever-growing group of hooligan children. They are accosted anyway as they are leaving the diner, still clutching the milkshakes the nice waitress transferred into paper cups so they could take them to go.

The leader of the rabble – a vicious girl named Victoria – tells them they are organizing an epic game of Capture the Flag and they need to join in. Her younger brother, Todd, coaxes while she stands by with a smirk, her beady little eyes taunting them.

Blaine wants to tell them to go away and leave him and Kurt alone. He wants to say something far, far worse. Something that Cooper would punch him in the arm until he repeated over and over in summers gone by. But Cooper isn't there to force it out of him, and Blaine hates using such words. He glances over at Kurt who raises one eyebrow and shakes his head minutely.

"No thanks," Blaine says. He is met with jeers and name calling and *why not's*. Kurt looks upset as two of his cousins join in. Apparently losing one's mother only affords a single summer of sympathy. Blaine gives them a dirty look. "I said no, thank you," he repeats. "We don't want to play."

"Why not?" Todd asks, his lip curled in an ugly sneer.

"Because you're –" *Come on, Squirt*, he can hear Cooper cajoling in his mind. *Say it. You know you want to. Mom's not here to yell at you. Say it!* "...uncivilized," he finishes and the Cooper in his mind scoffs in disappointment.

"Oooh! What'd he call us?" the real boys in front of him taunt.

“Uncircumcised!” someone shouts from the back of the group and everyone laughs.

“Fancy words, Anderson,” Kurt's cousin Daniel says. “Sorry if we're not impressed.”

“Shut up,” Kurt tells him and he gives Kurt the finger.

“We don't want you two playing anyway,” Todd says. “You act like stupid girls and would probably go home crying to your mommy.”

Victoria takes offence to this and punches her brother in the gut.

“Geez, Vic!” he exclaims, bent over and holding his stomach. “I meant *stupid* girls. Not awesome ones like you.”

She is appeased and they shuffle away with a parting call of, “see you around, babies!”

An hour later Kurt spots a red plastic flag poking out of an outcropping of rock. An uncharacteristically evil grin spreads across his face and he looks around for a moment before scrabbling up the jagged stone and pulling it out. “I guess we win,” he says, and tosses it into the water.

~*~

The In-Between – Year Two: Assorted letters and a recipe for scones.

Dear Blaine,

I nearly destroyed our kitchen. Do you think your mom would teach me how to make a soufflé? My dad was really mad. But after we went out for burgers and he took me to a bookstore to buy some cookbooks. Guess he knows I'm getting tired of eating the same five things every week with pizza and the occasional Chinese food on the weekends. I bought one of your mom's cookbooks. I didn't know she used to be a chef. I would love to go to chef school. Does she have the hat? I want the hat. Maybe we could have a class in pastries too, because I tried that and it's really hard but not nearly as messy. I guess I'll stick to easier stuff until I'm instructed by a professional. I did make a really good hollandaise sauce on Sunday morning though. And really good eggs. Dad was impressed. Too bad I choked the next time I tried to cook for him. Soufflés are hard.

I miss you. My friend Olivia moved away during the summer and most of the kids in my class are jerks. I wish we lived in the same place. At least the same state!

I should go do my math homework I guess. My worst subject. Write back to me soon!

Kurt

~*~

Dear Kurt,

Do you know what I wish? That you could come to my birthday party. We're going to some laser tag game place, even though what I really wanted was to go to the roller rink. Cooper had a party with laser tag once and my dad says the boys all had fun. Why can't they have fun at the roller rink instead? They have karaoke and light shows and it looks like there's glitter in the air but it's not actually real. So it doesn't make the floor slippery or whatever. Also I invited girls too and he asked me why. Because they're my friends? He seems to think they won't like the laser tag but my friend Jessica is the best at laser tag in my whole class. My dad is so weird sometimes.

He keeps trying to spend time with me now because my mom told him he should. It's not even fun. Except we went to a football game together. It would have been better if some of his work friends hadn't come with us. Mostly I was bored but the hotdogs were good. The game was okay too I guess. He says now that it's basketball season we should go to some college games and watch March Madness or something on TV. I don't even like basketball. What's March Madness? I was going to ask him but I didn't want him to look at me all weird like he does when I don't understand something.

Sometimes I think I liked it better when he ignored me. Mostly I feel like he's looking for a reason to get mad.

Mom wrote out her special recipe for cinnamon scones just for you. She said to add an extra two tablespoons of sugar if you want them sweeter. And also good luck.

I really wish that you could come to my party. If I could have a party with only me and you I would choose it over a party with every other person in the world any day. I wish my birthday was in August instead of March.

From, Blaine

*

Ingredients

- *2 ½ cups flour*
- *2 tsp baking powder*
- *2 Tbsp sugar*
- *1/2 tsp salt*
- *6 Tbsp butter, softened*
- *3/4 cup milk*
- *2-3 tsp cinnamon*
- *2-3 Tbsp brown sugar*

Instructions

1. *Sift and measure the flour.*
2. *Resift it with the other dry ingredients.*
3. *Work the softened butter into the dry mix with a pastry blender or a fork.*
4. *Add the milk.*
5. *Turn the dough on to a lightly floured surface.*
6. *Divide the dough into 2 pieces, rolling each piece into a circle the thickness of biscuits.*
7. *Sprinkle cinnamon and brown sugar over the dough as you knead. This will work the cinnamon and brown sugar into the dough in swirls. I add the cinnamon and brown sugar until there are streaks throughout the dough.*
8. *Cut each disc of scone dough into four wedges (to make 8 scones in total) and place them on a greased baking sheet.*

Bake them at 400-425 degrees for 10-15 minutes until the bottoms are golden and the insides are done.

Chapter Three

Eleven – August 2005: The Summer When Cousin Stacy is a Bitch

It starts with a man on the beach. The man is minding his own business, reading a thick, hardcover novel while lying under a colourful umbrella.

Kurt's fourteen year old cousin, Stacy, has tagged along with them, even though all she does is roll her eyes and shush them when they speak in even the most hushed voices. She turns over from her back to her front every ten minutes so that she will get what she calls an “even tan”.

After a while the man under the umbrella is joined by another man – tall and freckled with bright red hair. He jokingly rests an icy bottle of water against the first man's bare back before opening the top and handing it to him. The redhead joins his friend on the blanket, flipping over onto his front after a moment and shutting his eyes.

“Gross. They need to get the hell off of our beach,” Stacy says, following Blaine's gaze.

Blaine looks over at Kurt and makes a face. The two men are doing nothing that Stacy herself isn't doing. “What did they do?” he asks her in confusion.

She scoffs and pulls her sunglasses down to squint at Blaine over top of them. “Besides be fags, you mean?”

Blaine widens his eyes as Kurt narrows his. “Don't use that word,” Kurt tells her, his voice like ice.

“Why not? Does it offend you, Kurt? I bet you have people calling you that all the time, huh?”

Kurt makes an irritated sniffing sound and looks away toward the water. Stacy smiles, showing all of her teeth and sits up halfway, leaning back on her elbows. “You know what my dad says?” Kurt doesn't answer her, but Blaine can see his back stiffen. “He says one day when you're older Uncle Burt is in for a surprise. He's gonna come home from work to find you bent over a table by some guy. It's so true, too. Just listen to the way you talk – you sound more like a girl than I do.”

She sneers at Kurt, but he pays her no mind, staring out as if he didn't even hear her. Blaine sits there awkwardly for several minutes, watching the rise and fall of Kurt's shoulders as he breathes. The two men get up from their blanket and laughingly jog into the surf. Stacy has long since resumed her sunbathing as if she hadn't just been horrible to her cousin. Blaine gets up and offers Kurt his hand. "Let's go for a walk," he says.

Kurt takes it with a wobbly, yet grateful smile and they start off down the beach without a single backwards glance at Stacy.

They go much further up than they usually do. Kurt seems to want to get as far away from other people as he possibly can, so Blaine follows after him. He wishes he knew what to say to make him feel better. He doesn't understand how someone could be so mean and nasty to a member of their family. Even after all the times Cooper had called Blaine names and punched him, Blaine would never do anything to purposely hurt him, would never want to see him hurt. People are supposed to love their families. Kurt's cousin is a terrible person. There were a lot of names Cooper would have coaxed Blaine into calling her if he were there; Blaine flushes as he repeats them all in his head. She's just such a... *bitch*. *You're a bitch*, he wants to tell her. He wishes he was braver and could have said it to her face. He wishes he could have made Kurt feel better.

There are large clusters of rock around the cape. Piles of smooth, flat stones and rounded boulders slimy with green sea sludge and weeds. They dart around these, checking to be sure the tide is far out before moving towards the outcroppings that are usually covered by water.

They find an opening let in a rock wall, still moist from the tide that had enveloped it only an hour before. Kurt ducks inside, sticking his head back out a second later to beckon Blaine on.

It's a small cave, the walls smooth and damp from the tides. It smells of salt and mouldering seaweed and earth. Hanging from the ceiling are long spikes of muddied stone that Blaine thinks are called stalactites but can't quite recall. There are a few cracks overhead letting in the occasional beam of sunlight, and Blaine can just make out Kurt's smiling face in the gloom. It's the first smile Blaine's gotten out of him since the beach, which makes it all the nicer.

"This is the coolest place ever," Kurt says, and Blaine nods in agreement.

"We should keep it a secret. Like a special clubhouse kinda thing."

They settle on the rocks in front of the opening and watch the far away tide washing over the dark sand. Kurt is quiet again, his eyebrows furrowed in the middle like he's thinking deeply about something. "You're my best friend," he says at last, eyes still trained on the frothy surf. "What Stacy said about people calling me names... that was true. I don't have very many friends."

"Don't listen to anything she said, Kurt. She's a terrible person. She's a – " Blaine hesitates a moment before deciding to muster up the courage and just speak his thoughts unedited for once. "A bitch. She's a horrible, terrible bitch."

Kurt cracks up laughing until there are happy tears in his eyes and Blaine is glad he said it, even though his heart is still pounding and his hands shaking. He has the urge to glance around to be sure his mother is nowhere near and he just barely squashes it. "You're my best friend, too, you know," he says. "August is my favourite month of the whole year."

Kurt gives him a shining smile. "Mine too."

They sit quietly for several more long moments. Blaine runs his fingers along the cool wet stone under them, tiny particles of sand lodging themselves under his nails. He picks them out and uses his heel to gather some more in a little pile.

"Blaine?" Kurt asks, watching Blaine's foot trail over and through the wet sand. "We're not gonna be like in that movie *Beaches*, are we? It was one of my mom's favourites, and you're a lot like the pretty one with the dark hair and the sad eyes and I don't want you to die. But I do want us to be best friends forever."

Blaine has no idea what *Beaches* is or what happens in it, but he knows that a lifetime of being Kurt's best friend sounds amazing. "We will be, Kurt. It's gonna be amazing."

~*~

The In-Between – Year Three: Assorted letters and a gift.

Dear Kurt,

I watched that movie *Beaches* and cried and cried. My Dad walked in on me watching it with Mom and told her to turn it off. She didn't and he seemed mad at her at dinner. I heard them arguing but I couldn't make out the words. What a weird thing to fight about, huh? I guess some of the stuff in it might have been a bit

inappropriate for me, but mostly it was just a movie about how important it is to have a best friend. Don't you think? You're my best friend and I know how important it is that I have you. Even if I don't get to see you and talk to you all the time like I want.

The characters in the movie are a little bit like us, I think, only you aren't loud and a little bit crazy and I never, ever want to be a lawyer or do things just because my father would want it.

It's Christmas soon so I thought I would send you a little present. I hope you like it! Cooper's been talking to my parents a little and I think he might be coming home for Christmas this year. I haven't seen him in such a long time. I talked to him on the phone and he said if he doesn't come for Christmas he will visit me this summer.

Maybe I can convince Mom to let me call you on Christmas eve again this year. If so, I'll talk to you soon!

Blaine xoxo

~*~

Blaine!

Guess what? I get to sing a solo at our Christmas concert at school! It's Oh Holy Night. A jerk in my class said he bets I can't wait until my voice changes so I stop sounding like a girl and some of the girls are really jealous that the music teacher picked me, but I'm way better than they are so whatever. I'm so excited! My dad will probably record it so maybe you'll be able to see. Or I can sing it to you over the phone if we get to talk.

Thank you so much! I can't believe you got me a real chef's hat! I'm not sure if I was supposed to wait until Christmas to open it, but I was too impatient! I hope you like your present too. You can open it right away if you want.

If Cooper comes tell him hello for me and that I hope he's enjoying California. I hope you and I get to talk again like last year! I miss you so much.

I'm going to get this in the mail so it makes it to you in time for Christmas!

Kurt

Chapter Four

Twelve – August 2006: The Summer When Cooper Visits

Cooper always talks about girls. Or himself. Or himself *with* girls and how many of them *adore* him. The way he tells it, he's had a hundred different girlfriends since moving to Los Angeles. Blaine doesn't bother to ask about the one he moved there with in the first place.

He and Kurt roll their eyes behind Cooper's back as he scopes out the “hotties” and coats his bare chest in some sort of oil that smells like coconut. “Do you see that one?” he asks. He motions to a girl in a tiny yellow and white bikini and she looks in their direction. Blaine ducks his head in embarrassment. “Damn,” Cooper continues, oblivious to his brother's mortification. “That suit is practically see-through. I can see her nipples from here.”

“Oh my god,” Kurt mutters into his book and Blaine silently agrees with him.

