

# **Loving You Just the Way You Are**

**by**

**PickingViolets**

**Kurt/Blaine || AU || NC-17**

*Nothing in Kurt's life is as he expected... but he's unbelievably happy. What will happen when his world is shattered and all he loves is either taken away or broken? A story of love, healing, acceptance and triumph.*

*Warnings for Kurt/OC.*

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**Contents**

<b>Chapter One</b>	<b>- 3 -</b>
<b>Chapter Two</b>	<b>- 12 -</b>
<b>Chapter Three</b>	<b>- 20 -</b>
<b>Chapter Four</b>	<b>- 29 -</b>
<b>Chapter Five</b>	<b>- 41 -</b>
<b>Chapter Six</b>	<b>- 48 -</b>
<b>Chapter Seven</b>	<b>- 56 -</b>
<b>Chapter Eight</b>	<b>- 68 -</b>
<b>Chapter Nine</b>	<b>- 80 -</b>
<b>The Proposal</b>	<b>- 87 -</b>

## **Chapter One**

Kurt held Tala close as he spooned his wife from behind, reaching around to lightly caress her swollen abdomen. He sighed in contentment, rubbing light circles over where their baby resided.

He glanced back at the clock and saw that it was two in the morning. He sighed, knowing he should be asleep, but he just couldn't get his mind to shut down tonight for some reason. He pressed his face forward into Tala's black flowing locks and breathed in her scent before resting his head on the pillow and closing his eyes. He allowed his mind to drift and relive the happy memories of their relationship, hoping they would help him drift off.

Up until his junior year of college, Kurt had been positive that he was one hundred percent gay. He was a fairly flamboyant guy who loved fashion, theater... and of course... other guys. He dated a few guys here and there. Nothing serious, but he was young and had plenty of time for that. Kurt was quite handsome and several girls who had a serious lack of gaydar had hit on him over the years, with no success.

That's when he met Tala. They were both attending a frat party and there she was. Long, luscious locks, soft olive skin and exotic looking eyes that were almost black in color. She was tiny and petite, barely five feet in height, making Kurt's five feet and eleven inches seem incredibly tall for once in his life. She was soft-spoken and kind, yet full of a vibrance that seemed to make her glow. About ten different guys were trying to hit on her but she rolled her eyes and shrugged each of them off. Kurt laughed to himself at the frat boys' expense from across the room. He leaned back against a wall with his arms crossed to watch the show.

She looked up with those black eyes and she met a pair of electric blue. They smiled at each other. She slipped away from her groupies and went to sidle up to him.

"Would you like to get out of here?" She asked him shyly.

"Absolutely," he offered his arm and they had left together.

They spent the whole night talking and for the next weeks they were inseparable. His sexuality was never an issue. Never a real topic of conversation. They joked privately that he was 'Tala-sexual'. When asked by

people if he had 'flipped' or if she was his 'beard' they just rolled their eyes. Neither could explain it. Neither even cared to try. They loved anything and everything about each other. They were soul-mates. When asked ridiculous questions about how their relationship worked they would sigh, look into each others eyes and kiss tenderly. They would turn in silence to their criticizer as if to say, "Do you really need any more proof?" Nine times out of ten that would shut the person up. The tenth person they just ignored.

He proposed six months after they met. She said yes. They hopped on a plane and were married that summer in Hawaii. Tala's family was quite well off and payed for both their own family and Kurt's to travel together. They had a small, family-only ceremony on the beach. Kurt and Tala stood in the sunset, both wearing white, surrounded by their loving family as they committed themselves to each other.

That fall they moved into a modest apartment in Manhattan. It was far more than they could afford on their own, but again, Tala's family was insistent on helping out. They had an amazing relationship with their daughter and loved Kurt as their own. They saw, without a doubt, how much he loved their little girl. They told the young couple that they had been blessed with more money than they knew what to do with and it was their duty to take care of their children, grown up or not. The couple compromised by choosing a place that needed some work. Kurt and Tala were actually excited about the prospect since they were both interior design majors.

Kurt knew that it bothered his father a little that he wasn't able to help as much in that way. Burt and Carole loved their kids dearly and showed their support in a million little ways, every day. They would defend the young couple's relationship to the death. Carole would constantly send little care packages filled with homemade goodies and homey items for the apartment. Burt helped Kurt refinish their wood floors and retile the kitchen and bathroom. He helped Tala paint the walls and put up the window treatments she had sewn. Kurt and Tala were well aware of Burt's sensitivity in this matter and both made sure to reassure him of how much his and Carole's support meant to them. It wasn't unusual for Tala to plop her tiny frame down on Burt's lap, place a kiss on his cheek and say, "Love you, dad." Burt would blush a little at the attention and Kurt would fall even more deeply in love with his wife.

They graduated a year later with their degrees and started their own interior decorating business together. They slowly worked on the side to get their Master's degrees. It was slow going for the first few months but after hard work, long hours and constant campaigning, things took off. They were hired for more and more jobs and became the 'it' team to hire in Manhattan. By the time they were only twenty-four they were on their way.

That's when the really good news came.

Kurt came home after a long day at the office bearing chicken noodle soup. Tala had been sick and throwing up for the last two days and he was starting to get concerned. If she wasn't better by tonight he was going to insist that she go to the doctor. He walked through the front door carrying the take-out and was shocked to find her out of bed, in her robe, standing in front of him with a dazzling smile. She still looked pale but was happily holding a small gift bag in front of her. He looked at her curiously but she just jumped up and down excitedly and thrust the bag into his hands. He took it carefully and peeked inside. He pulled out a small white stick with a pink plus sign on the end. His mouth dropped open and he looked back up to affirm what he guessed. She bit her lip and nodded excitedly.

"Tala! Oh my god, we're going to be parents! I love you! I love you! I love you!" He scooped her up, bridal style and swung her in circles around the room until they were almost tipping over in dizziness and laughing hysterically. The moment he set her down though, her grin quickly faded and her face turned green. She darted off to the bathroom to throw up and he guiltily followed after her, holding back her hair and patting her back. He helped her clean up and tucked her into bed for some much needed rest. He lay down next to her, rubbing her back and running fingers through her hair until she was asleep. All of a sudden he realized that he was still clutching something in his hand. It was the pregnancy test. He grinned to himself. Never before did he think that he would be so happy holding something covered in someone else's pee.

The next months were filled with morning sickness, cravings and late night talks of names and the future. They spent long hours shopping for and decorating the nursery until it was perfect. They lovingly referred to it as the 'baby suite' by the time it was done. No child had ever been in possession of such a room while still in utero.

They were one month out. One more month until everything changed.

Kurt sighed and scooted gently out of bed, careful to not wake his wife. Sleep was just not happening tonight. He curled up on the couch and flipped through the channels, finally settling on "The Lord of the Rings." He looked up a moment later to see Tala waddling out slowly, rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

"Oh, honey! I'm so sorry! Did I wake you?" He rose quickly and went to meet her. He pulled her in for a hug, at least as best he could with the large swelling in between them and kissed her forehead. She sighed and leaned into him.

"The bed is always cold without you," she sighed sleepily. Kurt felt terrible.

"I'm so sorry, baby. Come on. Let's tuck you back in. I'll stay in bed." She craned her neck back to look up at her husband who was nearly a foot taller than her and cupped his cheek with a grin.

"It's okay. You don't have to do that. We'll cuddle on the couch for a bit." She looked down then at the enormous baby bump separating them and giggled. "Oh, sinta! Look at me! I'm huge!" Kurt looked down and rubbed both hands over her stretched skin lovingly.

"You're perfect," he whispered, pressing a kiss into her hair. He took her hand and pulled her to the couch. They settled together in the middle. Kurt lifted her legs so that her feet were propped up on his lap and scooted pillows behind her back to make her more comfortable. He placed both hands on her abdomen, ready and waiting to feel the baby move. He placed his face down by his hands.

"Hey jellybean," he whispered. Tala laughed softly.

"You call it that so much. I think that jellybean will still be the baby's nickname even after we find out if it's a girl or a boy." He sat up and placed a kiss on her lips along with a little eskimo kiss before placing his cheek back down against the baby. She leaned her head back on the couch and closed her eyes as she ran her fingers through his hair.

"Kurt?" She whispered.

"Yes, darling."

"Sing me and jellybean our song, please?"

He smiled and thought for a moment before taking a breath.

***Don't go changing, to try and please me***

***You never let me down before***

*Don't imagine you're too familiar*

*And I don't see you anymore*

*I would not leave you in times of trouble*

*We never could have come this far*

*I took the good times, I'll take the bad times*

*I'll take you just the way you are*

*I said I love you, and that's forever*

*And this I promise from the heart*

*I couldn't love you any better*

*I love you just the way you are*

He looked up when he heard a light sniffing.

"Oh, Tala! My love! What's the matter?" He brushed away the tears, overwhelmed by her sudden overflow of emotion.

"Nothing!" She hiccuped with a teary giggle. "I'm just so blessed! You love us both so much!"

"I really do." They smiled at each other for a moment before kissing gently and snuggling together to watch what was left of the movie.

"Damn," she sighed. "Orlando Bloom is so dang hot as Legolas."

Kurt quirked an eyebrow. "He sure is."

Tala giggled. "Oh, Kurt! Let's make a game of it and both fantasize about him the next time we have sex!" Kurt's shoulders shook in silent laughter.

"I love you, Tala."

"I love you too, sinta."

Kurt didn't know when they had drifted off but he woke at about five in the morning to Tala moaning in her sleep. She was thrashing and writhing as if in severe pain. His heart raced as he frantically shook her awake.

"Tala! Baby! What's wrong? Are you in labor?" She lifted her lids slowly and the pain he saw reflected in her black eyes felt like a knife in his heart. Without a second thought he dove from the couch to throw on some shoes and shove his wallet in his pocket. He scooped her off the couch, hurrying as fast as he could. When he got to the doorway he fumbled with the doorknob, trying to balance his wife carefully. For a moment, he couldn't figure out why his hand was so slick. He looked closely and saw that it was covered in a sticky liquid. His breath left him as reality punched him in the gut. His hand, his arm, his shirt, all of Tala's legs... they were covered in blood.

"Somebody help me, please!" Kurt ran through the emergency room doors clutching Tala in his arms. She had stopped writhing in pain almost five minutes ago as he raced through the streets in the early morning, driving three times the speed limit. Now she was almost completely limp in his arms and absolute terror threatened to overwhelm him.

A doctor quickly took in her swollen abdomen, the blood, and Kurt's panic before snatching her into his own arms and placing her on a gurney. He raced down the hall with Kurt at his side. The doctor asked a few perfunctory questions before rushing into the O.R. and leaving Kurt alone to finally let the terror take hold. He sank to the floor as his world crashed in on him.

At some point a nurse had led him to a family waiting room. Apparently he had called the family because Tala's parents were close by, pacing back and forth, and he was receiving constant texts from his dad and Finn. He tried to read them but for some reason he couldn't understand the words. He looked down at the blood drying on his arms and clothes. He held his hands out in front of him and watched them shake



uncontrollably. He swallowed and wrung his trembling hands together. The doors opened suddenly and Kurt stood as the doctor approached him. The physician's expression was unreadable. Kurt both loved and hated him for it. He was desperate for good news... he was desperate for ONLY good news. The doctor led him back to a chair and sat him down. Tala's parents rushed over and crouched by his side, gripping his hand. Kurt tried to speak but when he opened his mouth nothing came out. The doctor offered a smile but it didn't seem to reach his eyes.

"Your daughter was born at 5:45. She is currently in the NICU. She is a little early and her lungs are slightly underdeveloped, but we are giving her some oxygen and I have every reason to believe that she will be just fine and healthy. Things are looking very good for her."

Kurt closed his eyes and a small tear squeezed out and ran down his cheek.

*A girl. She's okay. My jellybean.*

He opened his eyes again and looked at the doctor steadily.

"Tala," his voice was ragged and barely audible.

The doctor swallowed hard before speaking and that's when the world stopped making sense. The physician gave what seemed like a ridiculously long explanation. Kurt managed to catch a couple of phrases such as 'placental abruption', 'caught it sooner' and 'so sorry'. After that the room was silent. People around him moved and talked. They talked to him. They talked to each other. Tala's mom fell to the floor in broken sobs and her husband clutched her to him. Kurt couldn't hear her cries. He could see what was happening around him but he couldn't respond. It was like the world was still moving and he was paralyzed, unable to keep up. The doctor placed a hand on Kurt's arm and the young man was irrationally angry at the tears in the doctor's eyes. Suddenly time sped up and sound rushed back into his ears. The heart wrenching sobs of Tala's mother filled the air. He started trembling again and jumped to his feet, looking around frantically.

"No." His spoke the word in a harsh whisper. He shook his head slowly and backed away from everyone, silently begging them to tell him this was just a cruel joke. When all they did was stare back in grief and pity he broke.

"NOOOOO!" He screamed in a broken sob. The walls were closing in. His heart had been cut out. There was no reason to go on. He couldn't do this. Life was over. Just as he fell to his knees a tall figure rushed through the doors.

Finn took in the sight of his brother, covered in blood, sinking to the floor. He heard the wail of grief escape his lips. He dove to his knees and pulled Kurt into his arms. Kurt tensed for a moment before collapsing completely, sobbing, sure that he would never stop.

"It's gonna be okay," Finn whispered. "I've got you, bro. It's gonna be okay."

An hour later Kurt had been cleaned and changed into spare hospital scrubs. He didn't remember how he got that way. He thought Tala's mom might have supervised it. He couldn't even begin to consider being embarrassed. He was barely placing one foot in front of another. He wanted to go home and die. Why were they forcing him to keep on functioning?

A nurse was gently holding his hand and pulling him into a private room in the NICU. She steered him toward a rocking chair and sat him down. She then reached into the Isolette to carefully scoop up a tiny bundle. She turned slowly, nodding for Kurt to open his arms. He obeyed mechanically and before he knew it, his arms were filled with a tiny figure.

"She's five pounds, three ounces. Not bad at all. That little tube in her nose is giving her some oxygen but it's really just a precautionary measure. She should be breathing completely on her own very soon."

The nurse had crouched down in front of Kurt and her hands were placed gently on his knees. She noted his red swollen eyes. She took in his dazed look and robotic movements. She wanted to cry. She wanted to hold him. She wanted to scream at the unfairness of life and tell him how sorry she was. She wanted to. She couldn't. That wasn't what he needed. He needed strength. From somewhere. Anywhere.

"You'll be fine. Just hold her and get to know her. I'll be right down the hall."

She stepped outside and immediately collapsed against the wall in the hallway, letting silent tears stream down her face.

Kurt took in the sight of his daughter. The transparent skin. The miniature rosebud lips. Glistening lashes framing the eyes closed in sleep. One delicate finger poking out of the blanket that she was swaddled in, seeming to stroke her own chin. The tiny chest rising and falling, coupled with a soft noise that might have been a sigh.

*Ah. This is my reason. This is why I can't give up. She is my reason for living now. My jellybean. My Malaya.*

The NICU nurse had finally steeled herself and wiped away her tears when she heard something coming from the small room that both melted and broke her heart. A voice that would have been beautifully melodic if it hadn't been filled with broken sobs.

***I would not leave you in times of trouble***

***We never could have come this far***

***I took the good times, I'll take the bad times***

***I'll take you just the way you are***

***I said I love you, and that's forever***

***And this I promise from the heart***

***I couldn't love you any better***

***I love you just the way you are***

## Chapter Two

For the first month of Malaya's life, most of her immediate family lived right in the apartment with Kurt. Tala's parents had a house close by and came over to the apartment every single day. Burt and Carole moved temporarily into the guest bedroom, planning to stay until they were sure that Kurt was ready to be on his own. Finn lived in a tiny apartment in Yonkers so he crashed on Kurt's couch whenever he felt he was needed.

Had Kurt been anywhere near full capacity, it would have driven him nuts. To never be alone, to never have personal space... but he was far from full capacity. He was functioning by necessity alone. He washed a load of laundry because he had no clean underwear. He ate a bowl of cereal because he could feel his strength waning. He returned business calls and paid bills because that was what he had to do to keep living.

The only time there was any light in his eyes or purpose to his step, was when he was taking care of his daughter. Holding her, rocking her, talking to her... those were the only moments that his family saw a piece of the Kurt they knew and loved. Any other time, his eyes were dead and he barely acknowledged another soul. They were all worried about him and watched him carefully. What concerned them was that, since that very first day, he had yet to shed another tear. Through the funeral, through the sorting of some of Tala's personal things, through the drama of having a newborn in the NICU as a single dad... his eyes remained dry.

Malaya came home when she was six days old and the family quickly fell into a somber but natural routine. They took turns caring for the child, dealing with any insurance and legal matters concerning Tala's death and taking care of the everyday household chores as Kurt juggled his work and home life.

It wasn't until three weeks after Tala's death that Kurt's numbness finally wore off. It happened gradually. As the days went by, the Tala shaped hole in his heart grew into a vast void that he felt himself being slowly sucked into. As the weeks stacked up he knew that he would soon have to let his family go back to their own lives. As much as he longed for his personal space again, the thought of doing it all on his own made him start to panic. Three weeks. It took three weeks for this to culminate.

It was four o'clock in the morning. Kurt was pacing back and forth with a screaming Malaya. His eyes were bloodshot and edged with dark circles, his hair stood on end, he was wearing the same pajamas that he had worn the last two nights in a row and he was close to a nervous breakdown. He could feel himself shaking and it was becoming harder to breathe. He knew that a panic attack was on its way. If he didn't do something soon he would be thrusting the baby into Carole's sleeping arms while he hyperventilated into a paper bag. He was desperate for that not to happen

"Please, baby. Please." His voice was shaking and he knew he sounded a little crazed. He was on the edge of breaking completely. His soulmate was gone. She wasn't waiting in their bed for him to hold or make love to ever again. She wasn't there to help him nurture the life that they had created together. He was holding that life in his arms. He was holding the only piece of Tala he had left... and she wouldn't stop screaming.

He ran through a million scenarios in his mind, trying to figure out what he had yet to try to calm his child. Suddenly it occurred to him. The one thing he hadn't done. He closed his eyes tightly and felt his stomach clench. He couldn't do it. This was as much Tala's as it was the baby's. He wasn't ready to take that step yet. Sure, he had done it that very first night in the hospital... but it had felt like closure, not a tradition he was expected to carry on. He steadied himself with a deep breath. He knew that this was what he had to do. If it would calm his little girl then it would be worth it.

He opened his mouth and sang. He sang the song that belonged to his girls. The song that would forever break his heart. Malaya fell asleep on his shoulder, looking peaceful and content.

Kurt set his daughter down in her crib and stroked her soft cheek before going to his room and sitting down on his bed.

The dam finally broke.

He screamed his anger at the world into his pillow. He rocked back and forth with his arms wrapped tightly around himself. He was shaking and desperately sucking in shallow breaths. Tears started to leak from the corners of his eyes. A sound like a wounded animal surprised him and he soon realized that it had come from his own mouth. He was suddenly blinded by tears. He was choking on the sobs escaping his lungs. The last bit of strength he possessed gave out and he sank down, curling into the fetal position. At that point he was certain that he wouldn't make it. He would drown in his grief. He couldn't come back.

Then, out of nowhere, came his saving grace. Strong and loving arms pulled him back from the abyss.

Burt sat down next to Kurt and pulled him into his arms so that the brown-haired head was resting on his chest. The father held his son tight and rocked him back and forth.

Carole sat at the foot of the bed and reached out with the loving hands of a mother. She gently rubbed circles on his legs, all the while whispering how much she loved him.

Finn sat on the other side of Kurt and reached over to take his brother's hand. He slotted their fingers together and held their linked hands to his chest.

That's when they all knew. It would be long. It would be hard. It would be complete shit... but they would come back. Kurt would come back. He would heal and become whole again. His own inner strength would make it possible. His family had simply given him hope and reminded him that the strength was still there.

"This is quite the project, Blaine." The curly-haired young man sat in front of his father's desk, working hard to not fidget nervously.