“Did ya see, did ya see?” Cooper pokes Blaine in the side and motions towards the girl once more. She is watching him with a smile and a cocked eyebrow, whispering with her friends. Blaine shakes his head and Cooper shrugs. “Your loss, Squirt. I'm going over there.” He ruffles Blaine's hair as he heaves himself up off the beach blanket and Blaine slaps his hand away.

Blaine falls back against the hot cotton of the blanket, warmed by the sun and the sand underneath. He feels lethargic. It's too hot to move. It's too hot to be annoyed at Cooper. It's too hot for everything. He lets his head loll to the side to find Kurt watching him. “Do you wanna ditch him?” he asks.

“Heck yeah. He's probably not coming back anyway.”

They pack up their beach gear and head for the cave.

~*~

It's evening before they drag themselves back to the Andersons' summer house. They'd opted to stay in the cave and out of the sun, but they're paying for it now with rumbling bellies. Neither of them have had anything to eat since an ice cream cone after lunch and it's nearly eight o'clock.

Blaine hears an odd grunting noise and a loud bang, but he thinks nothing of it, figuring his mom is working in the kitchen. He leads Kurt in that direction, hoping she has something they can sample.

When he walks into the room his first instinct is to cover his eyes, but he doesn't listen to it. He freezes in place instead, Kurt bumping into him from behind. Because it's Cooper who is making the noise. It's Cooper who is banging against the cabinets. Cooper and the girl from the beach with the tiny, nipple-showing bikini. And Blaine doesn't need to look closely to see her nipples through flimsy fabric now – they're on display in their entirety, her scrap of a bikini top untied and dangling from one arm. Cooper reaches around and cups a hand over her left breast as he rocks forward against her body. She's bent at the waist and making a face like he's hurting her. Blaine isn't stupid, he knows what they're doing, but he can't make himself leave, even though his brother isn't wearing any pants and god, he's having *sex* with a *stranger*. And it looks... gross. And quite possibly painful. And Blaine feels like he's going to be sick.

Kurt drags him away before they can be seen.

They go to the diner and get fries and milkshakes. They stay silent as they eat, both too embarrassed to talk about what they walked in on.

They wander around on the boardwalk for an hour afterwards, Blaine too worried to go home and Kurt not wanting to leave him alone. They talk about things at random, in quiet tones, neither one of them really engrossed in the conversation. They end up walking in the direction of Blaine's house on instinct, the path carved out after so many summers. Before they reach the fence line, Kurt turns to Blaine as if he has something to say. Blaine watches as he hesitates, his eyes flitting away toward the beach and the neighbour's house before making their way back to Blaine.

“Blaine,” he says, his voice at a whisper. “Do you think... when, um, when Stacy said some guy would have me bent over – do you think she meant like *that*?”

Kurt looks so horrified, eyes round and wet and fearful, that Blaine shakes his head. “No,” he says, even though he's sure that's exactly what she meant. He's pretty sure Kurt is, too.

~*~

Cooper's still in the kitchen when Blaine makes his way inside, though this time he is mercifully alone and eating a grilled cheese sandwich.

"Hey, Blainey!" he greets. "I was just about to go find you at your friend's house. Mom's gone out with Madeline and won't be back til tomorrow. It's just you and me, Squirt!"

"Great," Blaine says without feeling. He takes the seat across from Cooper and tries not to look in the direction of the kitchen island where he had witnessed something he can only hope that time will erase from his memory.

Cooper gives him a weird look and splits his sandwich in half, offering part of it to Blaine. He looks as though he's showered, so Blaine takes it and stuffs it into his mouth. He's still pretty hungry. They share the remainder of the sandwich and Cooper's glass of orange juice in silence, Cooper watching Blaine's face closely for some reason that Blaine can't figure out. After he sets the dishes in the sink he comes back to the table and claps Blaine on the shoulder.

"Come on, I'll set up the karaoke machine."

"It's gone. I never really touched it after you moved away and Dad said –"

"Dad? Jesus, Blaine, I hope you aren't still paying attention to the shit that old bastard spews. You're old enough to know better."

"He's our dad, Coop. It's not like I can just ignore him."

Cooper sighs and looks away, running a hand through his still wet and yet perfectly coiffed hair. When he turns back to Blaine he looks serious, and for the first time Blaine realizes that his brother isn't a kid any more. He's a fully grown adult who lives his own life and pays for his own things and understands. "Just promise me you won't take it to heart, Blainey. Just don't take anything he says to heart. And don't let him tell you what to do and what to like."

"I can't really help that, can I? If he says we're getting rid of the karaoke machine because it's just collecting dust and it's stupid, it's not like I can stop him. Or when he says piano and guitar are enough and there is no reason why I should take voice lessons, what am I supposed to do?"

Cooper sighs again and nods. He reaches out and squeezes Blaine's shoulder, like they are allies in this fight and he empathizes.

"Anyway," Blaine continues, "he's not that bad. He came to one of my recitals and to parent-teacher this year, and he's been paying way more attention to me lately – " Blaine stops abruptly at Cooper's shaking head.

"He's gonna try to mould you into him, Blaine."

"What? He's not –"

"He is. He tried it with me. He plays all nice with you until he doesn't get what he wants. The sooner you face the fact that Dad is an asshole and will never love you unless you do everything that he wants and be everything that he wants, the better, Squirt. Because I've seen how much it hurts you when he's cold, but someday, Blaine, someday you're going to do something or be something that he *really* doesn't like and it's going to get a lot worse than cold shoulders and mean looks. And there will be something, little brother. There will be *something*. And when that inevitably happens, you gotta tell him to go fuck himself. Don't let him turn you into a miserable son of a bitch. You're too good."

Blaine swallows and looks away from his brother's fierce gaze. He knows it's true, deep down where he hides painful things away so he doesn't have to think about them, he knows. But having someone else say it aloud hurts. "I might need you," he whispers, "someday."

"You got me, Squirt. Promise."

~*~

The In-Between – Year Four: Assorted letters and hemorrhoid cream.

Dear Kurt,

Cooper is starring in a commercial. He called me last night and he was so excited. You'll never guess what it's for – hemorrhoid cream. I can't stop laughing. When I was little he used to call me a hemorrhoid whenever I tried to hang around him and his friends and one day I asked my mom what it was. She got really, really mad when she found out why I was asking. So... irony and all that. And also, who would want to go in front of a camera and pretend they have hemorrhoids? Oh well, at least he finally got an acting job that he's actually getting paid for. He did a bunch of plays and a charity production of Grease, but this is an actual job. I hope he gets lots more so that when I decide to tell my parents that I want to be a singer or a

star on Broadway they'll know it's actually a possibility. Also because I want Cooper to be happy, but you already knew that. I wonder if Cooper does? I should probably tell him.

Someone who doesn't want Cooper to be happy and successful at the career he chose? My father. He wouldn't even talk to him on the phone to congratulate him. It was really mean and I think Mom was mad at him.

I had a weird dream about you last night. You were here at my school and we were waiting by my locker, which is weird because we don't even have lockers until eighth grade. But it was mine – it even had a collage of magazine letters spelling out my name stuck up inside and also a picture of you. When I opened up my locker door a wave of sea water washed out and all over me. It didn't get on you though, but it started sweeping me up and down the hallway while you stood by and watched me, calling after me as I floated away. Nobody else in the hall got caught up in the wave, just me. You looked so scared. I could see you standing there with tears in your eyes, saying my name over and over until you were so far away that you were tiny and I couldn't hear you anymore. I was sort of scared, but calm at the same time. Does that make sense? I was mostly scared because you were and not because of myself, except that I didn't want to go away from you. When I woke up I thought I was wet for a couple of minutes, then I fell back to sleep. I think I need one of those dream dictionaries to try and figure that one out, huh?

Guess I should go do some homework. I'm supposed to be reading a book for a book report right now! I miss you!

Blaine

~*~

Dear Blaine,

One more week left of school! You know what that means? Vacation with my dad and then two weeks and then YOU. I'm getting so excited! Dad and I had a hard time trying to pick something to do this year. He says since I'm a brand new teenager I probably don't want to go to theme parks and stuff like that, but I don't even care. I just like being with Dad. In the end we decided on a trip to Columbus, which is super close, and that we'd spend lots of time at museums and galleries and places I like. And he got us tickets to some shows, Blaine! And even the ballet one night! I can't wait to tell you all about it.

School has been extra torturous this year, so I won't weep over the fact that it's ending for a few months. And then ballet and musicals and the beach and YOU! It's gonna be a perfect summer.

I just baked so many cookies and cupcakes with Belinda (she's Tony who works at the shop's wife) for a charity bake sale. It was really fun and she sent me home with a few of each to share with Dad. They were pretty good, but her recipe was inferior to your mother's by a long shot. Be sure to tell her that nothing beats her cupcakes. And also I tried out that quiche recipe she sent to me with your last letter and it was amazing. Even Dad gobbled it up and he turned up his nose when I said the word 'quiche'. I really appreciate her teaching me how to cook all the way from Massachusetts!

I have a question – If we were stranded in New York for one evening only before our parents came and collected us and only had time to shop at ONE store and see ONE show, which would you choose? The idea popped into my head when Dad and I were trying to plan our vacation together and it's been plaguing me ever since. And of course I decided that being stranded in New York would be SO much better if you were with me, just like everything else is. So... which would it be? I'll see if you're any more decisive than I am. I'll give you a hint – I've chosen a show. Having a difficult time with the shopping however. It's so hard! Tell me in your letter and I'll see if we match up.

Gotta go and practice cooking steak. My dad likes it rare but I always seem to overcook it. Maybe I'll have perfected it by the time his birthday rolls around.

See you and talk to you soon!

(I can't wait, in case you couldn't tell!)

!!!

!!!

Kurt!

P.S. Soon!!!!

Chapter Five

Thirteen – August 2007: The Summer When There is a Girl

Amy Mullins is from Jackson, New Jersey and is staying with her aunt and uncle in their rented beach house for three weeks. Blaine and Kurt learn this about her within the first five minutes. Within the first twenty-four hours, they learn that all of the other boys their age are all dying for Amy's attention and will act like complete idiots to get it. Even if that means Amy herself tells them off and threatens to push them into the ocean. That only eggs them on.

"I swear, you two are the only decent boys in this whole place," she tells Blaine and Kurt, taking a lick of her ice cream cone. "I wish they would all leave us alone." Blaine wishes that Amy would leave him and Kurt alone, but of course he doesn't say that. He just nods and smiles and tries to laugh along with Kurt. Even though she has become a hijacker of Kurt's attention and therefore Blaine's entire summer.

It's not that he doesn't like Amy, because he does. She's friendly and smart and she likes musicals and sea creatures and she doesn't roll around in filth all day and smell like sour sea water. The other boys call her *hot* and tell each other to check out her boobs. Kurt tells them they are being disrespectful when they ask if he has ever seen her bathing suit top slip when they've been out for a swim. They all laugh and roll their eyes and Kurt's cousin Daniel says *as if he would even notice*, his lip curled.

Kurt is still red faced and avoiding Blaine's eyes when they make their way to the cave. Amy has been mercifully absent all day and Kurt and Blaine have an unspoken agreement to never take her to their cave, to their secret spot.

They are quiet for several minutes, Kurt sitting on a low rock shelf and tossing stones out of the cave door and into the surf while Blaine leans against the wall and watches him. He keeps playing the boys' words about Amy over and over in his head. They all seemed to be in agreement about her, but Blaine just doesn't see her in any special way. Mostly she sort of gets on his nerves, and that makes him feel guilty because she hasn't done anything. He supposes she's pretty, with her long, dark hair and her big, brown eyes. Her skin is what people refer to as "sun-kissed" and she has a nice figure and long, long legs. She's taller than both he and Kurt and most of the other boys their age. But Blaine doesn't find her attractive. He just doesn't.

"Kurt?" he asks quietly. The rhythmic *plunk plunk* of Kurt's rock-throwing pauses. He's listening. Blaine swallows the nervous lump in his throat. "Do you think Amy is pretty?"

Kurt is silent for so long that Blaine stops studying his own hands and looks over at him. Kurt is staring at his feet. He shrugs his shoulders as Blaine watches. "I guess so," he replies. His voice is sad. "She has pretty hair."

"Yeah," Blaine agrees. She does have pretty hair. Blaine kind of hates that about her, he decides.

It's about a week later when Kurt is away for the day with his relatives and Blaine is forced to spend his time with only Amy. They're lying on towels and reading when she closes her book and rolls over onto her front. "Blaine?"

He gives her a questioning look from over the top of his paperback.

"Does Kurt like me?" she asks.

Blaine feels a strange tightening in the bottom of his throat and for one hysterical moment he thinks that he's forgotten how to breathe. Of all of the boys here at the beach, she's decided to leech on to Kurt? Blaine feels indignant. Kurt is his. Right? She can't go stealing his best friend away just because she has some stupid crush on him.

Blaine realizes that he hasn't spoken when the fog clears and he can see her watching him with an odd look on her face. "Because I thought we were all friends, but he's been really quiet lately and when I asked him to get ice cream he said he didn't feel like it. And Kurt *always* wants ice cream, you know that."

Blaine wants to tell her that of course he knows that, since Kurt is *his* best friend. Not hers. Not her anything. But guilt strikes him again, for the millionth time that summer. What if Kurt likes her? He swallows the lump in his throat. "Of course he likes you," he says quietly. "He said you have good taste in musicals." Amy gives him a blinding smile, her perfect, white teeth shining in the sun. "And he said that you have pretty hair," he adds, his voice even lower. He feels physically sick when she winds her hair around her finger and lets it go – a perfect ringlet bouncing against her clavicle.

Blaine spends the last week of Amy's stay watching her interactions with Kurt and trying to decipher the feelings that every shared look and laugh between them have bubbling up inside him. He feels wretched and angry and mostly wants to run away and hide from whatever he's feeling, and also from the pair of

them. But he never once does, because he tells himself that if he leaves, she wins. He catches many odd looks from Kurt and pretends not to notice, even though they had perfected nonverbal communication summers before.

He is glad when she goes home. Jubilant. He smiles as she drives away and feels a familiar stab of guilt in his guts. But Kurt is smiling too, and that makes everything so much better.

The night after Kurt leaves for Ohio and Blaine is sniffing silently into his pillow, he replays over and over in his head his conversation with Cooper from the summer before.

"The sooner you face the fact that Dad is an asshole and will never love you unless you do everything that he wants and be everything that he wants, the better, Squirt. Because I've seen how much it hurts you when he's cold, but someday, Blaine, someday you're going to do something or be something that he really doesn't like and it's going to get a lot worse than cold shoulders and mean looks. And there will be something, little brother. There will be something."

Blaine is pretty sure he knows what that something is and it terrifies him.

~*~

The In-Between – Year Five: Assorted letters, something scary and the hospital.

I told them. It was bad. Mom cried and my father won't talk to me. I called Cooper and he said he was cool with it. Those were his exact words – "I'm cool with it." Always helpful Cooper. Still, better than the alternative I suppose.

Thank you.

Blaine

~*~

Kurt,

I'm writing this from the hospital. You said courageous, my parents said stupid and risky – apparently they're smarter than I give them credit for. These guys jumped us while we were waiting for a ride. I have a broken

rib, a broken leg and a concussion. Possibly some light internal bleeding. Mom found a new school for me to go to, a private school. They have a zero tolerance bullying policy that is strictly enforced. My father scoffed when she told me. I know he thinks I deserved it. I hate him. I never thought I would ever say this in my life – Cooper was right. Everything feels so wrong.

I'm loopy with drugs but I wanted to tell you. They wouldn't let me call from the hospital phone. I wish you were here. I miss you.

Love,

Blaine

~~*

Dearest Blaine,

I want to say thank you, first of all. You make me feel brave, even though you don't see yourself that way. You are. Going somewhere safe is not running away, Blaine. Please don't think of it as such.

Because of you and your friendship, I feel more at ease being myself. I told my dad. And also Mercedes. Just the two of them for now, but it's a start. I feel good about it. My dad said that he'd known for years, then asked me if I was sure. I told him yes, of course. I have been sure for a long time. Mercedes just tried to coax me to tell other people. Not yet. But someday.

I'm so sorry for what has happened to you, Blaine. I wish there was something I could do to make everything better. Your new school sounds good. I wish I could be there with you. I know this is a terrible thing to say, seeing as you've just been through a trauma – but I'm so grateful not to be alone. Thank you for that. No matter what people say to me or do to me, I am always thinking of you and your face in my mind straightens my spine and puts spikes in my words. I fling them about dangerously just for you. Especially now.

Someday we will go away and live free from those people who would hurt and judge us based on something we cannot change. And we will be happy then. You and I and the world at our feet.

All my love,

Your best friend, Kurt xxx ooo

Chapter Six

Fourteen – August 2008: The Summer When Blaine is on Crutches and Kurt Learns That All Fathers Are Not Burt Hummel

There is a skeleton of a car in the driveway of the beach house.

Blaine doesn't ask about it and no one says a word. It sits there, covered in a black shroud and remains an ominous secret for three long weeks. That is until Blaine's father shows up for his vacation and with all of the forced cheerfulness of a clown at a child's birthday party, tells Blaine that they're going to be rebuilding it together. *It's a classic*, he says. *We're going to bond*, he promises. A promise that feels empty when Blaine knows the true reasoning behind it.

He looks down at the cast on his leg. They'd had to re-break it since it had healed improperly. He feels as though it will always be there, reminding him of the night of the dance and all of the things that he cannot change. Right along with his father and his ever watchful, disapproving blue gaze.

He mostly props up books and hands his father things. They drive to shops and junk yards in search of parts. Blaine craves Kurt's presence and unconditional love. He worries that they will never be finished building the stupid car and that his father will waste the one month that he has to soak it up and revel in its simple perfection.

The weeks when his father is in Boston and the summer house is blissfully silent are his favourites. His mother is there as always, but she has been quiet. She watches him too, but not in the same way his father does. She looks sad and regretful. Blaine wants to tell her that it isn't her fault and she does her best, but he never says a word.

When August begins and Kurt arrives, Blaine breathes a sigh of relief. The feeling of peace, unfortunately, does not last.

His father takes much more time off work than usual. Whenever Blaine wants to meet up with Kurt, his father is there. He interrupts when they are watching movies, asking Blaine questions about the car. When Kurt shows that he is knowledgeable on the subject, Blaine's father flat out ignores him and sometimes leaves the room. Blaine has never been so mortified. He apologizes profusely. Kurt stops coming over to his house.

Blaine sneaks away every chance he gets and they meet at their cave. Sometimes they sit in silence and stare out at the water. Sometimes Blaine cries into Kurt's shoulder. Sometimes he tries to apologize some more. Kurt shushes him and tells him it will all be fine in time. They will escape. It's a future they treasure like so much delicate, breakable glass, holding it close to their chests and keeping it from anyone but each other.

And after everything – Blaine's father's interfering and his mother's silent guilt and Kurt's discomfort because of it all – after all of that, Blaine is forced to leave the beach early to get his cast off and go through physical therapy before school begins.

They meet up the night before his departure and huddle together amongst the rocks. "I'm sorry about this summer," Blaine says. "Next year will be better. I promise."

Kurt smiles and rubs Blaine's shoulder. He leans into the touch, trying to soak in a years' worth of affection.

~*~

The In-Between – Year Six: Assorted texts, a letter and a new school.

Sent 11:42AM From Unknown

I convinced my dad to get me a cell phone finally! This is Kurt btw.

Sent 12:01PM From Blaine

Oh that's so great! It'll be so much easier to keep in touch now! :)

Sent 12:06PM From Kurt

How's school?

Sent 12:13PM From Blaine

A lot better than last year. I sent you a letter telling you about it. How about you?

Sent 12:18PM From Kurt

Don't ask. School sucks. People in this town are ignorami. God I can't wait to get away from this place.

Sent 12:22PM From Blaine

:(I wish I could be there with you. For you. I would say have courage but I still flinch every time a locker slams or someone walks too loudly coming down the corridor.

Sent 12:24PM From Kurt

Oh Blaine. I wouldn't want you to be here.

Sent 12:25PM From Blaine

:(

Sent 12:26PM From Kurt

Not like that! It's just... bad here. Scary. I want you safe where you are.

Sent 12:28PM From Kurt

I wish you were safe here with me.

~*~

Hey Kurt,

So... Dalton. It's kinda weird being here. Mostly because the school is so beautiful that I forget I'm at school at all. Also I have to wear a uniform. It's blue and red with gray slacks and a white shirt. I miss my bowties, but it is sorta nice not having to think about what to put on in the mornings. I know you must be gasping in shock and disgust at me this very moment! I'll send you a picture of me in my uniform when we get them taken. Or I'll get someone to take one for me with my phone.

The best thing about being here – besides the obvious fact that no one can get away with calling me names and kicking me so hard they crack my ribs – are the study rooms. They're all dark wood and leather couches and high ceilings and huge windows. Really very beautiful. I'll get a picture of those for you too.

They have a choir here. An a capella choir. They have tryouts early next week and I think I'm going to go. A nice guy named Jeff in my English class said he was going to try out and I should go with him. Should I? I've been mostly avoiding other students unless they approach me first, but this would kind of force contact, I suppose. I just don't look forward to having to explain why I transferred here and why I finished my last year of school by correspondence before coming. It's not a fun story to tell. I never want to think about it again.

I could see you here. I could see you here so easily. I wish you were. I love August, but I wish I got to see you every month of every year. Someday though, right? We can be roommates and have our very own apartment. Where should we live? London? Paris? San Francisco? I thought maybe New York but Cooper says it's a horrible place. I think that has more to do with the fact that he couldn't get a role in a play or on a soap opera.

I'll call you soon. And do write. Your letters always make my day, week, month.

Blaine

~*~

Sent 6:03PM From Blaine

They gave me a solo! I'll call you later and sing it to yooooouuu!!!

~*~

Sent 3:42PM From Kurt

The man who runs our show choir is a total creep. I checked it out after you told me how great a time you've been having with yours. No thank you.

Sent 3:43PM From Kurt

Mercedes joined anyway. She's says she's gonna sing even if a creepy white dude is the only one listening.

Chapter Seven

Fifteen – August 2009: The Summer When There Isn't Enough Talking

When they meet in the Tinsleys' front yard after lunch Kurt says he's craving a banana split. He flushes red when he says it and Blaine studies him in confusion, studies the tiny pink circles just below his cheekbones that Blaine often has the urge to run his fingertips across. He shakes his head to free it of the thought. Kurt's shoulders are slumped and there is an air of general awkwardness about him. Blaine has no idea what is going on, but it can't be about the ice cream. The two of them have shared many a banana split since the first year they spent at the beach, and yet Kurt seems shy bringing it up. Kurt seems shy quite a lot lately –stammering and blushing at strange moments and tensing up when Blaine leans over him or brushes against his arm. Blaine is beginning to worry that he did something to make Kurt uncomfortable.

The sky is the inky purple of approaching twilight when they settle in with their ice cream. Kurt had changed his mind and ordered a sundae instead of the banana split they usually share, so Blaine had gotten a simple milkshake, still puzzled by the odd sideways glance Kurt had given him. The wind is wicked and the waves are crashing, and Kurt gets hot fudge all over his cheek when a particularly large gust knocks the plastic spoon from his hand.

Every year of Blaine's life has a single moment that seems to shape the rest into something, whether it be good or bad. The death of his grandfather, moving to Boston, meeting Kurt... and this year, this suddenly right here... he's not even sure how they got here. He never wants to leave.

It's almost like an accident at first – like Blaine had fallen forward when he tried to wipe the chocolate from Kurt's cheek, or maybe Kurt had, and then they had just been there, in the middle, together. Their lips just pressed together. They are both still, Blaine with his eyes squeezed shut wondering if Kurt is sneaking a look, wondering if he should too. And then they are moving and it is so much better. Soft and slick and rougher and softer again, the angle changing, the pressure back and forth until they both pull away and just stare, their ice cream tumbling to the sand, forgotten.

No one says “what does this mean?” They don't talk about it at all. It just happens and they let it.

~*~

When Blaine returns to his house that evening after the sun has gone down, he feels as light as a feather. He floats through the front door, humming a happy tune under his breath, the sweet taste of Kurt's hot fudge sundae still on his lips.

"Then stop him from going, Mari! You're his mother; it's not rocket science!"

He stops in his tracks. His father, however, does not stop his tirade, ignoring his mother as she disagrees and tries to get him to see reason.

"That boy is the fruitiest thing this side of a fruit farm, and you just let our son wander off with him and stay out until all hours of the night. It's no wonder Blaine thinks he's... one of them, too, as much time as he spends with that boy."

"Good lord, Tom, you aren't seriously suggesting that Blaine is making it all up. You have said many, many foolish and offensive things since –"

"It is not foolish! Monkey see, monkey do. Where else did he pick it up? Certainly not at our house! Though the movies you watch and the classes you've signed him up for over the years probably didn't help!"

"So it's my fault, too, is it? He's the way he is because he *is*, Tom. It has nothing to do with outside influences."

"And so you're just happy for our son to be a –"

"No. Of course I'm not. How could I be after what happened? But you can't change something like that. We have to accept it and move on –"

"Like hell we do! We do not have to stand around while he does god knows what with that limp-wristed –"

"I will not listen to you talk about either of them in that manner!"

And as Blaine's father begins to rant once more and his mother stands up for him in one way, but never in the other, he feels a sort of calm settle over him. Although his stomach feels tied in knots and there is an annoying fluttering at the backs of his eyes, he does feel calm. He's glad, in a way, that's he's overheard them as they really are. He can no longer lie to himself, can no longer trick himself into believing that they feel one thing or another when he's heard their truths shouted so plainly.

Blaine turns around and leaves the house again, closing the door very gently behind him.

He texts Kurt on his way down the beach, stopping on their favourite piece of driftwood to wait for him to sneak away from his grandparents' house.

"Are you okay?" Kurt asks before he's even reached the driftwood seat. Blaine nods, but curls into him the moment he sits down. "What happened?"

"They were fighting about me." *They were fighting about you. They were fighting about us.* But then Blaine remembers what they had been doing only an hour or so before and he wonders for the first time just what that *us* has morphed into. Still he says nothing, worried that Kurt won't want to discuss it. More worried that he won't hear the answers that he needs. Instead of talking more he cuddles closer, Kurt's lips pressing to the top of his head. He smells Kurt's shirt and the sea breeze and he's still okay. Less shaky and teary and okay.

They sit until their butts are numb and then move to the soft sand where they fall asleep, limbs tangled and Blaine's ear against Kurt's chest. His heart is beating in tandem with the rolling of the waves.

In the morning they go home to shower and change in order to meet for breakfast. Blaine's father's car is no longer in the driveway. His mother is absent from the kitchen. He sighs in relief and heads for the stairs.

~*~

It's a picnic in their cave and Blaine can't bring himself to care about anything but Kurt's mouth. It has been teasing him: sucking on strawberries and eating grapes and drinking from a straw. Blaine moves everything aside and pushes Kurt down on the blanket. He doesn't utter a single word of complaint.