This was it. He couldn't do it without his father's financial backing. There was no way. And if he was completely honest with himself, he also desperately wanted his father's approval.

"I know, sir. I am up to the task though. I am willing to put in the work to make sure this succeeds. I won't stop until I've seen the success firsthand."

Blaine's father looked at him appraisingly for a moment.

"Why?"

"I'm sorry, sir?" Blaine was surprised but the abruptness of the question. Uncertain of his father's angle.

"Why this? Why now? Why you?"

Blaine looked at him steadily.

"Because the kids need it. Because they need it now. Because I'm the one who can make a difference."

A smile broke onto his father's face.

"Damn right you are. I'm in. Make it happen son."

Blaine lost his composure and forgot the formality that reigned in their family. He practically dove head first across the desk and attacked his dad with a hug.

### **Two years later**

"Molly! Come here so we can eat breakfast, sweetpea!" Kurt was hurrying to fix his daughter's morning oatmeal. "Molly!" He placed the bowl in front of her booster seat and went to pour himself some coffee. When a few seconds had gone by and all he heard was silence he went in search of his toddler. He swallowed hard and his heart sank when he saw her. It was happening once again.

She was standing at the window, completely entranced by the rainbow reflection of a prisms wind chime hanging just outside. As the chimes swayed and danced, so did the rainbow reflections. The small child stood transfixed. Rocking back and forth, from one foot to the other, she seemed lost in another world.

Kurt knelt down beside her. He swept back the already long and silky black hair and tried to get her electric blue eyes to meet his own.

"Malaya," he said her full name softy. "Malaya, Grandma will be here soon and you need to come eat."

She made no response.

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

***I couldn't love you, any better I love you just the way you are***

She stopped her rocking and her eyes focused again. A small smile graced her lips. She still didn't say a word and she didn't quite meet her father's eyes but she turned easily, offering up her hand, and let him lead her to the table.

He placed her in her booster and blew on the cereal to cool it before handing it to her. He gave her a small plastic spoon and she dutifully worked on eating mouthful after mouthful. Kurt kept up some constant chatter as he worked around the kitchen. He would look at her occasionally to see if he would get a response. He would sigh and nod resolutely when she remained stoic.

She had been a fairly typical two-year-old, playful and energetic, speaking in broken sentences, loving story time and tickle fights with her daddy.

Then everything changed. It didn't happen completely overnight, but once he started noticing the differences in her, things had seemed to cascade pretty quickly. It had started with general quietness on her part and a lack of communication. It moved on to long periods where she seemed to be lost in her own world. It developed further into an intense desire for routine and meltdowns when said routine was altered. When he looked back, he could see small signs that something had been wrong all along, but he had dismissed them as quirks. Hindsight was 20/20.

Kurt had done his research and he knew deep down what was going on. He had taken her to a specialist just yesterday and was waiting for the call.

He jumped when his phone rang and pulled it from his pocket with a shaking hand. He put on a smile for his daughter.

"Daddy just has to talk on the phone, baby. You keep eating."

No response. He didn't expect one.

He answered his phone and listened to what he already knew was coming.

He felt that familiar stab to his gut.

It was one thing to know the truth in your heart. It was another to have to face it head on.

He might have managed to say goodbye to the doctor before he hung up. He really wasn't sure. He really didn't care.

*Five minutes. You can have five minutes.*



He set the timer on his watch before sinking into a kitchen chair. He let the fear and grief overwhelm him. He sank his head down into his arms and sobbed. He felt fear for the future. Fear of the unknown. He felt grief for the loss of the daughter he thought he would have. He grieved the father/daughter relationship that he had once daydreamed about. That relationship was gone. It was unrealistic now.

His timer went off. He took a deep breath and stood to wash his face. He walked back to the table and reached out a hand to stroke the chubby cheek in front of him.

He smiled. A real genuine smile.

His grief was real and valid. So were his fears, but how could he stay sad when this beauty was right there in front of him, just waiting to be loved? The life he had imagined may have been ripped away, but a new kind of life was being placed in his lap. He had the opportunity to take this new path with pride, dignity and determination.

He picked up her hand and placed a small kiss there.

His mind raced as he planned his day. Work would have to wait. He had a lot more research to do.

"This is it!" Blaine jumped up and down enthusiastically. Cooper laughed and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Don't wet yourself there, Blainey."

Blaine was too excited to be bothered by the childhood nickname. He sighed contentedly and looked one last time at the sign in front of the large, three-story house.

*~Anderson House: A Center Based Program For Autistic Children~*

He wrinkled his nose again at the clinicalness of the name, but his father had been insistent. If it had been up to Blaine he would have called it something like "Anderson's House of Fun." Cooper had pointed out right away that a name like that would lead to men lined up outside their front door with singles, thinking they had found a strip club. Maybe it was a good idea Blaine hadn't been allowed to choose the name on his own. He had compromised by making the sign look as fun as possible. It had poofy looking bubble letters and was artistically decorated with what looked like splashes of paint.

In fact, the name alone was where the clinicalness ended. Everything about the building was fun. It was designed for children. The walls were painted fun but soothing colors. Toys could be found everywhere you went. There was more child-sized furniture than adult-sized. All in all, it was everything Blaine had imagined and hoped for.

"It's time, little brother. You ready?"

Blaine took a deep breath and stepped up on the front porch alongside Cooper. Mr. Anderson put an arm around both of his sons and addressed the small crowd gathered in front of them.

"We want to thank you all for coming out today and supporting us. All of us, no matter our reasons for being here, are a part of the same family now. My boys and I couldn't be more thrilled to be doing this with all of you. Let's work together and we can make a difference. I'm thrilled to announce the grand opening of Anderson House!"

Cheers and applause broke out and Blaine grinned widely as his father hugged him before stepping off the porch to greet people.

Blaine stayed on the porch and separated from the crowd for just a moment in order to take it all in. He smiled to himself as he observed the therapists he had hired mingling with the parents and children. He had really lucked out. This was a good bunch of dedicated workers. His gaze moved on to take in the potential clients. He viewed each child with a tug at his heart and a swirl of emotions. He stopped finally on a lone pair standing at the very back and off to the side.

He observed them carefully. He wasn't sure why but they stood out to him. The small girl was quite beautiful. She had a rare combination of silky, jet black hair and bright blue eyes... yet it was the father who really struck him. He was handsome for sure, but that wasn't it. He contemplated for a moment before realizing what it was that set this man apart. Most of the parents there had either tired or scared looks in their eyes, like they weren't sure if this was the place for them... or had just plain reached the ends of their ropes. Blaine couldn't fault them. That was why he did this. That was why he was there, to help. This man, however, looked neither tired nor scared. Blaine looked into those blue eyes and saw two things.

Love for his child and fierce determination.

His heart skipped a beat.

## Chapter Three

*Seven years ago...*

*"Kurt?"*

*"Mmmm, yes, baby?" Kurt didn't look up from where he was placing kisses down Tala's neck. She giggled and pushed him back.*

*"Stop for a minute. I want to talk to you." He sighed, but scooted over onto his side so that he was pressed up against her instead of on top of her. He knew he shouldn't feel impatient. They had been married for two months and had just moved into their own little fixer-upper. He could be alone with her as much as he wanted now that they were no longer living in the dorms. She was his world though, and sometimes being without her for even minutes felt like someone was taking his oxygen. He rested his head on the pillow next to her and pulled his wife close so that they were nose-to-nose. She giggled again, rubbing their noses together.*

*"Sometimes I think you'd just up and die if you weren't constantly touching me." Kurt grew serious at her light-hearted comment. He ran his fingers through her hair.*

*"Sometimes I think that may actually be true." She lost her smile and looked deeply into his eyes.*

*"Oh, sinta. Don't think that. You are the strongest person I've ever known. You would always be okay, no matter what." He looked down for a moment, not knowing if he was as strong as she believed. He suddenly reached out and tickled her stomach, nuzzling his face down into her neck as he pinned her down gently.*

*"Nope! You've ruined me forever. Without you I'd curl up in a ball and stop breathing." She shrieked with laughter and tried to scramble away.*

*"STOP! Sto-ha-ha-hop! I'm gonna pee my pants!" He pulled back at that and made a face. She wiped the tears of laughter from her eyes and smacked at him playfully. "And if I had, you would have been responsible for washing the sheets because it would have been your fault." He grinned at her and pulled her in for a deep kiss.*

*"That would have been fair I guess." He settled back into place and pulled her over so that she was resting on his chest. "What was it you wanted to talk about?" She hesitated, playing with a button on his shirt before starting to speak in a soft voice.*

*"Why me?"*

*"What do you mean? Why you... what?"*

*"Why I am the one that was different for you? Why am I the only girl you've ever wanted to be with?"*

*Kurt felt his breath catch. These kinds of questions and conversations so rarely came up with them. They just loved each other. That was it. He sat up and pulled her with him. Sitting with their legs criss-crossed, knee to knee, they linked their fingers together. He looked at her urgently and began speaking in a rush.*

*"Tala, are you doubting all of a sudden how I feel about you? A-are you afraid that this is some phase and that I'm going to get tired of you and want to be with a man? Because I can promi-..."*

*She shook her head and laughed her light and musical little laugh. She grabbed his face with her hands and pulled him in close.*

*"Sinta? You. Worry. Too. Much." She placed a soft kiss on his lips and then pulled back, grasping his hands again. "If I had any doubts of those kind I'd have been much wiser to address them before we were married." She grinned at him and he finally smiled back, starting to feel relieved. "I've never doubted how you feel. We fit perfectly from the moment we met. You're the one for me and I know I'm the one for you. That wasn't what I meant at all." Kurt rubbed her small hands with his thumbs.*

*"I'm sorry. You just surprised me. Explain to me what you're wondering then."*

*She was thoughtful for a moment. "I guess I'm just curious. What is it about me that makes me different from other girls for you? What is it that makes..." she stopped for a moment to grasp her breasts in both hands and propped them up on display, "these babies attractive to you for the first time in your life."*

*Kurt burst into laughter at her antics. He looked across to his wife's laughing eyes and wide smile and felt his heart swell a little. This is why he loved her so much. There was no judgment in her eyes. There was no fear that he was hiding something. She was secure and content in their relationship and accepted him for who he*

*was completely. This came from a simple desire to know and understand every little thing about the man she loved. He reached out and pulled her into his lap, resting his cheek on the top of her head.*

*"Tala, when I look at you... I see the person that I love. I see someone full of kindness. I see someone generous to a fault. I see someone gentle and loving, with just the right amount of sassiness. I am so in love with you. I am in love with your soul and your mind... and your body." At this last statement, he started placing small kisses on her neck again and she sighed in contentment as she melted into him. "I love every part of you. I can't help myself. I was never attracted to another girl before you and I sure as hell never will be again. I'm yours forever. I-I can't explain why you're different. You just are. All I know is that I'm so madly in love with you I can hardly see straight. How's that?" She turned to face him, wrapping her legs around his waist and pulling him in for a gentle kiss.*

*"It was perfect. It was what I already really knew." They smiled and leaned in to each other again, pressing soft and slow kisses that quickly grew deeper until they were both a little breathless. Kurt suddenly grinned and grabbed her waist, lifting her into the air and tossing her gently on her back before crawling down on top of her. He eagerly undid the buttons of her shirt and pulled it off.*

*"Now, to show you JUST how much I love those 'babies' as you put it..." her giggles echoed across the walls as he set to work...*

Kurt shook his head to pull himself out of his daydream as his phone rang. He set down his coffee and grabbed his phone from the counter.

"Hi, dad." He smiled, always grateful to hear his father's voice.

"Yes, today is Molly's first day. I'm getting ready to leave pretty quickly here actually, so I can't stay on too long... Of course, I'll call you tonight and let you know how it goes. And I know you won't ask, but yes, I know what day it is and I'm okay... Yes, I really am. I mean, it's a shitty day and I'll definitely cry at some point, but I'll make it. Okay?... I know, I wish you were here too." His voice cracked a little. He mentally slapped himself, knowing that if he started tearing up at 7:30 in the morning then this would be a god-awful day indeed. "I promise I'll call if I need anything... Yes, dad, I really mean it." Kurt smiled and shook his head. "K, I love you too... Bye."

He sighed as he went to look through Malaya's diaper bag, making sure he had everything set for her. He really didn't know how he felt about the fact that her first day at the Autism center fell on Tala's birthday. Thankfully, he was too rushed to dwell on it for much longer.

He scooped his daughter up from her booster seat with a smile and quickly wiped down her face and hands. He slipped on her little shoes and swung her up onto his hip before taking a deep, steadying breath. He walked out the front door, clutching the love of his life in his arms, practically radiating determination.

Blaine stared into the mirror, almost in a trance as he poured a tiny amount of gel into his hand to style his hair.

Most days he was fine. Most days he felt like he could function and act like his old self.

This was not one of those days.

### ***Seven years ago...***

*"Tyler?" Blaine called as he carried the groceries into the house. He glanced around, wondering where his boyfriend and little boy were. He heard giggles coming from the backyard and smiled. He tossed the perishables from his grocery bag into the fridge and raced outside to join his family. College was kicking his butt and he hated the fact that he saw the two loves of his life so little during the week.*

*When he stepped outside, he smiled at the sight he found there. He leaned up against the door frame and watched Tyler and Micah wrestle around, laughing and giggling up a storm. He shook his head, thinking of all the people in their lives who had told them that they were crazy and would never make it.*

*Tyler and Blaine had been together since they were sixteen. There had been the temporary breakup when they were freshmen in college and they decided they needed to expand their horizons... date other people. Two weeks later they were jumping each others bones and declaring that they never, ever wanted to go through fourteen days of torture like that again.*

*Now they were seniors in college, living on their own... with a three-year-old little boy.*

*Okay, Micah wasn't actually theirs. The little boy was the son of Tyler's eighteen-year-old cousin. She had gotten pregnant when she was only fifteen, and far from ready for that type of responsibility. The young teen and Tyler had always been close. He had jumped in to help her care for the child as much as he could, right from the beginning.*

*Six months ago, they had woken in the middle of the night to frantic knocking at their door. They had sleepily stumbled out of bed to find Tyler's cousin sobbing on their front step, clutching Micah on her hip with a tiny, tear-stained face. Before they knew what was happening she had thrust the young child into their arms, claiming that she couldn't do it anymore. They had stood there in shock, watching her hop into a cab and disappear into the night.*

*The next day they had called the police and social services, letting them know what had happened. The police tried their best to find the girl, but it seemed that she had vanished from the face of the Earth. As far as Micah was concerned, social services was content to leave him with the boys for the time being. There were no other family members who were willing to take the child, and the department of children and families was swamped beyond belief with cases where children were in truly desperate situations. Micah was with family who truly loved him and that was good enough for the overwhelmed social worker in charge of their case.*

*That was how they ended up as a family at the young age of twenty-one.*

*Blaine quickly joined in on the fun, scooping Micah up in his arms and tossing the boy in the air, eliciting loud giggles. Tyler stood and wrapped his arms around his boyfriend, pressing a kiss to his cheek. Micah squirmed to get down and Blaine set him to his feet. The boy ran off to play and Blaine turned in Tyler's arms, linking his fingers around his boyfriend's neck.*

*"How was your day, baby?" Blaine asked after placing a kiss on his lips. Tyler leaned in and rested on his shoulder for a second. He was shorter than Blaine and very slight. Blaine wasn't sure if he would have admitted it out loud, but he loved the fact that his boyfriend was so much smaller than him. He wasn't the biggest guy in the world and it felt great to hold Tyler in his arms and take care of him. Tyler pulled back and smiled widely.*

*"It was good! Micah was so much better today. He talked and interacted with me and even made eye contact a few times!" Blaine smiled back, but it didn't really reach his eyes.*



*While Micah was still living with his mother he had been diagnosed with Asberger's Syndrome. The young couple was still struggling with how to handle their special situation. Blaine learned quickly that their coping styles couldn't have been on more opposite ends of the spectrum. Blaine dealt by researching and reading and immediately trying every type of therapy and method he came across. Tyler dealt by being in denial about eighty percent of the time. He was convinced that a little love and care on their part would cure all, that Micah would soon grow out of it and be a typical child. Blaine had tried to talk to his boyfriend and explain the seriousness of the situation, but Tyler refused to listen.*

*For the moment, Blaine had decided to leave it alone. Tyler loved his little cousin and was an excellent caregiver. Blaine knew he could handle the heavy stuff alone for now. They needed time to adjust. They needed time to learn how to live the life that had been handed to them. Blaine kissed Tyler on the top of the head and they both turned to watch Micah play. They laughed, watching him stumble around the yard, attempting to chase down a chipmunk. They sat down on the back porch to talk about their day. Blaine talked about his classes and Tyler told stories of all the cute things Micah had said and done. They held hands, laughing and chatting, until all of a sudden they realized that it was quiet. Too quiet. They both looked up and then at each other at the same moment.*

*Where was Micah?*

*They dove to their feet, calling his name and searching every corner of the yard. Blaine's heart was about to beat out of his chest when he noticed that the gate to the fence was open. He ran as fast as his legs would carry him, willing himself to not throw up as a million horrible questions and scenarios ran through his mind. How long had he been gone? How far could he have gotten? What if a stranger picked him up? What if a dangerous dog was loose in the neighborhood? He reached the front yard just as he heard the sound of tires squealing.*

*Tyler screamed at the top of his lungs.*

Blaine looked back up at his reflection. He was shaking and sweating. He closed his eyes as he clutched the edge of the sink until his knuckles were white. He sank to the bathroom floor, taking deep and slow breaths.

After several minutes he felt his heart rate return to normal and the shaking slowly stopped. He buried his face in his hands before sucking in a deep breath, angrily wiping away the tears that had escaped. He shook his head quickly and stood to his feet.

Not today. Not today of all days. He had come so far. He had overcome so much. He was so different from the broken man he had been seven years ago. He swallowed hard and took another steadying breath. He hated the fact that he had no control over when those memories hit him. Memories of the day when everything in his life changed.

He slowly reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet. He opened it carefully and ran a finger over the creased picture he kept there. He smiled a sad but genuine smile.

He held in his hand the reason for why he did what he did. He held in his hand his inspiration. His reason for continuing to live his life with purpose. He nodded his head and tucked his wallet away. He wiped at his eyes again and moved to splash some water on his face. He glanced once more at his reflection. His eyes were still a little red but they were no longer full of pain and desperation. He had regained his confidence and self control. The puffiness and redness would disappear on his drive to the center. No one would be the wiser.

He steeled himself as he walked toward the front door. It was going to be a good day. It was the first official day that the center was fully functioning. He was finally going to help people and make a difference. One day soon, he would find a way to feel complete. To be healed.

"Blaine?"

The curly haired man glanced up from his desk and the pile of paperwork that surrounded him. The receptionist at the center was poking her head through his office door.

"Yeah, Jen?"

"Your first appointment is here. Mr. Hummel and his daughter Malaya."

"Have them come on in," he told her with a smile, quickly moving to clear away some of his mess. He was still looking down when he heard someone enter his office. "Come on in! Please pardon my mess. I'm still

trying to get organized." He looked up with a grin that froze when he met a pair of very familiar, electric blue eyes.

"It's no problem. I completely understand," the man smiled at him as he reached out a hand. "I'm Kurt Hummel, and this is my daughter Malaya."

Blaine simply stared for a moment without responding. Kurt's smile faded at Blaine's hesitation and he glanced around behind him and then down at himself before looking back at Blaine oddly.

"Um, is there something wrong?" Blaine mentally shook himself out of his daze.

"Oh my goodness, no. I'm so sorry! I must seem like an idiot. It's just been one of those mornings and you just... reminded me of someone..." he finished a little lamely. Luckily his response seemed to satisfy Kurt and his smile returned with an understanding nod of his head.

"I'm Blaine. Blaine Anderson." He stuck out his hand and Kurt shook it politely. "Please, sit down."

Kurt took a seat and held Malaya on his lap. Blaine smiled at the girl and moved to the front of his desk to squat down next to her.