~*~

It's an afternoon in the sun and Kurt is complaining because he forgot his sunblock. Blaine watches him with a grin and sprays him with his watergun. "Laugh it up!" Kurt yells, hitting Blaine with a perfectly aimed sandal. "Look at me! I'm roasting and becoming increasingly coated in freckles the longer I'm out here with out my SPF seventy-five. And you!" Kurt motions to where Blaine is lounging in the sand, the sun warm on his skin. "You're all sun-kissed and glowy and I'm over here – covered in freckles and red like a lobster!"

Blaine grins again and slides his sunglasses down his nose. "I didn't know lobsters could get freckles."

Kurt makes an unholy noise before launching himself at Blaine and tackling him, rolling them both over and over until they are coated in sand. Blaine takes over and then he's got Kurt under him, completely at his mercy. He looks around to be sure there is no one near before leaning down and capturing his lips, the sleek slide of sun-warmed flesh and the taste of salt overwhelming. Kurt moans a little and opens his mouth and Blaine is done for. Everything that follows is a blur of happiness and sun and gritty sand that he smilingly rinses away in the shower hours later.

~*~

It's the night before Kurt is leaving and Blaine knows that it's his last chance to say something. To say anything. To clarify what and when and how. But when Kurt brushes their lips together and kisses him so soft and sweet and rests his forehead against Blaine's, eyes closed and the most serene expression on his face, Blaine can't make himself say a word. *This is enough*, he thinks. He knows he is lying to himself; he tells that part of his mind to shut up. This is enough. Because at the moment it is everything. So it has to be, doesn't it?

They don't get a proper goodbye the next morning. Just a tight hug and sad smile and eyes that are watery and pained. Kurt kisses the palm of his hand and places it against the window. A goodbye that only Blaine will understand.

Blaine feels a tight fist of panic clench in his gut as he watches the car pull away, the palm of Kurt's pale hand still pressed against the window. It's too soon. It isn't fair. He has so many things that he hadn't the chance to say. Or the courage to ask.

~*~

The In-Between – Year Seven: Assorted texts, a letter and ignoring the obvious.

Sent 1:17PM From: Kurt

The Spanish teacher has taken over the show choir! Creepy man got fired for being creepy. More news at 11. (Well, after school.)

~*~

Dear Kurt,

I hope everything is well with you! I've loved hearing the crazy tales of your new glee club. I'm so glad you and Mercedes have a good group to sing with, even with all of the drama they seem to bring with them. If your director doesn't give you a solo soon he is nuts! Your voice is the most unique and beautiful thing I have ever had the joy of hearing in my life.

In other news – my choir has decided to make me the front man this year. At first they asked me to audition for solos, but now they're just handing them to me without any work. I guess it's sort of unfair to the other guys, but they don't seem to care. And I have to admit, I'm having a lot of fun.

I know it's sort of weird to keep sending letters when we text all the time and IM and talk on the phone. I guess I just like having this tangible proof – this thing that is you and me. I can't really explain it. Humor me? There are so many things that I want to say, to talk about, but I'm too afraid sometimes. Those things come out better on paper, don't you think?

I miss you.

Love, Blaine

~*~

Sent 4:02PM From Kurt

Rachel is INSANE. Quinn is PREGNANT. Finn Hudson is a moron who makes even Brittany look like a genius in comparison. I will discuss the deets later tonight if you're going to be around.

~*~

Sent 1:18PM From Blaine

Kurt, God, we performed at a seniors' home today and a lady had a heart attack. She freaking DIED. I'm all shaky still. Why do I feel like I'm partly responsible? I was only singing for them. :(

Sent 1:23PM From Kurt

It is no way your fault. Are you back at the school? Get on your computer and we can talk 'face to face'.

~*~

Sent 6:55PM From Kurt

Something super weird happened today. Dad met Finn Hudson's mother at a parent get together at school, and now he's just left on a date with her. She seems very sweet but... WEIRD. Why are you not around to talk me through!

~*~

Sent 7:53AM From Kurt

Dad bought me a car! Dad bought me a CAR! OMG! You have to see it. It's big and shiny and sleek and MINE. Holy freaking crap!

Sent 8:24AM From Blaine

That's amazing, Kurt! I can't wait to see it. Happy Birthday! :)

~*~

Sent 7:22PM From Blaine

It's nearly summer! I can't wait to see you. Two more days of class! :)

Chapter Eight

Sixteen – August 2010: The Summer When Kurt Doesn't Show

Blaine has been there a week, alone and melancholy. Without Kurt he sees the real side of things – the beach sand harsh and the rocks sharp and the wind biting and the briny scent of the sea putrid. The people are faceless – an ever-revolving crop of vacationers. None of it matters. Blaine feels lost.

He sits on a large chunk of sun-bleached driftwood and watches the gulls fight over a pile of fries that someone had overturned and left. He can't quite seem to shake the horrible feeling that he will never see Kurt again and that what happened between them the summer before had meant far less to Kurt than it had to him. He misses Kurt. He doesn't want to be in their places without him. He goes to all of them anyway.

He sends a text: *I miss you so much it's like a physical ache*, and regrets it immediately. Kurt doesn't respond.

Two days later and Blaine is once again staring out at an ocean full of everything and nothing, his phone clasped in his hand. He has long since stopped beating himself up for sending his thoughts and feelings out into the ether so heedlessly. Now he only feels numb. Kurt has always been his safe place. He doesn't have a safe place anymore.

"It feels that way to me, too," he hears from behind, the sound of the voice, silver bells, distorted by the cruel winds.

Blaine he turns around so fast he nearly falls off of his driftwood perch. And Kurt is there. He looks out of breath and flushed, his jeans and button up and light, knotted scarf too much for the location and weather. "Where did you –? How are you –?" Blaine stumbles over his words and shakes his head. He doesn't know why Kurt has changed his mind. "I thought you had to work with your dad."

Kurt shrugs and comes forward, his feet slipping and sliding in the sand. Shoes are such a nuisance on the beach. Blaine wants Kurt to take them off. He wants to turn back time and make it three weeks ago and to have never gotten the message that Kurt wasn't coming after all.

Kurt sinks down next to him, all grace, and then fiddles nervously with his scarf – two conflicting actions that are each so very Kurt. They sit in silence for a long moment. It is not the comfortable silences of years past. Blaine can tell that Kurt is thinking, grouping the perfect words together before spitting them out. He does this often, but it rarely takes him this long. Blaine has decided to keep his words to himself before he does any further damage with them.

“I missed you,” Kurt finally says. Simple and quiet and aching to the point. And Blaine finally understands his opening statement: *It feels that way to me, too.*

I miss you so much it's like a physical ache.

Blaine's breath catches and he turns his eyes on Kurt who looks back, teary and miserable. “I'm sorry,” he says quietly. “I'm sorry I was so afraid.”

“Afraid?”

“To come. I was afraid to come here.”

And Blaine gets it. He feels like a hole opens in his chest then, shredding his insides and leaving them tumbling out all over the sand. Kurt didn't want to have to face him. Everything that they have ignored for the past year, in their phone calls and in their letters, those things would be impossible to ignore once they were face to face. And Kurt didn't want to have to deal with it. With him. With what had happened between them. “Because of last summer?” he manages to get out. “You regret it.”

Kurt's eyes widen and he shakes his head, his perfect red lips forming a surprised O. “I – No. *No*. Absolutely not. It's just that... well, it's just the opposite. I... *Blaine*.” The way Kurt is regarding him, like he wants Blaine to read his meaning just by looking at his face, that he wants him to understand without having to be told. But Blaine doesn't understand, doesn't know just by looking. He does feel less panicked, his heart beat slowing from frenzied to a simple pounding, because *just the opposite* must be something good. Something that he wants.

“I'm in love with you, Blaine,” Kurt says, his eyes tearing up and his face crumpling just a little as he looks down and begins to once again fiddle with the ends of his scarf. He looks despondent. Blaine doesn't understand why, when his own brain feels like it is short circuiting with all of the overwhelming breadth of things that are going on within. He wants to take Kurt in his arms; he wants to jump around and cheer;

he wants to kiss Kurt until their lips are sore; but what he needs to do before all of that is speak, say something back. Kurt's shoulders are rounded, his body closing in on itself. He doesn't understand. How did the two of them get so mixed up?

"Oh, Kurt," Blaine says. He lays his hands on each of Kurt's hunched shoulders and gently rolls them back until Kurt meets his eyes. "I love you, too. I always have." He leans forward and presses his forehead against Kurt's and closes his eyes. They both let out a sigh. "Since the moment we met you have been the most special, most important thing in the world to me."

"We should go to the cave, Blaine. Because I really need to kiss you."

~*~

The tide is all the way in so they have to wade into the cave. Kurt has removed his shoes and rolled his jeans up as high as he can – which is not very high, as they are the tightest jeans that Blaine has ever seen. Blaine chuckles at him and receives a playful glare in return. He is so glad to have his Kurt back that he wants to whoop with joy. He offers to piggyback Kurt in instead. He receives another death glare before Kurt plops into the water, jeans and all, and makes his way in through the opening in the rock. Blaine follows after him with a grin, the water barely brushing the bottoms of his shorts.

He is accosted as soon as he sets foot inside the rocks walls of the cave – taken around the waist and pressed up against the smooth limestone and kissed within an inch of his life. Kurt's lips are silky and wet and Blaine can taste faint traces of the sea salt in his mouth. He whimpers and submits, opening up for more of Kurt's tongue and going limp in his arms, completely at his mercy.

Being at Kurt's mercy is a wonderful thing.

Blaine raises his arms above his head, his fingers scrabbling against the rock, looking for purchase, anything to hold onto. But they slip down over and over, the wall too smooth from years of sea water pounding over it. Kurt slides his hands up Blaine's arms and winds their fingers together and presses Blaine's hands back against the cool smoothness, tilting his head to deepen their kiss even further, turning it wet and dirty. Blaine moans into his mouth, tightening his grip on Kurt's fingers, and moans again as Kurt presses his hands more firmly against the solid rock. And Blaine finds himself trying to form words, trying for some sort of coherency that just does not want to come to him. Kurt seems to understand. He untangles their fingers and moves his hands to Blaine's hips, hefting him up slightly so his legs can wrap

around Kurt's waist. He pushes Blaine's body back, leaning him against a ledge to distribute his weight, and then presses in closer. Blaine can feel him – the hard outline of him through his soaked jeans and he jerks his hips forward, wanting friction, wanting the press of that hot hardness.

“Blaine,” Kurt breathes against his lips, then slides down, mouthing and gasping against Blaine's jaw and chin and throat as he goes. He sucks on his Adam's apple and Blaine's hips jerk forward once more, this time coming up against Kurt's own, the delicious, achingly hard length of him right there, and then Kurt cants his hips and they are together. They groan in unison. Blaine looks Kurt in the eye for a moment before grabbing him by the ass and pulling Kurt towards him just as he thrusts forward.

It only takes a minute of urgent, uncoordinated rutting before they are both crying out and jerking erratically and coming in their pants.

“Um,” Kurt says, slowly and carefully dropping Blaine back to the ground. “I really did only intend to kiss you...”

Blaine laughs and buries his head against Kurt's shoulder. “It's okay though, right?” Now he is second guessing himself, though he is sure that Kurt had been joking. It's so difficult for him to just accept Kurt's love at face value. With everyone else there has always been a catch.

Kurt presses a chaste kiss to Blaine's sore, swollen lips and nods his head. He pulls back and glances down at himself, screwing up his face. “I thought wet jeans felt disgusting... This is even worse.”

“Maybe we should go out into the water and rinse our pants out,” Blaine suggests, his face warming. He can see that Kurt is rather pink himself, even in the shadows of the cave.

“I'm going to have to take mine off completely.”

“I won't look if you don't want me to.”

Kurt watches him for a moment, a small smile on his lips. “I don't mind,” he finally says, and Blaine hears his own breath catch.

He ends up having to help Kurt out of his sodden jeans, the two of them laughing the entire time. They stand shoulder to shoulder in the water, rinsing out their underwear. “The fish are going to eat it,” Blaine says to lighten the serious mood that has suddenly fallen over them.

“That’s gross, Blaine.”

“I know. But still true.”

Kurt huffs a laugh. “Just because it’s true doesn’t mean you need to say it out loud,” he says, snapping the waistband of his wet briefs to try and dislodge the mess within. Blaine starts to giggle. Soon they’re holding onto each other, laughing into each others’ hair. “You’re a fool,” Kurt tells him fondly.

“You love me anyway.”

“Anyway? It’s one of the reasons I love you most.” Kurt looks down at Blaine and Blaine is forced to close his eyes against the depth of emotion he sees in Kurt’s.

“Kurt?” he whispers. Kurt hums in response and traces a cold, wet fingertip around Blaine’s right eye and over the slope of his nose. “We’re gonna talk about it this time, right?”

“Yes. Yes, of course.”

~*~

The In-Between – Year Eight: Assorted letters and texts, something terrible and a missing shoe.

Sent at 6:27PM From Kurt<3 (my boyfriend!)

I cannot find my favorite shoe. I feel like Cinderella. Did you happen across it, my prince?

Sent at 7:01PM From Blaine xx

Muahahahaha! I shall issue my demands for its safe return at midnight on the twenty-fifth.

Sent at 7:03PM From Kurt<3 (my boyfriend!)

I am gasping in shock here, Blaine. I must see that it’s all right or you get nothing!

Sent at 7:06PM From Blaine xx

001.jpeg

Sent at 12:00AM From Blaine xx

I demand one picture of my boyfriend's beautiful face. Send it to me asap & I will return your shoe via the US Postal Service. You have one day.

Sent at 6:53AM From Kurt<3 (my boyfriend!)