"Hello, Malaya. It's nice to meet you." The small girl leaned into her father and made no response. Blaine was unphazed and moved a hand to the armrest of the chair she was sitting in. Without saying another word he slowly started to tap a steady rhythm. She cocked her head before hesitantly reaching out a hand, copying the rhythm a couple of times before pulling her hand back to rest in her lap. She didn't meet his eye but had a small smile on her face. Kurt watched in fascination. No one had ever broken through Malaya's walls that quickly before besides himself.

"We call her Molly sometimes," he supplied softly. Blaine nodded and pulled up a chair so that he could sit right next to them. He whispered the name 'Molly' to himself, thinking that it fit perfectly.

"So, Kurt. What is it that brings you here? What is it exactly that you're looking for?" Kurt looked at him steadily.

"I want to change my daughter's life. I want to give her everything." Blaine looked at him and smiled.

"What are you doing here, Blaine? What is your reason for doing this?" Blaine started in shock. Throughout this entire process, no one had ever once asked him that question. He looked back at Kurt just as steadily.

"I want to change your daughter's life. I want her to have everything," he answered softly. Kurt stared back for a moment before breaking into a slow smile.

"I think this may work out beautifully then."

## **Chapter Four**

Kurt paced his office nervously.

What if this was a bad decision? What if the people at that center were total quacks? What if he got there later only to find that Malaya had been miserable and crying the whole time?

He was just about to grab his keys and drive back, just to check on her he told himself, when there was a knock on his door. He looked up to see Finn standing there with a smile and two cups of coffee.

"Hey, dude. Are you busy?"

"Well, not really. I was just debating..."

"Driving over and taking your daughter home early because you're second guessing whether this was the right decision and you're worried that she's upset and missing you?"

Kurt tried to be annoyed but he could only smile at his brother's incredibly accurate description of what was going on in his head.

"Am I that predictable?"

"Just when it comes to how much you love your kid, bro." Finn grinned and moved to sit down in front of Kurt's desk, offering him one of the coffees. Kurt accepted with a sigh and sat down across from his brother. They were silent for a moment before Finn spoke up.

"So, how are you doing today? Really?"

"I have about a million answers to that question," Kurt gave a mirthless laugh.

"Well, that would be why I said the word 'really'. Lay it on me. Give me every answer." Finn eyed him steadily. Kurt wavered before standing abruptly and walking to his window, arms crossed over his chest.

"I just left my little girl with complete strangers. Sure, I researched them, but how do you really know if someone is safe and dependable? I'm asking other people to help my daughter and it makes me feel like a failure as a father that I can't be the one to help her myself. Things are insane here at work because I've been so distracted over the last couple of years. We are becoming more and more of a demand, which is a good thing, but work is piling up and I can't handle it all and still be the dad I need to be for Malaya. It's Tala's birthday today so I can't stop thinking about her. Memories keep flooding my brain of how I'd make her breakfast in bed every year and..." his voice cracked and he quickly wiped away a tear, "she would always pretend to be surprised." Finn leaned forward with his elbows on his knees, intent on listening to everything his brother had to say.

"Most of all," Kurt added in a soft voice while still facing the window, "I'm just tired, Finn. I'm so tired of doing this alone. I miss Tala so much that I just ache inside. Raising a child alone is exhausting. Raising a child with special needs alone... some days I feel like I'm not gonna make it. Some days I just want to curl up in bed and not even try anymore. The only thing that keeps me going is knowing how much Molly needs me." His voice was a whisper by the end. He had never voiced all of this to someone else before. He didn't dare to even look at Finn for his reaction. It was only a second before he felt a hand on his shoulder, turning him around, and he was being engulfed in a huge bear hug.

"I definitely don't have all of the answers, man. Hell, even the answers I have aren't gonna be the best or smartest ones," Finn laughed a little in a choked up voice as he held his brother tight. Kurt laughed a little too before pulling away and leaning up against the wall to gaze back out the window.

"Well, one answer is easy. Hire someone to help you out here," Finn said as he leaned up against the wall on the other side of the window. Kurt nodded, still looking out through the glass.

"Yeah, I actually just put up a job posting yesterday. I've got a couple interviews tomorrow."

"Good, well that's one problem solved." He took Kurt by the shoulders and forced him to meet his gaze. "You're not a failure because you're asking for help. It's the opposite if you ask me. You're the bravest guy I know, Kurt. Not only have you faced this head on, you've done everything you can for your little girl... including asking others for help. I think that makes you the best father ever." Kurt felt himself tearing up again at his brother's words.

"Thanks, Finn. That means a lot."

"Look, I can't even imagine how much you miss Tala. I can't imagine being a single parent. I look up to you so much, man. Can... can I just say one thing though? And please don't be mad at me." Kurt looked at him warily but nodded.

"I know that anytime one of us brings up the possibility of you dating again you tell us that you're not ready," Kurt rolled his eyes and let out an exasperated sigh but Finn charged ahead. "I think you're not ready because you're not letting yourself be ready."

"That doesn't even make sense, Finn." Kurt snapped irritably.

"Yes, it does. Just, please hear me out and then I'll shut up about it." Finn looked at his brother, waiting for the go ahead and finally recieved another short nod accompanied by an exaggerated eye roll.

"You think that letting yourself feel something for someone new would be like betraying Tala."

Kurt didn't look up. He wasn't ready to admit that anything Finn was saying was correct.

"Kurt, was Tala a selfish person?" Kurt's head snapped up.

"What kind of question is that? You know very well what an amazing and selfless person she was!"

"Exactly," Finn said softly. "You guys were an amazing pair that way. You both cared about the other more than you cared about yourself. And that leads me to my next question. If you were gone and she were the one raising Molly alone, would you want her to be sad and lonely forever or would you want her to find someone to live her life with and be happy?"

Kurt stared at the floor before answering in a broken whisper. "I'd want her to be happy. You know I would. And you're right, she'd want the same for me. I know that. I do. I just... I can tell myself that all I want and know it in my head, but convincing my heart... that's a little harder." Finn nodded.

"I get it, and I'm not pushing you to hop right into a relationship. You need to do this at your own pace... but Kurt, at least put yourself out there. You're not even giving yourself the chance to start healing in that way because you're closing yourself off. Give it a chance. Just, open up your mind to the possibility of finding someone else that can make you happy. You're never gonna be ready until you believe that it's okay to be ready. You're not only denying yourself the chance to be happy in that way again, you're denying someone special the chance to be happy with you. Someone who may need you as much as you

need them... and let me tell you, that's a pretty big loss. You're amazing and anyone would be lucky to have you and Molly in their lives."

Kurt just stared at his brother throughout the short speech, feeling a little overwhelmed at his insight and thoughtfulness. By the time Finn was finished he was wiping away the tears and pulling his brother into a hug.

"Don't sell yourself short. That was pretty smart," he laughed as he sniffed back the rest of his tears. Finn laughed too and hugged him close.

"What can I say? I have my moments."

"Thanks, Finn. I love you."

"I love you too, bro."

Blaine finally gave up on the huge pile of paperwork after lunch and decided to spend some time with the kids. That was, after all, the entire reason he had opened the center. He reminded himself to look into hiring an assistant to help with the tedious parts of his job.

He walked down the halls of the house and peeked into the different therapy rooms as he passed. He was so grateful for the amazing therapists and volunteers he had acquired for this project. He did a quick assessment in his head as he observed.

His first hire had been easy. He had known Nick and Jeff since grade school and they'd had as big of a passion for the center as he did. When they had found out that he was starting the process two years ago, they had told him immediately that they wanted to be involved. They were in charge of the "Free Play" area.

The idea for the center was that the children rotated from room to room throughout the day to different therapy sessions. It could be overwhelming though, especially for a child with Autism, so they created the "Free Play" area as a place for the children to go in between sessions. They could have a break and choose their own type of toy, or even just rest, as a way to comfort themselves. This was the busiest and most constantly occupied room so it required more than one worker. Nick and Jeff functioned well as a team in



every aspect so this was perfect for them. Blaine watched as Nick sat on the floor across from a small boy, rolling a ball back and forth. Every time the boy made an attempt to interact in the game and push the ball back, Nick would cheer him on as if he'd hit a home run. Jeff was across the room, holding a young girl in his lap as he rocked steadily in a rocking chair. Any type of steady, back and forth movement was usually comforting to a child with Autism, but the fact that this girl was allowing herself to be held at the same time was a big step. A few other kids were off on their own, contentedly playing with the toys of their choice and enjoying some separation from the masses. Blaine smiled as he watched them. He could not have found a better pair for this job.

Next he passed by the "Sensory" room where Mike was working. Most children with Autism had extreme reactions when it came to anything sensory. Textures, lights, certain sounds... they either loved these things or hated them. The goal of this room was to encourage the children and comfort them with the sensory items that they loved, and slowly get them used to the ones that were difficult for them to handle. There was a water play table, a sandbox, a play area for the children to climb on made up of varying textured carpets, several toys that would light up and play music at a touch and finally, Blaine's favorite, a display of lights off to one side that would only turn on by vocal stimulation. If a child sat in front of it and made any type of noise, the lights would gently start to flash a pattern and music would start to play. The louder the child got, the more the lights and music would respond. Not only did it help with sensory therapy, it doubled as speech therapy, encouraging the child to vocalize to get a response from something. Mike was currently working with a couple of children in front of the display and they laughed and giggled excitedly when the lights flashed at the sounds of their voices. That was definitely a good investment.

Up next was the "Gross Motor" room, where Puck was working. It was filled with huge therapy balls, large swings suspended from the ceiling, a balance beam that was low to the ground and several small bikes and scooters. Puck had one little girl swinging contentedly in a swing, while helping two other children work their way around the room on little trikes.

"That's it, move your feet. Dude! You're a regular Lance Armstrong!" Puck cheered as one of the boys made a successful lap around the room. Blaine grinned before moving on.

He turned down the hall and came to the kitchen where Brittany was leading the "Picky Eaters" session. It was quite normal for any child with on the autistic spectrum to have an aversion to certain foods, mostly because of the textures. They were slowly working on introducing new and healthy foods to the children's diet, while having the added bonus of working on appropriate etiquette for meal times and table manners.

Today they were introducing apple slices. Brittany was taking turns setting a single apple slice in front of each child at the table and then taking one to eat herself.

"Num num num! Delicious apples! Come on, let's try a bite together!" She clapped her hands and cheered when two children reached out tentative hands and put the apple in their mouths. Blaine shook his head and grinned. The kids responded so well to Brittany because she was like a child herself. She was perfect for this type of work.

Across the hall from the kitchen was the old dining room, converted into the "Speech Therapy" room. Mercedes was the therapist there and worked on getting the children to communicate, in any form. This was one of the most challenging stations, as communication was a constant struggle for any child with Autism, and every child had their own difficulties and skill level. It was one of the few therapy rooms where children were worked with individually.

Mercedes was sitting at the table with a young girl in front of her. This was a particularly challenging case where the child was almost completely nonverbal and had a very low cognitive level, as she had other disabilities besides Autism. Mercedes was encouraging any type of interaction by mimicking the sounds the child made and trying to get her mimic back. It was slow and trying work but Mercedes had the patience of a saint and refused to give up until she made some progress. Blaine watched her appreciatively before moving on.

He strolled briefly into the next room where all of his music equipment was located. He planned on starting some "Music Therapy" sessions when he had the time. He sighed, fingering his guitar and the small sets of bongo drums. He couldn't wait until he had more time away from his desk so that he could really get involved.

He stepped out into the back next, to watch as Sam led a "Swim Therapy" session. Three kids were currently in the pool, splashing and swimming with the help of life jackets and floaties. This was far and away the favorite station for most children. They loved the freedom that the water provided. It was playtime and physical therapy in one go.

He stepped next into the side yard, where the final group therapy session was taking place. This section was called "Life Skills" and focused on teaching the kids how to function in society and accomplish normal, everyday tasks. They were currently working on how to cross a street. They had a play setup of sidewalks, a street and a crosswalk where they could practice. Artie led this group and Blaine could not

have been more thrilled with this choice. He felt that it was an amazing example to have someone who was handicapped showing these kids that they could do anything they set their minds to. Artie wheeled around with ease and gently directed the children.

Blaine stood off to the side and watched the group work. Artie was showing them the process of checking the crosswalk signal and looking both ways before carefully crossing the street. Most of the children were watching intently and mimicking Artie's movements, but Blaine noticed that one child was off to the side by herself. He had met with every child here individually, but it was going to take some time to learn every face and name. He recognized this girl right away though. It was Molly Hummel. He remembered her in particular because she was such a striking little beauty with those bright blue eyes accompanied by jet black hair. He had also been touched by how well she had responded to him that morning. He had high hopes for how much they could help her because of her positive response. His instant connection to her had nothing to do with her dynamic father who had equally gorgeous eyes. Nope, not at all. He was strictly professional.

Blaine watched her curiously as she cocked her head to the side and listened to some faint strains of music coming from the window of the house next door. He glanced to Artie, who shook his head, indicating that the young child hadn't been participating in the group at all. He knelt down next to her and put a hand on her shoulder. She moved slightly at the touch but kept her focus in the direction of the music.

"Do you like music, Molly?" He spoke softly. He moved so that he was directly in front of her and formed the word in sign language for music while singing along with the melody coming from next door. She immediately turned her focus on him and smiled, placing one tiny hand on his face. He stopped singing and she immediately frowned. He looked at her with growing excitement. He made the sign for music again and sang a bit more. She relaxed and smiled again, tapping his signing hands with her small one. Blaine grinned.

*And we've found a way to communicate.*

He scooped her up in his arms and waved to Artie, showing him that he was taking the child with him. Artie waved back before returning to the rest of his group.

"Come on, Molly. Since you like music so much let's try some more." She reached out a hand and threaded it through his curls. She made a curious face and pulled on a single curl, giggling when it bounced back

into place. Blaine cuddled her close, not able to stop smiling at her positive responses to him. He knew that he wasn't supposed to have favorites, but with this little girl he couldn't help himself.

After Finn's visit in the morning, Kurt was able to relax a little and let himself get caught up in his work. He had been hired to design the lobby for a new law firm and was soon thoroughly absorbed in fabric swatches and debating some Milo Baughman designs he had recently found on auction. He had stepped back to critically eye a sketch when his receptionist rapped on his office door and poked his head in.

"Mr. Hummel?"

Kurt pulled himself back into the moment and smiled.

"Yes, Aaron?"

"You wanted me to remind you when it was time to pick up your daughter. It's almost three now."

Kurt looked at his watch in shock. He had honestly believed that he wouldn't make it through the day without talking himself out of picking her up early every ten minutes. He couldn't believe that he had allowed himself to get so caught up in his work. He grinned, excited to see his daughter and rejuvenated from a complete and uninterrupted workday for the first time since she'd been born. He grabbed his keys and phone and dashed out the door.

"Thanks, Aaron! See you tomorrow!"

The receptionist smiled. His boss had been so withdrawn and serious for the last two years of his life. It was really nice to see him happy.

Kurt rushed through the front door of the center just a few minutes after three. Jen automatically pointed down the hall to the music room.

"You're not late, she's been happy and wonderful all day and she's been thoroughly absorbed in music therapy for the last two hours," she grinned at him, practically reading his thoughts.

Kurt smiled at her gratefully before heading down the hall. He hesitated when he got to the door and decided to stand at the edge for a moment before making his presence known. He could see Blaine sitting in a chair with his guitar propped up on his knee. Malaya was standing in front of him, excitedly holding her left hand in front of her and swinging her right hand from side to side.

"Good job, Molly! Yes, that's music. Do you want more? Please ask me for more... Excellent!"

Kurt stopped breathing and tears automatically pricked the corners of his eyes. Malaya was communicating! She still wasn't quite making eye contact, but she was actually communicating!

He watched in awe as Blaine started strumming on his guitar and Malaya stood there, transfixed. He thought he would melt when the curly haired man began to sing.

***You'll never know what you've done for me***

***What your faith in me has done for my soul***

***You'll never know the gift you've given me***

***I'll carry it with me***

Malaya reached a hand up to touch Blaine's face and he playfully nuzzled in to kiss her palm. Kurt's tears spilled over.

***Through the days ahead I think of days before***

***You made me hope for something better***

***And you made me reach for something more***

***You taught me to run***

***You taught me to fly***

***Helped me to free the me inside***

***Help me hear the music of my heart***

Molly was laughing now and patting Blaine's face excitedly. He stopped singing for a moment to join her in laughter before jumping back into the chorus. Kurt put his hand to his mouth to cover an open sob. He was completely blown away.

***You've opened my eyes***

***You've opened the door***

***To something I've never known before***

***And your love is the music of my heart***

Blaine strummed one last time before setting his guitar aside. The little girl frowned in irritation and started to do the sign with her hands again.

"Molly, darling, my fingers are about to fall off and I think your daddy will be here soon to..." he stopped and looked up in surprise when Kurt stepped into the room. He took in Kurt's red-rimmed eyes and the look of awe and joy on his face. Blaine smiled widely, knowing without a doubt the reason for the other man's happy tears.

"Look, Molly. Daddy's here." Kurt walked in and scooped the girl up in his arms. She immediately patted her father's mouth and quickly did the same sign with her little hands that she had been doing for Blaine.

"That's the sign for music. She's asking you to sing," Blaine smiled at him. "Do you sing at all?" Kurt looked at him with misty eyes.

"Yeah," he answered in a choked voice. "I sing to her all the time actually."

Blaine grabbed up his guitar again and grinned. "I think I might have one more chorus in me before I form some serious blisters. Do you know the song I was just singing to her?" Kurt nodded wordlessly and took a step close to Blaine. As the curly haired man started to strum, Kurt opened his mouth to sing.

***You were the one***

*Always on my side*

*Always standing by*

*Seeing me through*

Blaine almost faltered for a moment at the beauty of the other man's voice. He didn't know what he had expected but it sure wasn't this. He was floored. He took a step closer so that they were almost touching and joined in with a harmony.

*You were the song that always made me sing*

*I'm singing this for you*

*Everywhere I go*

*I think of where I've been*

*And of the one who knew me better*

*Then anyone ever will again*

Blaine noticed that Kurt's eyes filled with pain when he sang those last words. His heart broke for the man, wondering who he had lost to make those words so poignant. The moment quickly passed for both of them though when Malaya reached out her small hands and placed them gently on both men's faces as they continued to sing. A huge smile spread across her face and the two men looked straight into each others' eyes, overwhelmed with emotion.

*You taught me to run*

*You taught me to fly*

*Helped me to free the me inside*

*Help me hear the music of my heart*

The small girl giggled loudly and patted their faces again. They looked at each other in awe, both tearing up again before continuing.

***You've opened my eyes***

***You've opened the door***

***To something I've never known before***

***And your love is the music of my heart***

***What you taught me***

***Only your love could ever teach me***

***You got through when no one could reach me***

Blaine faded away and listened as Kurt sang, tears streaming down his face, nuzzling his daughter close.

***Cause you always saw the best in me***

***All the best that I could be***

***It was you who set me free***

They stood in silence for a moment as Malaya drew her hands back and contentedly rested her head on her father's shoulder. Kurt closed his eyes and kissed the top of her head, whispering softly.

"I love you, Malaya. I am so proud of you."

Blaine swallowed hard as he set his guitar aside and wiped away his tears. Kurt opened his eyes to look at him and they both laughed joyfully.

"I'd say we made some pretty amazing progress today, wouldn't you?" Blaine smiled and sniffed.

"Yeah," Kurt laughed again in a rough voice. "I'd say so."



## Chapter Five

Over the next few weeks, Kurt saw some significant changes in his daughter's development. She was making small amounts of eye contact, she was actually communicating with people (not verbally, but anything was an improvement) and she seemed much more comfortable and content in her day-to-day life.

Part of the improvement came from the therapy she was receiving at the center. He was continually impressed and amazed by their ingenuity and dedication to the children. He had yet to meet every therapist and volunteer, but the small amount of time he had spent at the center, observing the sessions, had left him feeling encouraged and excited.

Another large part of her improvement though, came because of changes within her father. For the first time since he had lost Tala, he was starting to feel parts of his old personality come back. He loved being a father and wouldn't have traded his angel for anything, but he needed to work too. Having Molly at the center gave him the freedom to do that full time again. Not only did he thoroughly enjoy his job, he craved the solidity and structure that going to work every day provided.