0_1.jpeg

Sent at 6:56AM From Blaine xx

Oh. Wow. I will return your shoe this very morning.

Sent at 6:59AM From Blaine xx

Just for the record, you are the most breathtaking creature in the entire universe. I am besotted. xx

~*~

Dear Blaine,

First off I just have to say – I miss you a lot. I'm really glad you sent me that text and that I stopped being so stubborn and frightened and came to see you. Because that is why I go – to see you. After that first summer it was the only thing that kept me from throwing myself on the floor and clinging to Dad's leg and refusing to leave the house when it was time to go to the airport. But I digress...

I was so petrified you didn't feel that way about me that I almost stayed behind and missed out on the most important month of my year. If only you could have heard the way Mercedes and Rachel yelled at me. They are big fans of yours, even without meeting you. That only goes to show how much I gush.

Anyway, what I am trying to say, in amongst all of this off-topic meandering, is that I'm sorry, Blaine. I hurt you by not showing up and for being practically silent and for being too afraid to talk about what happened between us last year. I don't want that to ever happen again. You are too important.

Seriously, if I'm ever being stupid like that again please yell at me. I might give you the silent treatment for a few days because I am as stubborn as the day is long, but I will get over it and admit you were right. God, I miss you like crazy. I want to put my head on your shoulder. (You're singing the Paul Anka song now, aren't you? Is it eerie how well I know you?) I want to rest back against the rock and have you sitting between my legs with your head on my chest. I want to be able to do those things whenever I want. Life isn't right when I can't. Sometimes being so far away from you makes it really difficult to breathe.

I love you.

Kurt

~*~

Sent at 3:45PM From: Kurt<3 (my boyfriend!)

UGH. Mr. Schue is so unoriginal. Boys vs Girls?! And of course he tells me I can't be on the girls' team yet again. I swear he thinks I want to BE a girl, but I just want to be on a team that actually treats me with respect.

Sent at 3:46PM From: Kurt<3 (my boyfriend!)

Also, his choice of sweater vest was eye-burningly atrocious today. Do people even look in the mirror before they leave their homes?

~*~

Sent at 5:56PM From: Kurt<3 (my boyfriend!)

At the hospital again. No change. I don't know what to do. Blaine, what will I do?

Sent at 6:01PM From: Blaine xx

I wish I was with you. It'll be ok, Kurt. It'll be ok. I love you.

Sent at 6:35PM From: Kurt<3 (my boyfriend!)

Carole is making me eat. She says hi. She used you as an excuse to guilt trip me into eating. I still like her anyway. And also you.

~*~

My Dearest Kurt,

I wish more than anything that I could have been there with you over this past week. I begged and pleaded with my mother to let me fly to Ohio, but as you can tell by my absence, she refused. I was even considering taking off without her permission, but the last thing you need right now is to be in the middle of my parental issues. I am so, so relieved and blissfully happy that your dad is awake and doing well. I know how worried you still are, but please don't clam up and stop talking again, Kurt. And look after yourself as well as your father. You know you are just as important to him as he is to you. And you are also so, so important to me. The most important of all. I love you so much, Kurt, and the thought of you being all alone and hurting like you have been just kills me. I'm so sorry I couldn't be there for you when you needed me to be. I promised that I would be and I couldn't deliver on that promise. I'm sorry.

I know that we've been speaking on the phone and texting while you're at the hospital, but I just needed to put pen to paper and tell you how much I care and regret not being around. Life will be so much brighter when we no longer have to be separated for 11 months of the year. It was painful being away from you before, but now that we're together as we are it's so much harder to go through every day without being able to see you smile or frown or hear your beautiful voice. The bad things seem easier with you next to me and nothing hurts quite as much when you are on my side.

The council has been asking for suggestions for competition songs and the ones I find myself suggesting are all very similar. Wes asked me if there was something we needed to talk about after the title of about the 20th sappy lovesong about missing your sweetheart came out of my mouth. I am pathetic. I don't even want to tell you the extent of my patheticness in fear that you will tell me I am freaking you out and you want me to keep far away from you for the rest of time. I may or may not have a photo of you under my pillow. The latter if you think that is weird and/or creepy. So yeah, I don't. Or not really. It's just on my nightstand. Or something. Really it is.

What do you want for Christmas, anyway? (Not a distraction from my awkward confessions. At all.) Before you ask, there is nothing I want besides you (my boyfriend!) with a big, red bow tied around you. Maybe next

year, though more likely the year after that. (If you could see my face – it is the perfect visual representation of my patheticness.)

I can't wait for New York, Kurt. I can't wait to be with you all of the time. Imagine never having to say goodbye at the end of August every summer, knowing we won't see each other for an entire year. That is always the worst day of my year. God I miss you. And love you. Being without you (and especially right now, when you cry on the phone it kills me not to be able to take you in my arms), it's the worst kind of torture. I just need you to know that I think about you always. And sometimes at inopportune moments when I should have my attention focused elsewhere. Like in English class when the teacher asks me questions about King Lear and I answer "Kurt. Um... what?" and everyone thinks I'm probably on something. Everyone besides the Warblers. They just mock me about it for weeks afterward.

Anyway, all of this to say: I miss you. I love you. I wish more than anything that I could be there with you to hold you tight. I've been writing you a song and I'll sing it to you over Skype.

My whole heart and all the rest of me,

Blaine

xoxoxoxoxox

P.S. Tell Carole thank you for taking care of you. And tell your dad to feel better and allow himself to be babied for a while. I think you need to do it almost as much as he needs it.

P.P.S. Once again, I love and adore you and you are beautiful.

~~*

My Dear Blaine,

I am trying to write you letters, though I know it doesn't happen as often as you'd like. I've been in such a funk since everything that happened with Dad. It's difficult to get back into the swing of things, though the doctors say he is out of the woods. I have him on an extremely strict diet still, even after the wedding and Carole and Finn being here and my not always being in charge of the food anymore. I snapped at Carole the other morning because I thought she was feeding Dad breakfast sausages. They were for Finn. God, I felt terrible. I STILL feel terrible. But I can't just shut it off, you know? I've been looking after Dad since Mom died

and I can't simply stop because he has a new wife. I'm trying. But he's too important to me and you know as well as I do that I am a total control freak when it comes to anything important to me. You did know that, right? Probably best if you do seeing as you're my boyfriend now and are right up there with my dad in the Important to Kurt Hummel category.

I hope things are going well at school and home. I know it's still tense around your dad. Have you heard from Cooper lately? I miss your Cooper stories. He would fit in so well with my friends here. They are all on the wrong side of loopy. A few of the girls and Artie nearly swooned when I told them your brother was the star of the freecreditratingtoday.com commercials. They really flipped out when I told them I'd met him before. I left out the bit about seeing him in the midst of a very intimate act. God, can you feel my blush all the way in Boston? It's been YEARS. Why am I still so embarrassed?

I've got to get back to practice I suppose. Even though Mr. Schue has been just as predictable with the competition solos as is usual. It's so frustrating! You know what would be amazing? If both our glee clubs made it to nationals. Then I could see you months early! Something to strive for. It will make me sway extra fabulously in the background. Also, our costumes are hideous. I almost walked out. Not even kidding.

I've read this over and it is not nearly sappy enough to be kept as a love letter or whatever you want it for. How shall I ever correct this?

I love you. Your silly grins and your tiny smiles, and the way they both make your eyes crinkle at the corners. When you are old you will have the deepest crow's feet known to man, and I will kiss them every night. They will be all the more beloved because they will be the result of your thousands of breathtakingly gorgeous smiles.

Also, you have an ass that won't quit.

(Blushing again.)

xxx,

Kurt

Oh and also ooo so that doesn't look quite so dirty. Um. I feel all warm. Going to open the window. Dad gets so cold now that he must have the heat cranked in here or something. Yeah.

Love you!

~*~

Sent at 2:26PM From Kurt<3 (my boyfriend!)

The girls have declared a mutiny and have confiscated many things near and dear to me until they get to 'meet' you. So Skype tonight? I apologize in advance.

Sent at 2:35PM From Blaine xx

Of course! I would love to meet them too. Also, some of the Warblers want to meet you, so we'll have even more company. <3

Chapter Nine

Seventeen – August 2011: The Summer When They Go on the Lam

Kurt drives that summer instead of flying, and Blaine finally gets to see his sweet sixteen present – sleek, shiny black and chrome.

When Kurt swings by the Andersons' beach house Blaine is just storming out the front door. Kurt pops open the passenger door and calls him over and the anger and frustration and tension drain out of Blaine's body at the very sight of him.

“Fancy seeing you around this neck of the woods,” Kurt drawls. The smile slips from his face. “What's wrong, Blaine?”

“My father,” Blaine says simply. He knows that Kurt needs no further explanation. Kurt gives a sympathetic hum and studies him for a long moment, car engine still idling. He looks almost calculating.

“Get in, stranger,” he drawls again.

Blaine shrugs and jumps in, slamming the door and snapping on his seatbelt. “Where to?”

“Hmm... Road trip, I think.”

Blaine laughs and Kurt grins over at him. He throws him a wink before backing out of the driveway and taking off down the street.

They are ten minutes outside of town before Blaine realizes that Kurt isn't planning on stopping anytime soon and he doesn't have fresh clothes or anything else. “Kurt, we don't have an overnight bag or anything. Where are we going?”

“Wherever the wind takes us,” Kurt says dramatically and laughs. “I've got my stuff in the back. I came straight to your place.”

Blaine feels a sense of warmth wash over him. Kurt had come straight to see him. He hadn't even stopped in to say hello to his grandparents first. "Well, *you* may be set, but I don't even have clean underwear or a toothbrush."

"So we buy you a toothbrush," Kurt says with a shrug. "We can share the rest. I have plenty of clothes and everything else."

"Did you plan this?"

"Nah. Spur of the moment. Though it is pretty ingenious if I do say so myself." Kurt bounces a little and reaches for the radio and Blaine watches him as he fiddles with the dials until he finds an oldies station. He's so beautiful and full of life. Blaine hates that they can't be together like this every day of every year, so he sits back in his seat and takes it in and falls in love all the more with every single word and look and smile.

They're in New Hampshire before Kurt is forced to stop for fuel. "We're officially fugitives," he says with waggle of his eyebrows. He hops out of the car to pump the gas.

~*~

The beach is familiar and safe, so they find a sparsely populated one and settle on a blanket Kurt keeps in the back of his car and begin ignoring their incoming calls and text messages.

"I'm going to have to answer my dad soon," Kurt says, tilting down his sunglasses to show Blaine his eyes. "I told him I took a detour so he wouldn't worry, but he will anyway."

Blaine sighs and looks out at the water. "I know. Me too, I suppose. This can't last forever."

Kurt smiles a little and takes his hand. "I didn't say we were going back. Just that we should let them know we aren't dead. Besides, this beach may be a little rocky, but I think I like Maine." Kurt wiggles a little and leans back on the blanket, taking Blaine's hand with him.

"Where are we going to stay?"

"I saw a hotel near the pharmacy where we bought your toothbrush."

“So we’re going to get a hotel room and just hang out here?” Blaine asks with a laugh.

Kurt shrugs. “I’m sure we can find something to amuse us.”

They do. After checking into an older hotel in the village, they find a karaoke bar that serves seafood and old fashioned milkshakes. Everything about the place is from another era, including the patrons. Blaine glances around at the crowd and the youngest person, besides Kurt and himself, looks to be in their late fifties.

Kurt excuses himself once they’ve finished eating. He returns ten minutes later with a thick book and a grin on his face. He plunks the book down on the table in front of Blaine and slides into the booth. “My new BFF Ethel over there said the singing starts in fifteen minutes. Thought we could pick something out and wow this crowd.” Blaine laughs at Kurt’s wiggling eyebrows and flops open the unwieldy book. And, wow, the selections inside are a little on the old fashioned side as well. He figures that he shouldn’t really be surprised. He certainly won’t be wowing *this* crowd with the newest Katy Perry chart topper like he would at school.

As they shuffle up onto the tiny stage, Blaine has to hold in his laughter. The music starts up with the sounds of train whistles and he turns around and stifles a laugh against his own shoulder. Kurt makes a face at him and pokes him in the side before beginning to sing.

“Pardon me, boy Is that the Chattanooga choo choo?”

Kurt has reached the end of the first verse before Blaine has quelled his urge to giggle and turned around to join in. When they reach the finale of the song, they are met with rousing applause.

*“She’s gonna cry
home?”*

~~What~~ Intell her that I’

Blaine allows himself to laugh then, while he and Kurt take bows and wave at the excited senior citizens demanding an encore. Kurt grabs the microphone and promises they’ll be back to do another number in a little while.

They fall into their booth, laughing against each other. The bartender comes over and places a bottle of wine and two glasses down in front of them. “Bernice said she would like to request that you two perform *Don’t Be Cruel*.” He motions to the bottle and does a funny little bow. “With her compliments.”

"Talk about singing for your supper," Kurt says after the bartender walks away. Blaine studies the label on the bottle for a moment, but he knows nothing about wine. He looks up at Kurt and shrugs, then pours them both a glass.

They understand Bernice's insistence that they take to the stage again once other members of the crowd get up there and start caterwauling into the microphone. One seemingly ancient lady manages to pull off a passable Patsy Cline number, but everyone else is just terrible.

So they sing *Don't Be Cruel*, dedicating it to the mysterious Bernice, and continue on with some Frank Sinatra and some sultry Peggy Lee. They have the old timers eating out of their hands.

Kurt has gone up alone just as Blaine is finishing off the last of the wine. "This is for my cutie," he says into the mic, and Blaine feels the warmth of a blush spread to the tips of his ears as Kurt starts belting out *Love Me or Leave Me*.

An ancient lady wearing the thickest glasses Blaine has ever seen as well as an actual *shawl* pulls a chair over and sits herself next to his booth. She doesn't say a word at first, just watches Kurt as he sings, a content little smile on her thin, red lips.

"Love me or leave me Or let me be lonely You won't believe me, but I love you only I'd rather be lonely Then happy with somebody else"

Her smile widens and she leans towards Blaine. "Don't you just love the old songs? They're so romantic."

Blaine returns her smile and nods, though she isn't even looking at him, but watching as Kurt sings.

"Your wife has a very lovely singing voice," she says.

"Um..." Blaine is too shocked and well, if he's being honest with himself, a little too drunk to try for any form of coherency. He chokes on his words. *Husband*, he thinks. Nothing comes out but a hysterical little giggle.

"There'll be no one Unless that someone is you I intend to be independently blue I want your love But I don't want to borrow To have it today to give it back tomorrow For your love is my love There's no love for nobody else"

Kurt finishes on a spectacular note and Blaine cheers along with everyone else in the bar. The old lady pats Blaine on the cheek and winks before leaving her chair and heading for her friends. Blaine watches her go, his eyes wide and mouth lolling open.

“Why're you gawking at that lady?” Kurt asks as he takes Blaine's glass and gulps down the last drink of wine. He reaches under the table and curls his long fingers around Blaine's thigh and that finalizes Blaine's decision.

“Let's go,” he says. He takes the empty glass from Kurt and places it back down on the table before offering Kurt his hand.

They walk back to the hotel, laughing and singing the entire way.

They're kissing before the door has even closed behind them, and stripping each other of clothes before they've even reached the bed. Blaine pushes Kurt down on his back and tugs at his jeans, pulling them all the way off and tossing them on the floor. His eyes slowly trace up Kurt's long, pale legs and... *god*... he isn't wearing any underwear. And so Blaine stands there staring down at Kurt's cock, long and flushed and curving upward, resting on his taut stomach. He's never seen another guy's dick before, not live and in person and with the knowledge that he's allowed to *touch* it.

“Oh, *Kurt*...” They are the only words he can manage. He falls to his knees in between Kurt's splayed thighs and spreads his hands there, at the tops of Kurt's legs, the soft hairs tickling against his palms. He licks his lips as he studies Kurt's cock and hears a far-off groan.

There is a tiny bead of liquid shining at the tip. Blaine takes it in one hand and pulls it back to get a better look, running his fingers gently up and down the shaft. He can hear Kurt panting and feel his thigh quaking under his hand, but he stays where he is, watching the bead as it grows and seeps out. Before it can drop down and run over his fingers, he leans forward with his tongue extended and laps it up. It tastes strange – thin and bitter and a little bit salty. Kurt is pressing forward now, straining slightly against Blaine's hand, and Blaine rubs his leg in what he hopes is a soothing manner. He hasn't meant to take so long. Hasn't meant to be so overcome with curiosity and simple *want*. He licks his lips once more and leans down to wrap his mouth around the rosy head of Kurt's cock.

Blaine hears Kurt say something, voice low and gruff, but he can't concentrate on anything but the feel of him, hot and heavy and thick inside of his mouth. He slides up and down, bringing his hand towards his

mouth at the same time. Kurt's hips shoot up off the bed and Blaine has to pull back. Kurt apologizes and Blaine hums around him. He doesn't even mind. All he can think is how hot it was and be relieved that he seems to be doing something right.

He slides his mouth up and almost off and slips his tongue into the slit. He can taste a bit more of Kurt's precome there, and he licks it up before tonguing around and under the head. He wonders what it would be like to get an entire mouthful of that taste all at once, to swallow it down while still sucking. He slides his hand off Kurt's thigh and brings it down between his own legs to palm himself through his unbuttoned shorts.

Blaine presses more firmly against himself as he slides his mouth back over Kurt's cock, sucking and bobbing his head up and down in time with the thrusting of his own hips. He feels Kurt's hand rest gently on the top of his head, hears him speak Blaine's name like a warning. He doesn't tell him that he needs no warning, wants no warning, just speeds up and sucks harder, his cheeks hollowing out as he moans, his hand insistent now against his own erection.

When Kurt comes he jerks upwards and his cock slips out of Blaine's mouth, come smearing over his cheek. Blaine chases after Kurt's pulsing cock with his mouth and sinks back over it, swallowing the last spurt before he's coming himself, his hips canting forward against his hand.

He lays his head down on Kurt's hip, panting into his skin. He can hear his own heart beating, feel Kurt's pulse against his cheek. "That was...." Kurt says from above, his voice gravelly.

"Yeah," Blaine agrees.

~*~

They buy lube and condoms the next day.

When they're lying in bed, kissing languidly, soft brushes of lips and tongue, Blaine can't focus. He keeps glancing towards the small plastic pharmacy bag sitting on the night table. They never said they were using it for anything specific or even that they were using it right away, but there it sits. Blaine *wants* to use it right away and for something specific. Really, really badly.

"Blaine?" Kurt is staring at him with both eyebrows raised. Blaine hadn't even noticed when they'd stopped kissing. "Where are you right now?" Kurt follows Blaine's eyes to the bag on the table. "*Oh.*"

"I'm sorry," Blaine says, stammering over his words. "I didn't mean to..."

"It's okay. Blaine, we don't... We don't *have* to. We don't –"

Kurt is smiling a little but he looks disappointed. He thinks... *oh. No.* Blaine begins shaking his head and lays both hands on Kurt's wide shoulders. "I want to. I mean, if you do. I'm sorry for being so distracted. I just can't stop thinking about it."

"We are talking about the same thing here, right? I mean, like... anal."

Blaine nods, running his fingers along the pink flush of Kurt's cheek. "I try to finger myself sometimes when I'm thinking about it... about you, but I can never get it right and mostly it only frustrates me."

Kurt places his hand over the one Blaine has on his cheek and stops his movement. "You mean you want *me* to..."

"Yeah. I mean, if that's okay with you... I... It's just that, well, it's kind of been my number one fantasy for a while now. But if you don't want that, it's okay. We can do whatever –" Kurt places two fingers over Blaine's lips to stop his rambling and Blaine puckers up and gives them a soft kiss, smiling in embarrassment. How can someone want something so badly and yet be so embarrassed? The tumult of being a blushing virgin, he supposes. Though after the night before that isn't exactly true. But they had been a little drunk, so he's decided that it didn't count.

Kurt pulls his hand away slowly and nods once before leaning back in to kiss Blaine's mouth.

It's not long before they're naked and rubbing against one another. Kurt splays Blaine's legs and sits between them, his finger coated in lube. "Promise me something?" he asks quietly.

"Anything," Blaine agrees.

"If you don't like it or it hurts, tell me to stop. No matter how much I might be enjoying myself, tell me, Blaine. Because I know you. You'll lie there and be uncomfortable just because I'm having fun. So don't. Promise?"

"I promise," Blaine says. He smiles as Kurt inches closer and loops Blaine's legs around his body so that he's sitting in the circle they create. "And Kurt..." Kurt stops with his slick finger resting between Blaine's ass cheeks and looks up into his face. "I love you."

"I love you, too. So much." And he slides it slowly downward and presses in just slightly and Blaine is lost.

Kurt opens him slowly and precisely, pressing gentle kisses everywhere he can reach while Blaine falls apart around his fingers. It's just so much. It's everything he's been wanting. When Kurt slows down the thrusting of his fingers and comes in closer, Blaine whispers, "you can, Kurt. Please. You can."

He whimpers when Kurt's fingers slide out and Kurt's leans over him, pulling Blaine's legs up and wrapping them more tightly around his waist. Blaine presses his heels into Kurt's lower back to ground himself and fists at the sheets. The pressure is intense. It doesn't hurt, but burns slightly, the stretch feeling foreign to him. Kurt is so careful and slides in little by little until his hips are flush against Blaine's ass. His face looks tense, like he is warring with himself – wanting to be gentle but instinctively needing to thrust in and out. Blaine moves a little, pushing forward slightly to let him know that it's okay to move.

The pressure eases and Blaine lies back more comfortably, reaching up to thread his fingers through Kurt's sweaty hair. Kurt rolls into him and back out, still gentle, panting and moaning and he leans down to run his mouth over Blaine's jaw and kiss his lips. "You feel so good," he says, not much more than a gasp against Blaine's cheek.

Blaine thinks he could lie like this forever, underneath Kurt with him thrusting and grunting and sweating and moaning in pleasure. But then Blaine shifts, pressing back as Kurt presses forward, and something changes. He feels a spike of pleasure shoot through him and lets out one long, low moan. The change in position drove Kurt in more deeply and every time he brushes inside a certain way Blaine's breath catches with the force of the tingling sensation in his lower belly and balls.

"Kurt, Kurt, oh my god, please." Kurt begins to thrust more quickly, reaching out a hand to wrap around Blaine's cock. He pumps it steadily, sloppily as he fucks in and out, panting and gasping. He picks himself up to give his arm more room to jerk Blaine off. The tingling is getting stronger, the desperation increasing until Blaine feels it bubble up within him and hit – and he sees nothing but an expanse of white as he cries out and comes and comes and shakes. He feels Kurt tense and thrust up deep within his body one last time before he's shaking above and grunting. Blaine's eyes are closed, but he feels Kurt's weight come to rest on top of him, the pair of them still trembling from their release.

"Sorry," Kurt says in a whisper, and relieves Blaine of the burden of his weight. Blaine exhales loudly as he feels Kurt slip out of his body. "Oh, shit. I'm so sorry," Kurt says, sounding panicked. Blaine sits up halfway and Kurt is staring down at his ass. "The condom broke," he says, peeling it from his softening cock. "God, I must have put it on wrong or something... dammit!"

"Kurt, it's okay," Blaine reassures. "Not a big deal."

Kurt shakes his head and tosses the used condom into the empty pharmacy bag before looking down at Blaine. He runs his fingers through Blaine's sweaty hair and down the side of his face. "You've got come on your chin, you know. And your neck... how did you...? It's basically all over you. Both yours and mine. God, I'll go start the shower for you."

Kurt goes to get up off the bed, but Blaine rests a hand on his arm to stop him. "Kurt, it's fine."

"It can't be comfortable."

"It's fine. I promise. Just come here and lie down with me for a few minutes, okay? And then we can shower."

Kurt crawls up and lies down next to Blaine, resting his head on his shoulder. They stay like that for a while, lazily petting each other where they can reach. "Now," Blaine says, "tell me... Are you freaking out about what we just did, or because you're worried that *I* am freaking out about what we just did?"

"I'm freaking out because I'm worried that I'm doing everything wrong and you'll never want to do what we just did ever again. And god, I really, really want to do it again."

"Well, then stop fretting because I *definitely* want to do what we just did over and over again... for the rest of my life."

"Me too. And I think it would be a whole lot easier if we just call it sex."

Blaine laughs and plants a kiss on the top of Kurt's head. "We should get married."

"Well we *do* have to go back to Massachusetts," Kurt replies, grin evident in his voice. There is a beat of silence, and then, "oh my god, you're serious! Not that I'm saying no, but I'm pretty sure we have to be eighteen to get married, Blaine."

Blaine sighs and nuzzles against Kurt's hair. "Next year then."

"Next year."

~*~

They pack up to begin the journey back the next day. As Blaine is coming out of the bathroom with their toiletries, he hears Kurt talking on the phone.

"Yeah, I know, Dad. I know. You did not – You did not think that I was dead! I texted you an hour after we left! Uh-huh, sure. Whatever. Okay, I can be in trouble." He pauses for a moment, his hand hovering in the air over a shirt he had been about to fold. "You *know* why, Dad. Okay, just so we're good."

Blaine smiles over at him. Kurt's relationship with his father is amazing. He can't wait to witness in person some day. *Next year*, he says to himself again.

"Oh, you know, singing karaoke for some old people and losing my virginity..."

And Blaine must have heard him wrong. He can't have just said that to his father. Maybe Blaine only *thought* he was talking to Mr. Hummel, but it's really just Mercedes or Rachel on the other end of the line.

"Sure, I will. I love you too, Dad."

Blaine sinks down on the chair as Kurt ends his call and slides his phone into the pocket of his shorts. He turns to Blaine, folding the shirt against his chest like an employee at a clothing store. "What's wrong? You're looking a little green."

"Oh my god! Kurt, why would you – I can never meet him! He's going to have me killed!" He'd heard enough stories about Burt Hummel to know that the man is very protective of his son.

But Kurt just laughs in the face of Blaine's terror. "He's not going to have you killed, silly." Kurt rolls his eyes playfully and turns back to finish folding the clothes. "He knows that I love you and he wants nothing more than for me to be happy."

"You told him you love me?"

"Of course," Kurt answers, almost flippant, like how dare Blaine think that he wouldn't.

"I really am gonna marry you, I hope you realize," he says.

"You'd better. I don't just go around having sex with randoms, you know. I am not doing that with anyone else but you."

Blaine throws his head against the back of the chair and laughs. "Kurt?"

"Mmm?"

"Do we *have* to go back?"

Kurt sighs and turns to look at Blaine. "Unfortunately," he says. "But... one more year. One more year and we'll never have to say goodbye again."

"Do you promise?"

"I promise."

~*~

They are solemn on the drive home. Kurt follows the water all the way there, but the beautiful scenery does nothing to help the mood.

Blaine's parents meet them in the driveway. His mother looks sad, his father livid. He is tapping his foot as though Blaine is a small child who has been naughty, his arms crossed over his chest and his eyes cold and menacing.

"Guess I'm getting the belt," Blaine jokes.