He also craved the interaction with other adults. Being at home with Molly most of the time had drained him of his mental and emotional reserves. Every day that he had actual adult conversations, and ate a meal that didn't include goldfish crackers and sippy cups, made him feel a little bit more balanced as a person. He would go home, refreshed and revived, excited to spend the evening with his little girl.

Being happy and stable himself had an effect on Malaya that he hadn't anticipated. The combination of providing a structured schedule for her, yet being relaxed and easy-going about the things he couldn't control, brought positive responses from the little girl. She interacted and attempted to communicate with him more, and was just generally at ease.

"Alright, Malaya. You ready to go to school?" Kurt went to the door on that particular Wednesday morning with her backpack in hand. He stood with bated breath, waiting to see how she would respond to a purely verbal request. He hadn't attempted something like this since she had first shown the major signs of being Autistic.

She set aside the toy she had been playing with and walked to him immediately. The small girl plopped down on her backside and stuck her feet up in the air, waiting for her shoes to be placed on her feet. Kurt couldn't help but laugh at her antics and placed a kiss on the top of her head as he helped her into her shiny little boots. He set her on her feet and adjusted the poofy bow holding her ponytail in place.

After he helped to slide her backpack onto her little shoulders, he knelt down in front of her. Gently taking her face in his hands, he encouraged her to look him in the eye. Her gaze still focused on the wall behind him, but she made no attempt to pull away.

"I love you, jellybean," he whispered.

That was another small change that had occurred. He could call her that loving nickname again without missing Tala so much he thought his heart was being ripped in two. Speaking the little pet name still tugged at his emotions, and sometimes made his breath catch, but now it would usually be accompanied by happy memories of his sweet wife. The happy memories and thoughts were finally starting to outweigh the sad and lonely ones. He still wasn't one hundred percent sure how he felt about that.

He watched Malaya closely as a tiny smile appeared on her face. She leaned forward and touched their noses together, making a content humming sound. The enormity of a response like this did not fail to escape him. The triumphant emotions that always accompanied a huge step forward on her part swelled up within him.

He stood to his feet and cheerfully told her to grab her jacket from the coat hook. When she moved to comply, he let out a victorious little cheer and jumped up and around in circles for a moment, thinking that life couldn't get any better.

He scooped her up in his arms and walked out the door. It was going to be an amazing day.

Blaine smiled brightly when he caught a glimpse of the, now familiar, perfectly styled hair and navy blue pea coat from his office window. He jumped up from behind his desk and glanced in the mirror, running a hand over his slightly unruly curls, attempting to arrange them. He tried desperately to push aside his excitement, knowing his feelings wouldn't be reciprocated.

He had been drawn in by the loving determination of Molly's father from the moment he met him... not to mention the man was absolutely gorgeous. Those electric blue eyes would come close to hypnotizing him at times, and he would catch Kurt looking at him oddly before realizing he'd been staring. Over the last weeks he had tried, on multiple occasions, to nonchalantly find out more about Kurt. The brown haired man was always evasive with his answers though, seemingly uncomfortable with talking about anything too personal. Out of necessity for the center's records, he had shared that Molly's mother had died in child birth, and then nothing more. At first Blaine had held on to the hope that maybe the mother had been a surrogate, that this man might possibly be gay too. That hope had been shattered though when Kurt once made a comment about how much Molly looked like his wife. In those words Blaine heard a raw pain that was so tangible, all he wanted was to hold the man close. He refrained though, not knowing how physical of a person Kurt was. Along with his sadness for Kurt's pain, he felt a stab in his own heart, knowing that the other man would never feel anything romantic for him. This seemed so selfish to him, and he constantly told himself to ignore those feelings. Regardless of what he knew in his head though, his heart would start to flutter and he would feel giddy the moment Kurt entered the room.

He nervously fluffed up his curls and adjusted his bowtie, blushing in embarrassment when he heard a sharp laugh from his doorway.

"Primping?" Mercedes asked with a wide smile.

"No. Of course not," Blaine mumbled without meeting her gaze. She laughed even louder.

"Uh-huh, sure," she grinned. "I'm excited for you, honey! Who's the guy?" She plopped down on a chair in his office and crossed her legs, looking at him expectantly. He shook his head and sighed.

"I'm being ridiculous. I'm totally crushing on this guy, but he's straight. Well, I'm fairly certain he is anyway. He was married to a woman and he's shown absolutely no interest in me."

"Aww, sweetie I'm sorry." She give him a sympathetic little pout. "He's divorced?"

"Widow, actually," Blaine replied. "Just two years ago. I couldn't blame him for not being ready even if he would be interested in me. Goodness knows it was more than two years after..." he trailed off, clearing his throat. Mercedes reached out and held his hand for a moment, squeezing it gently. "Anyway, it took me a good while to heal after everything that happened. If you could've heard the pain in his voice when he

talked about his wife, Mercedes... it's obvious that he's still mourning her. And like I said, seeing as he was married to a woman, I'm fairly certain he wouldn't be interested even if he was ready."

She sighed as she gazed at him, wishing she had something to say that would wipe the sad puppy dog look from his eyes. She didn't get a chance though, as a voice spoke just then from the hall.

"Cedes?" Kurt stood there with a look of shock on his face, holding Malaya in his arms. The speech therapist jumped to her feet with a squeal and attacked him with a hug.

"Kurt Hummel! What are you doing... oh my goodness... Molly! Molly Hummel!" She took in the sight of father and daughter with a 'Well, duh!' look. "I remember thinking of you when I heard her last name, and God knows I should have known when I saw those gorgeous blue eyes. I can't believe this!" Kurt laughed at her exuberance and smiled widely, hugging her again.

"What are you doing here?" He asked brightly.

"I'm this little beauty's speech therapist." She tickled the girl's tummy and moved into her line of sight. "Good morning, Malaya! It's good to see you!" She exclaimed while signing the word hello.

"I can't believe it!" He shook his in amazed disbelief. "Small world."

"Hey, y'all!" Artie called out, rolling up to Blaine's office door. "Time for our first session. Molly starts with me today. I can take her right now if you'd like me to." He smiled at Kurt and held out his arms. Kurt smiled back and handed his daughter over.

"Thank you," he called as Artie wheeled away. The man in the chair waved a hand in the air, all the while talking to the little girl animatedly.

"Morning, Blaine," Kurt said kindly to the curly haired man

"Morning, Kurt." Blaine's voice cracked a little when he spoke and his cheeks tinged pink. Mercedes snapped her head in his direction.

*No, he didn't? This cannot be the supposedly straight man he's crushing on!*

Blaine refused to meet her gaze though, so she looked back to her friend.

"So, spill boy! What've you been up to? I can't believe you have a daughter!"

"Yeah," Kurt smiled. "A lot has happened since we were eighteen." They both chuckled softly as he sat down next to her.

"Listen, I don't want to intrude. I'll just..." Blaine started, feeling awkward.

"Don't be silly! Sit down. We're all friends here." Mercedes winked at him. Blaine glanced nervously at Kurt for confirmation. He had honestly meant it when he said he didn't want to intrude, but he was also honestly excited about the prospect of finally learning something of substance about the other man. Kurt gave him a genuine smile and nodded. Blaine hopped up on top of his desk and watched as the old friends turned back to each other.

"Well, I went to NYU, you know that. I met Tala, Malaya's mother, my junior year and that was it. I was a goner. We were married only months later. We started a design company together after we graduated, which I'm still running today." Mercedes couldn't help the look of shock that crossed her face. Kurt snorted a little laugh.

"Yeah, you're not the only one who was surprised. I'm not sure I can explain it, Cedes. You know very well that back in high school I would have told anyone and everyone that I was one hundred percent gay. Goodness knows I never thought I'd feel that way about a woman... but, Tala just... she was amazing. You would have loved her," he finished in a whisper. Mercedes smiled at him sadly, reaching out to hold his hand. Blaine just stared at them in shock.

*Gay?! He's gay?! Well, at least considered himself to be gay before he met his wife?!*

Blaine's heart felt like it was going to beat out of his chest. He was suddenly overwhelmed with the thought that he might actually have a chance with this man. He snapped back to attention, realizing that Kurt had continued to talk.

"Molly was a total surprise. We didn't even know for sure if we wanted kids. We were so excited though, and Tala, she was so gorgeous while she was pregnant." Kurt smiled but wiped away a tear as he spoke.

"What happened?" Mercedes asked softly. Kurt swallowed hard.

"One night, she was about eight months along... she st-... started bleeding like crazy. I think I drove about ninety miles per hour to the hospital. By the time we got there... she was completely limp in my arms. I remember sinking to the floor in the hallway of the E.R. after the doctor took her from me. I looked down at myself and all I could see was red... the only thing I could think of was that no person so tiny could lose so much blood and live. Turns out I was right." He was looking down as he finished speaking. Mercedes held a hand to her mouth as she let out a heartbroken gasp. Blaine, on the other hand, couldn't help but cry as memories of his own flashed through his mind. He knew very well what it felt like to be covered in someone else's blood, feeling helpless and terrified. He stared at the blue eyed man with pure empathy.

When Kurt looked up, their eyes met. He was taken aback by what he saw in the hazel eyes. It was more than sympathy. It wasn't pity. It was a look that said, 'I understand.' It was an instant connection. Kurt stopped breathing for just a moment before tearing his eyes away and blinking rapidly, trying to bring himself back to the moment.

"Anyway, she uh, she didn't make it past the delivery. Our families helped a ton of course, especially at first, but it's just me and Molly now." Mercedes nodded and gripped his hand tight.

"You're doing an amazing job, Kurt. I can't imagine being a single parent period, not to mention under those stressful circumstances. Now with the addition of dealing with special needs..." he nodded and looked down at his lap. Blaine saw the sudden downturn of his mouth and watched as the light left his eyes. He realized instantly what was going on. He dove to his knees in front of the other man and gripped his hands over top of Mercedes'.