"I want to bring you home with me," Kurt says.

"I want you to bring me home with you, too." Blaine gives Kurt's hand a quick squeeze then opens the door and climbs out, *one more year*, repeating over and over in his head. He wonders, suddenly, if Cooper employed the same mantra. Blaine wishes they had been closer.

When he steps out of the car, Kurt rolls down his window, watching Blaine's father closely as though he took Blaine's belt comment to heart. Blaine glances from his father's furious face to Kurt's loving one and he makes a decision. If Kurt can tell his father, then so can he. He moves towards Kurt's open window and curls one hand around the back of his neck, leaning into the car. He has to go up on his tiptoes to reach Kurt's lips, but they are soft and sweet and welcoming. "Love you," he says. "See you later."

He hears his father cursing behind him and saying how dare he where the neighbours might see, but Blaine doesn't care. Kurt smiles at him and as far as Blaine is concerned, his father can go fuck himself.

Go fuck yourself, Dad, he taunts in his head.

The Cooper in Blaine's mind whoops and hollers and cheers. "At fucking last, Blainey," he says.

At fucking last.

Blaine's father stays away for the remainder of the summer. Blaine wraps himself up in Kurt and pretends he doesn't care.

~*~

The In-Between – Year Nine: Assorted texts, a note, a sad toothbrush and an important decision.

Sent at 7:34PM From My future husband &/or Kurt

I have your toothbrush. It is lonely. Here is a picture of it. Does it not look sad?

011_0.jpeg

~*~

Sent at 12:47AM From Sweet Blaine

Kurt I think I'm drunk remeber when I was drunk and I sucked your cock? I wanna do it so bad right now

Sent at 1:03AM From Sweet Blaine

I'm sorry for bein drnuk and texting you are you mad? Stupid david gave me vodak

Sent at 1:16AM From Sweet Blaine

I love you

~*~

Note found on October the 13th, tucked into the dash of Kurt's Navigator under a map of the North Eastern United States.

Kurt,

You told me you would marry me today. I'm holding you to it! This is an official document-type thingamajig.

Oops, you're coming out of the store!

I LOVE YOU!

Blaine (Worshipful boyfriend and future husband extraordinaire.)

~*~

Sent at 10:21PM From My future husband &/or Kurt

Remember the night at the karaoke bar? Does it make The Chattanooga Choo Choo our song? B/C I don't think we can dance to that at our wedding.

~*~

Sent at 12:01AM From Sweet Blaine

Happy 18th Birthday! You know what that means! ;)

Sent at 12:03AM From My future husband &/or Kurt

That I can legally buy alcohol in England?

Sent at 12:03AM From Sweet Blaine

>:|

Sent at 12:04AM From My future husband &/or Kurt

Those eyebrows are frighteningly accurate.

Sent at 12:04AM From Sweet Blaine

MEAN.

Sent at 12:05AM From My future husband &/or Kurt

The beach in August? Seems apt somehow.

Sent at 12:05AM From Sweet Blaine

:D

~*~

“Okay, you've got all your letters?”

“I told you I did.”

“And opened them?”

“Yep.”

“Okay.”

“You said that already.”

“Sorry. I’m just nervous.”

“Who should go first?”

“Let’s both say it really quickly and get it over with.”

“NYU.”

“NYU.”

“Oh my god!”

“Oh thank god!”

“You know what they say –”

“Great minds think alike.”

Chapter Ten

Eighteen – August 2012: The Summer When They Don't Go At All

“This apartment is perfect.”

Blaine hears Kurt come up behind him and sighs happily as he wraps his arms around Blaine's waist, resting his chin on his shoulder. Kurt hums in agreement and Blaine can feel the vibrations tickle against his neck.

“This day would be so perfect if not for –”

“Blaine, they're you parents.”

“I can't believe they're coming. I can't believe that they actually want to help us move in after everything – I can't believe that *he* would, anyway.”

Blaine glares at the building across the way, the view from their brand new bedroom window suddenly not as picturesque. He feels Kurt hum into his skin again and turns his face to nuzzle against his hair. “Maybe he's had a change of heart,” Kurt suggests, the brightness in his voice sounding false.

Blaine knows that *he* knows that Blaine's father has had no such thing. He is probably only in New York helping Blaine get settled in because Blaine's mother told him that he must. Cooper might as well be lost to them with how often he is in contact, and Blaine knows that his mother is terrified that the same fate will befall their relationship with him. And he loves his mother, so he stays silent and takes his father's many passive aggressive taunts with little to no reaction. But at some point something has got to give. He doesn't want *this* day to be ruined. Not when he has been waiting for it for so, so long. And now after spending the morning getting to know Kurt's wonderful, loving parents (Burt and Carole, as they had insisted they be called), he worries about their reaction to Blaine's family. There is vast, frosty expanse between the two.

Blaine sighs deeply and nestles his nose further into Kurt's soft hair and feels a gentle kiss pressed against his neck. The apartment door opens and there is a flurry of footsteps and hysterical laughter. “Uh-oh,” Kurt says, a smile in his voice. “Sounds like Carole got into the wine at lunch.”

She hadn't however, they discover as they venture out of the bedroom and into the kitchen, where all four of their parents stand, unpacking boxes of brand new dishes directly into the tiny dishwasher. Carole is standing next to Blaine's father and actually laughing at something he said. His father is somehow managing to be charming, instead of steely and overbearing.

"Ran into your folks out on the street," Burt says, clapping Blaine on the shoulder. He keeps his hand there, warm and firm, as though knowing that Blaine needs the support. Blaine looks up at him and gives him a grateful smile. Burt nods back, a twinkle in his green eyes. He catches Kurt watching with a fond look before he turns to offer Blaine's mother a cold drink. It's a hot, sticky day and the air conditioner hasn't quite brought the temperature in the apartment down to a respectable level in the living area. It seems to work best in the bedroom where the air is positively frigid.

Blaine's father gets Carole laughing again and she smacks him playfully with a handful of paper from the now empty box of dishes. Blaine already feels as though he has been sucked into some alternate dimension when his father turns to him and says, "so, are you going to give us the grand tour, son?"

His father has never called him "son" in his life. Blaine figures he must be putting on a show for the Hummels until he sees the look that passes between his parents. He's actually trying. It seems like such an impossibility, but he gives Blaine a crooked smile and Blaine motions him towards the tiny living room.

After the whole two minutes it takes to give Blaine's parents the tour, they all pitch in to clean and unpack. The trouble doesn't come until nearly dinner time, arriving with the sound of the apartment buzzer.

"Ooh, furniture delivery!" Kurt says in excitement after he buzzes them up.

It's their new queen-sized bed.

It takes up nearly their entire bedroom, but when Blaine jumps on it next to Kurt and rests back, splayed out like a starfish, it's so worth every inch of space.

"It's not too soft, is it?" Kurt asks. "Because you said you prefer a soft mattress, but the sales guy said we can send it back if it's not right."

Blaine smiles and opens his mouth to tell Kurt that it's perfect, but is beaten to the punch by his father's acerbic, "excuse me?" Blaine and Kurt turn their faces towards the doorway in unison. Blaine's father

stands with his arms loose at his sides, his eyes narrowed and his jaw clenched. “Did you just elude to the fact that that is your bed. As in, both of yours?”

Out of the corner of his eye Blaine sees Kurt furrow his brow in confusion. But Blaine is not confused. Not at all. He is resigned. He knew this was coming. Has been waiting for it all day. “Yes, Dad,” he answers, chin up and voice haughty. “What did you think exactly? That I was moving in with –”

“There is another room!” his father interrupts, gesturing across the hall. “Of course I assumed one of you would be sleeping in there. I would never have agreed to this had I –”

Blaine sits up on the bed and slides over so he can stand while he has this argument like a civilized grownup. “But the thing is, I don't need you to agree to anything. I'm old enough to decide for myself and you aren't paying a cent. So, sorry that you can't stand that I'm acting on the fact that I'm gay, but I am not going to put my life on hold until you get over it. I'm gay, Dad!” Blaine stands in the small space between the bed and the door, his arms spread wide, meeting his father's eye. He's not trying to be challenging, not trying to start a fight. He's tired of trying. He's so tired. He's too young to be so tired, and he's decided at long last that he's finished. If his parents can't support him then he will find support elsewhere. From Kurt and new friends – a self-made family.

“I'm gay,” he continues, his voice much more controlled and quiet. “And I love Kurt. And that right there –” he motions to the bed where Kurt still sits with wide eyes, “that's our bed, yes. Where we will be sleeping every night. Where we will be doing all of the things that seem to terrify you and make you hate who I am. But do you know what? Those things and that bed, they have nothing to do with you. They are none of your business or your concern. So if you have a problem with my relationship, I think you should probably go.”

His father turns and leaves. He feels a crushing disappointment tear through his body, leaving him achy and light and strange. He hears people talking, but it sounds as though he is hearing it from under water, like a wave has just blasted him in the ear while he was distracted. Kurt rests a hand on his waist and brings him back to sit on the bed. Disappointment, yes, but not surprise. It's what he expected. He didn't realize until that moment that he held on to any scrap of hope for another outcome.

As the haze is clearing, Carole pokes her head in through the doorway. She gives him a pitying look. “We're all gonna go out for dinner, boys. You two enjoy your time alone. We should be gone for a few hours, at

least. I'll text you when we're on our way back." She gives them a conspiratorial little wink before adding, "it'll be okay, Blaine, sweetie. I promise." And then she is gone.

They sink back into their bed and listen to the quiet voices and footsteps and the closing and locking of the door. They are alone. Blaine breathes a sigh of relief.

"Wow."

Blaine snuggles against Kurt's side and throws an arm over his hips. "I know. I was waiting for that."

"Did you not mention that Santana was moving in with us?"

"I didn't think to. Didn't think it mattered."

Kurt lets out a low whistle and Blaine chuckles, the vibrations tickling Kurt's side. "What do you need right now?" Kurt asks.

Blaine's heart melts inside his chest and he tightens his arm around Kurt and lands a peck on his clavicle. "Just you," he says. "Just you."

Kurt takes his comment literally, shucking off both of their clothes at record speed and searching hastily through one of his suitcases for lube and condoms.

After the fastest preparation ever, he's straddling Blaine's hips and pushing himself onto his cock, Blaine gasping and trying to stay as still as possible beneath him.

They've only done it like this once before, but they had been in the cave and the rocks had been killer on the back with nothing but a couple of towels under him. And although Blaine thinks that he prefers having Kurt inside him – hot and full and close – he loves having Kurt over him like this, seeing him hovering above, all of his perfect skin and broad shoulders and gorgeous face looking down, pure pleasure and love written all over it. And Kurt feels so good, is so tight and slick around him, it's like nothing Blaine has ever felt. He revels in it, allowing Kurt complete control, being ridden and squeezed and pulled and pressed until he's gasping and warning.

Kurt's hand is working himself over as he slides faster and faster up and down on Blaine's cock. Blaine watches Kurt's long fingers as he fists himself, watches his lithe body as he jerks up and thrusts back

down. He splays his hands on Kurt's muscular thighs and grips his skin, making pink indents with his fingers. Kurt moans above him and Blaine hears the same sound echoing back from between his own lips.

And then there is squeezing and the slickness and Blaine feels it – the tightening, the tingling, the white-hot heat, and he's crying out and thrusting upward, gripping Kurt's thighs and fucking into him as he comes. He's unable to keep his eyes open and they drift closed as he spasms. Blaine feels Kurt's warm come splash across his stomach and he rocks down on Blaine's oversensitive cock once, twice more before collapsing forward, panting and pressing sloppy kisses onto Blaine's skin.

“Let's get in the shower before they come back,” Kurt breathes against Blaine's neck after only a short moment of rest.

“Do you think they'll come back?” Blaine doesn't specify. Doesn't say *my parents* or *my dad*, but Kurt understands.

“Yeah,” he says. “Yeah, I do. How could they not?”

Kurt sounds so sure of himself that Blaine doesn't question him further, just allows himself to be tugged into the shower and washed and massaged and rinsed and dried and loved.

~*~

The In-Between (Together, at last) – Year Ten: As overheard by the Andersons and Hummels upon their return from dinner, a few assorted texts and one enlightening conversation.

The laughter can be heard from all the way down the hall. It gets louder when they enter the apartment. It's very obviously Kurt, as it becomes more hysterical and higher in pitch the closer they are. The four of them regard each other, wondering if maybe they should turn around and find something else to amuse them for the evening, as the boys already seem amused. But then they hear Blaine let out an unholy shriek and Kurt break into fresh peals of laughter.

“You're ridiculous!” Kurt exclaims, choking on the words and his own guffaws.

“How can you laugh? How can you laugh!” Blaine replies, sounding both terrified and indignant.

“Even if it *was* a cockroach, which it wasn't –”

“Was.”

“ – what do you think it's gonna do to you?”

“I don't know! Crawl up my nose while I'm sleeping?”

“Why would it do that?” Kurt asks, his voice rising in octave as he nears the end of the question. He snorts a laugh. “What about your nose is attractive to a roach?”

Blaine makes a sound like a wounded animal. “They're just *creepy*, all right? If there was a nuclear holocaust, we would all die and they would still be here, scuttling around in the ruins and making their freaky little clicking noises.”

Intrigued, the Hummels and Andersons round the corner. What they find is Blaine standing on an overturned trunk, Kurt staring at him blankly.

Blaine runs his hands through his wet curls, his eyes round and his expression serious. He leans slightly in Kurt's direction. “They can withstand a *nuclear holocaust*, Kurt.”

Kurt stares some more and Blaine nods, satisfied that he seems to be finally getting through to him. That is until Kurt bursts into another gale of laughter. Blaine throws up his hands.

“It... was... a ... beetle...”

“Cockroach!”

“... and it was the size of my pinky nail.” Blaine crosses his arms over his chest and shoots Kurt a death glare. “You're being ridiculous, Blaine. Come back down here.” Kurt reaches out to offer Blaine a hand but he swats it away.

“No! It might still be lurking.” Blaine looks down at the scuffed wood of the floor, his eyes roving, searching. “I will not touch that floor until you find it and kill it!”

“Find and kill a tiny beetle –”

“Enormous cockroach!”

"You're making the crazy eyes, Blaine. The crazy eyes."

"Please, Kurt."

"Don't make that face at me."

"Please."

"Blaine Anderson, stop that. I will not look at you!"

"Kurt."

"Ugh, fine! I can't believe I'm –" The rest of his words are muffled as he drops to his knees and shuffles around on the floor. He comes up from under a table a moment later with his hands cupped around something and Blaine clutches his chest, his eyes wide.

"Kill it! Squish it! Set it on fire!"

"Oh my god, Blaine, I am not torturing a poor defenceless beetle because you have some weird phobia."

He opens his hands to show Blaine the insect, but he recoils. *"Kurt,"* he pleads.

Kurt heaves a dramatic sigh and narrows his eyes at a cowering Blaine. "Oh my God, I cannot believe I am doing this."

Kurt marches past them with a quick greeting, out through the door and into the hallway. Blaine stays on top of the trunk until Kurt returns five minutes later, empty handed. Blaine smiles at him and he rolls his eyes. "Love you," Blaine says, coaxing.

Kurt rolls his eyes again. "You are insane."

Blaine widens his smile and tilts his head to one side.

"Fine. I'll tackle the things you trick yourself into believing are roaches, but you get the spiders. Those things actually bite."

“Deal.”

“Ridiculous,” Kurt mutters, but he accepts Blaine's kiss when he presses it to his lips.

~*~

Sent at 5:23PM From Kurt<3

Would you mind picking me up some cream on your way home? The full fat stuff. I need it for a sauce I'm making.

Sent at 5:24PM From Blaine xx

Of course, my love. I would go to the ends of the earth for you. Or simply the market.

Sent at 5:26PM From Kurt<3

You are cheesier than this sauce, I swear.

Sent at 5:27PM From Blaine xx

Ooh, there's cheese? I'll rush!

~*~

Sent at 11:13AM From Kurt<3

This class is boring me to tears. Literally. I can't stop yawning.

Sent at 11:15AM From Blaine xx

Pay attention, Mr. Hummel. You never know when you may need to pull out a random fact about René Descartes.

Sent at 11:18AM From Kurt<3

We should go to Coney Island after class.

Sent at 11:20AM From Blaine xx

What do you think Descartes would make of Coney Island? Do you think he would ride the Wonder Wheel or go straight for the cotton candy?

Sent at 11:21AM From Kurt<3

Now you've done it. Stop making me laugh! The professor just gave me the stink eye.

Sent at 11:23AM From Blaine xx

Don't be mean, Kurt. He can't help that his face looks like that.

Sent at 11:24AM From Blaine xx

Will you ride the Wonder Wheel with me?

Sent at 11:28AM From Kurt<3

Only if you share my cotton candy.

~*~

There is a man staring at them. Blaine has the sudden and instinctual urge to let go of Kurt's hand, but he forces himself to hold on tighter instead. Kurt looks down at their joined hands and gives Blaine an odd look. He loosens his hold and apologizes for squeezing so hard. The man keeps on staring.

As they get closer to him, Blaine's heart rate increases. He doesn't want to alarm Kurt, who doesn't seem to have noticed, but he doesn't really want to walk past the man either. He does anyway, and when they pass an arm shoots out and clasps Blaine's shoulder. Blaine jumps, startled, and accidentally drops Kurt's hand.

The man gives Blaine a wide, partially toothless grin and Blaine tries to smile back. His mouth feels wobbly, as do his hands and the backs of his knees.

The man leans forward and gives Blaine a conspiratorial sort of look. "You make the sex?" he says, and motions between Blaine and Kurt, who has stopped in his tracks a couple of feet ahead.

"Um..." What the hell should he say to that? He's sort of worried that the man is propositioning him, but he's not quite sure. "Yes. But only with each other, though," Blaine answers with another awkward smile and a forced laugh.

The man's smile widens and he claps his hands together just once. "You get married here now!" he says.

Blaine is taken aback. When he smiles at the man this time, it's genuine. "Oh, yes! Yes, we can get married here now."

"Yay!" The man says. "High five!" He holds up his hand and Blaine slaps it.

"I, um... I should get going. Nice talking to you." Blaine gives the man a wave and hurries to catch up with Kurt, who has gone on a little further, shaking his head.

"Oh my god, you don't just talk to random strangers on the street about our sex life, Blaine."

"He was a nice man!"

Kurt turns to look at him, shaking his head some more. "You are such a strange little person."

Chapter Eleven

Nineteen – August 2013: The Summer When They Arrive and Leave Together

Blaine still smiles every morning when he wakes up with Kurt there next to him, miles of milk pale skin against the dark grey of their sheets. He looks over at the clock and sees that the alarm is due to go off in five minutes, so he leans in and presses his grin into Kurt's bicep.

"M'too comftubble," Kurt slurs, a hand reaching out blindly to pet at Blaine. He makes contact with Blaine's face instead of his hair, a finger just above his eye and another nearly up his nose. Blaine huffs a laugh and snuggles up higher so he can kiss Kurt's stubbly jaw.

"Alarm's about to go," Blaine murmurs into his ear. "We need to get up. Don't want to be late. I know how you hate rushing about at the airport."

Kurt whimpers and sticks his lip out and Blaine can't help but to roll half on top of him in order to take it into his mouth. He sucks on Kurt's pouty lip until he laughs and smacks him. "Get off, ya lug. Crushin' me."

"You love me," Blaine sing-songs.

"Yeah, yeah. Shower. Can't deal with your rainbows an'...." Kurt opens his mouth in a wide yawn and rubs at his eyes. "Sunshine an' optimism 'fore I'm awake. *Ugh.*"

"You're a grump," Blaine tells Kurt as he slumps out of their bed. He taps him on the ass and leaps out at his side. "But don't worry – you're *my* grump and I love you regardless."

"Uh-huh," Kurt mumbles and Blaine smacks him on the ass a second time.

~*~

The airport is a mass of tourists coming and going and staying. It takes them several minutes to locate Blaine's parents in the crowd. His mom pulls him into her arms and over his shoulder he sees his father greet Kurt, shaking his hand and clapping him awkwardly on the shoulder. He smiles to himself, hiding it in his mother's scarf. It's awkward as hell, but at least it's something. And something can always shift and change and be built on. Something isn't hopeless.

His father hugs him after his mom has let him go, rubbing a hand over his back and squeezing him tight against his chest. He looks sad when Blaine pulls away, and Blaine figures that's something, too.

When they get to the beach house Blaine's mother offers them the guest room with its bigger bed and more adult decor, but they opt to stay in Blaine's room instead – cuddled close on his single bed surrounded by the comfort of the familiar and well-loved.

They have brunch with Kurt's grandparents the next day, the other members of Kurt's extended family thankfully absent. The Tinseys are quiet and polite and thoughtful. Blaine has never really known how to take them; their silences do not carry the same cold strain as the ones he grew up with, but his life has made him wary of silences, like they may turn around and bite him once he has been lulled into a false sense of security.

They talk about their apartment and New York. They talk about the cost of housing there and how crazy it is to own a car. Mrs. Tinsey smilingly tells Kurt that they have left him the house in their will while her husband smiles and nods but doesn't speak. They talk about getting married here on the beach once they have finished with school. Mr. Tinsey speaks up finally, shyly offering their garden for the reception party. When he smiles his eyes twinkle just like Kurt's and Blaine finds he can relax at last.

Blaine's father has driven the vintage Chevy that they restored to the beach this summer. It's a horrible rattle-trap, but he seems to cherish it – keeping it washed and waxed and pristine. Blaine used to feel nothing but resentment watching his father go through this meticulous routine, but now he wonders if he misinterpreted his father's love for the car. As he beckons Blaine over to help him buff it to a shine, Blaine realizes that it had to do with him all along. And not in the way he had imagined.

He isn't sure what happened or what was said at dinner with his parents and the Hummels in New York on the day they moved into their apartment, but he's pretty sure he's got Burt Hummel to thank for his father's effort over the past year. Like his son, Burt Hummel is a king among men.

They talk and laugh and joke around as they finish detailing the Chevy and Blaine feels content. It has been years since he felt such calm and comfort around this man, that they have seemed to be on the same wavelength. He remembers one scorching day the summer before kindergarten, aches and scrapes and bruises and lessons in riding his brand new midnight blue bike, but nothing since. He hopes there had been more days like that one, and that his father holds onto those memories. Maybe one day they will be close enough that he might share them.

A wasp lands on the chrome next to his father's hand and he shrieks and jumps and flings his rag at it. They stand in silence for a moment before cracking up with laughter. Blaine bends down and retrieves his father's discarded rag and hands it back. They share a simple smile.

~*~

The sun is setting, warm oranges and reds and the barest hint of indigo. They sit shoulder to shoulder, staring out at the water, passing a dish of ice cream back and forth. The lady at the ice cream parlour remembered their favourite and had given it to them on the house. It was as though she had known that this was their last summer. That next year and all the years after, there would be jobs they couldn't leave and other such adult responsibilities. They would be regulated to meagre weeks of vacation that would have to be split evenly between one family and then the other. It's like saying goodbye to their childhood in a way, but trading it in for something so much better.

There is an eerie cry from above and a lone seagull swoops down at the water. The water answers back with a roar of waves and beside Blaine Kurt shivers in the late summer evening's chill. Blaine looks over at the boy he has loved for more than half his life and feels an infinite *wholeness* that leaves him steady and at peace. The sun is setting, the waves crashing on the beach, their lives stretch on ahead and Blaine has never been more optimistic.

Chapter Twelve

Thirty – August 2024: The Summer When They Bring the Kid

The house that Blaine grew up dreaming about belongs to them. A lot of heartache came before the papers were signed and the keys handed over, and Kurt couldn't bring himself to come and stay for a few summers afterwards. But as they enter through the cherry red door, Blaine cradling their three year-old daughter in his arms, Kurt turns to him and smiles. The house holds many memories for Kurt, both good and bad, but it also holds the ghosts of the two of them as children, as does the area surrounding. The boardwalk and the beach and the rocks and the caves – they are all special in their own ways.

Katherine struggles to escape Blaine's arms and he sets her down on the polished wooden floor. She eyes him for a moment and he can see the wheels turning in her head, figuring out what exactly she can get away with. She gets a mischievous glint in her eye, a familiar one that Blaine has cherished since he was nine, and she turns around and is about to take off at a run when she looks up at Kurt and stops in her tracks. Blaine has to stifle a laugh as she crosses her arms over her chest, a tiny little mirror image of Kurt staring up at him with challenge written all over her face. "I don't think so, little miss," Kurt says.

She rolls her eyes and turns back to Blaine. "I want to see, Daddy," she says, and Blaine bends down to scoop her back up in his arms. He and Kurt share a smile and he marches her up the wide mahogany staircase to look down over the entryway. She gasps and waves down at Kurt, who waves back up and laughs. She *oohs* and *ahhs* at the elaborate chandelier and reaches out as if to try and catch it. Blaine remembers fantasizing about doing just that the first time he visited the house.

When they tuck Katherine into bed in Kurt's old room and kiss her goodnight, Kurt stands and stares for a long time until Blaine takes his hand and leads him away to the master bedroom.

They play on the beach the next day. Katherine building a sandcastle with Blaine's father while his mom reads a book and Blaine chases a complaining Kurt around with a water gun. When Blaine has promised to stop and relinquished his dripping weapon, they settle in next to Katherine and help dig out the castle's moat where she has decided there will be a water-dragon that shoots waves out of its mouth instead of fire.

"We can make a movie of it," she says. "Dad and Daddy, you can be the princes, and Uncle Coop can be the dragon."

They all laugh at that, Blaine's father hardest of all. "And who can I be?" he asks.

Katherine thinks for a long moment before responding. "You can be the lawyer that keeps Uncle Coop from going to dragon-jail when he gets in trouble for spraying water and ruining the visiting Queen's Coach luggage full of vintage couture."

"Oh, he would deserve to go to jail for that," Blaine's father teases.

"Well I didn't say you should do a good job, Grampa," Katherine replies with a little sniff and continues building the drawbridge.

Blaine meets his father's eyes over her head, both of their shoulders shaking with silent mirth.

They take Katherine to their cave after lunch when the tide is out, Blaine piggybacking her while Kurt leads the way.

"Daddy, it's crystals!" she exclaims as they duck in through the opening in the rock, pointing up at the hanging formations on the ceiling. Blaine sets her on her feet and she runs around excitedly, checking out every nook and cranny with her flashlight. Kurt and Blaine sit close together on a rock, one they have shared many times over many years, and watch their daughter explore their most special place. Next year, they know, they will be bringing along another little person to share in their past and their future – a second child due mid-winter.

Blaine feels a familiar warm sensation of seawater eyes intent upon him and turns to find Kurt smiling. "I love you," Kurt tells him. He's heard it hundreds, maybe thousands of times over the years, but hearing Kurt say it still makes butterflies swarm his belly and dance around.

Blaine returns the sentiment with his eyes and leans in to capture Kurt's lips with his own.

"Eww, no kissing," Katherine says, and turns away to examine some green slime coating a group of rocks.