"Kurt?" The blue eyed man looked at him, surprised. "You are doing an amazing job with Malaya." Kurt ducked his head and Blaine could see that he was going to instantly deny it. He put a finger under the other man's chin and forced his gaze upward. "I mean it. I have seen almost unprecedented improvements in her since she started coming. Part of it is just Molly herself. She was ready and willing, we just provided the opportunity. An even bigger part of it is you, though. You've worked so hard and done everything possible to give her a decent chance. You're reliable, responsible and provide her with the routine that she needs... but while those things are important, there's one thing that really stands out about you. You love that little girl unconditionally. You love her without exception. You give her the opportunity to grow and learn, but it's simply because you love her just as she is, not because you'll start loving her when she improves."

Kurt's mouth fell open as he listened to Blaine's little speech. It was uncanny how his words were pretty much an exact mirror of what Kurt thought to himself every day. He loved his little girl desperately and just wanted her to be happy. Knowing that someone else saw this and recognized it was like a warm and shimmering light at the end of the tunnel. He felt acknowledged. He felt appreciated. He looked down at the way Blaine was holding his hands and felt the way he was gently cupping his chin.

He felt loved.

He then felt something growing inside of him that he hadn't felt in the longest time.

He felt a pique of interest and a quickening of his heartbeat.

He immediately followed it up by feeling nauseous and terrified.

Then he bolted.

## Chapter Six

Kurt slammed things in his office. The filing cabinet drawer. His pens. The sketches for the law office he was designing. Those didn't make quite as big of an impact though, seeing as they were made of paper.

He was so angry he couldn't see straight. He was angry and he only had himself to blame. He had stumbled out of Blaine's office with barely a warning, mumbling something about being late for a meeting. He had roughly pushed the other man away from him as if his touch was distasteful. Both Mercedes and Blaine had stared at him in shock but he had been freaking out too much to care... at least in that moment. He cared a lot now. Now Molly was probably going to be kicked out of the center because her father was an idiot with no social skills. Now that amazing man probably thought that Kurt despised him.

*Great work, Kurt.*

He seriously didn't know what had come over him. True, Blaine had been holding his hand and touching his face in a fairly intimate way, but the other man hadn't actually tried anything. He was just being friendly and supportive. It wasn't even the touching that had bothered him. It was his own reaction to the touching. It was his reaction to Blaine's amazing words. He had like it. He had wanted to be touched even more. He had wanted to be loved and reassured by this man even more.

He sighed and plopped his head down onto his arms. He couldn't feel that way. He just couldn't. It was too soon. Tala had only been gone...

Kurt swallowed hard and sat up in his chair again as realization set in. He stood and walked to the window, gazing out into the city.

*This is what Finn was talking about.* He forced him to think the actual words in his head.

Here he was, with an amazing person right in front of his face who obviously cared for him... and he was completely shutting down. If he was perfectly honest with himself, he had noticed Blaine's obvious stares and politely flirtatious actions since the first day they met. It had only gotten more intense over the last weeks. The fact that he simply wasn't ready for a relationship of this nature had helped him to convince himself that it was all in his head. He told himself repeatedly Blaine was just a great teacher to Molly. That



was why he was so friendly to him, he was Molly's father. The fact that he had to convince himself of this so often should have been his first clue that it was actually something more.

He turned back to his desk and pulled the picture of Tala he kept there into his hands. He lightly outlined her beautiful face with his finger. So many conflicting emotions were flowing through him. He didn't know what to think.

"What do I do, baby?" He whispered. "What would you want?" He sucked in a quick breath when another realization hit him.

She wasn't there to tell him. That was the point. She would never be there again. Life was about him and Malaya now. Tala would never have wanted them to live a half-life, with him still clinging desperately to her memory. They deserved a life that was full of love and happiness. They deserved to be whole again. They deserved someone like Blaine.

His hand shook as he set Tala's picture aside and pulled out his phone. There were several pictures there of Molly at the Center. One day he had stayed for a bit to watch her in action and had snapped tons of pictures of her. There were far and away more pictures of her with Blaine than with anyone else.

He slowly slid his finger across the screen, moving from one picture to the next. They were all of Molly sitting in a chair, right in front of the curly haired man. He was playing his guitar and smiling brightly as he sang to the little girl. Kurt looked closely at her little pixie face. In every picture that he passed, she was excited and attentive. In some she was obviously in the middle of signing the word 'music'. In a few, she was reaching out to touch his face or his hand. The very last picture was the one that took his breath away though. She was actually making eye contact. They were both looking each other straight in the eye, with pure joy on their faces. It was obvious that not only did Molly love this man, he loved her right back.

Kurt felt a warmth and a peace flow through him. All of a sudden, he truly understood what Finn had meant by not letting himself be ready to move on. He had been so caught up in his own head, he had convinced himself that he wasn't ready... that maybe he would never be ready. He had refused to give himself permission to start living his life again because it had felt like a betrayal to Tala. He realized now that, while understandable, it was unnecessary and kept both him and Molly from really healing.

He put his phone away and folded his hands in front of him, propping his chin on his fingers.

He was still scared. He was still uncertain. He still missed Tala more than anything and she would forever be a part of him... but he was ready... maybe.

He grabbed his keys and jacket, leaving his office before he could talk himself out of it. Time to face the music.

"Hey, Kurt!"

The blue eyed man was just leaving the front door of his office building and looked up when he heard his name called. He had to stop himself from rolling his eyes as he watched a tall, broad shouldered man jog toward him.

He had hired Isaac a few weeks back when he had finally come to the realization that he couldn't handle the workload solo anymore. The man was a great designer and handled customers brilliantly, but there was something about him that irritated Kurt. He couldn't even put his finger on it. He only knew that whenever he had to be around the other man for more than an hour he wanted to break something. He smiled stiffly as Isaac approached.

"Hey. I'm sorry to run, but I actually need to..."

"Oh, no worries. I won't keep you. I just wanted to let you know that I found some really amazing pieces at an auction uptown the other day that you might want for that law office. I texted you some pictures this morning. I don't know if you got them."

Kurt immediately felt guilty. Here he was, being all impatient with this man for reasons that completely escaped him, and the other designer was going out of his way to be efficient and helpful. Kurt gave him a genuine smile then.

"I'm so sorry. I've been insanely busy this morning and my phone was turned off for a while."

*I was actually freaking the fuck out and avoiding my phone like the plague because I had just made an ass of myself.*

Isaac smiled. "No big deal. I think I can understand why the most talented designer in all of New York would be too busy to answer a text from his lowly assistant."

Kurt's smile faltered a bit then. That was it. Comments like that. It was like he was being patronizing and self deprecating at the same time, both of which made the blue eyed designer want to scream. Kurt was talented, sure, but there were literally thousands of talented designers in New York, all a phone call away. Also, Isaac was not his assistant. Yes, Kurt was the owner and boss, but Isaac did just as much work on almost the same level. Kurt didn't need this man to boost his ego. He was finding it incredibly annoying that he even tried.

"Yes, well, thank you for sharing what you found," he replied a little more formally. "I'll check them out as soon as I find the time and get back with you." Kurt nodded briskly and turned to hail a cab, leaving Isaac to stare after him in surprise at his sudden change in mood.

Isaac sighed and headed into the building. Try as he might, nothing he said or did caused the other man to take notice of him. He was an outwardly nice, incredibly good looking guy. This, literally, never happened. His gait became determined though as he strode through the building. He could do it. It would just take a little time. One way or another he would get into Kurt's pants.

Kurt hurried up the walk of the Center, consumed by the thought of making things right with Blaine. He stopped abruptly when he opened the front door. It suddenly dawned on him that he hadn't considered the actual words he was going to say yet.

*Shit.*

He was just debating whether he should quietly duck out and get his thoughts in order when he heard Jen call his name sharply. His heart skipped a beat and he ran inside. The tone in her voice was terrifying. All thoughts of romance and relationships left his head and he was filled instead with scenario after scenario of what could be wrong with Malaya.

"I'm so glad you're here! I was just about to call you," she grabbed his hand and quickly pulled him down the hall. "She's not hurt, so please don't freak out. I can see it in your eyes," she said over her shoulder

with a sympathetic look as they hurried out into the backyard. "I'm sorry if I scared you. She's not doing well though, so I'm glad you're here."

Kurt swallowed the fear that had been welling up inside of him and glanced anxiously around the backyard for his daughter. It wasn't hard to find her. A small group of kids and three of the therapists were surrounding the little girl, just off to the side of the pool. She was rocking back and forth desperately and shaking her head frantically from side to side. Tiny moans were escaping her lips and the sheer panic in her eyes was palpable.

Sam and Brittany were standing a few paces away, holding back any children that tried to approach her. Blaine was crouched down in front of her, speaking softly and soothingly. For the first time though, the curly haired man's presence seemed to have little-to-no influence on her. She shrugged his hands away when he attempted to pick her up and just rocked even more frantically. Kurt dove to his knees in front of her, next to Blaine.

"I'm here, Malaya. Daddy's here. It's okay."

Her distraught rocking stopped for just a moment when she heard his voice. She reached out to tap him roughly in the face before doing the sign for music, over and over.

"She's been asking for music ever since she got upset, but I keep trying to sing and she just gets more upset!" Blaine told him with obvious pain in his voice. "I can't figure out what she wants."

Kurt looked at him briefly, and felt a tug at his heart when he saw how genuinely upset Blaine was that he couldn't calm Molly. He quickly turned back to his daughter though. He only had one guess as to what she wanted but he was game to give it a try. He sat down directly in front of her and gently stroked her hair as he sang.

***Don't go changing to try and please me You never let me down before Don't imagine you're too familiar And I don't see you anymore***

The combination of the melody and her father's soothing voice was exactly what she was craving. She immediately stopped rocking so fretfully and her small body relaxed. The panic started to leave her eyes and she began breathing slow, calming breaths. He reached out for her tentatively and almost cried in relief when she actually held out her arms to him. He scooped her into his lap and cuddled her close.

*I wouldn't leave you in times of trouble We never could have come this far I took the good times, I'll take the bad times I'll take you just the way you are*

Blaine watched in awe as Kurt lulled and soothed his little girl in a matter of seconds. Just another reason why he was quickly falling for this man. Just another reason he felt like shit because of this morning. He turned his head and nodded to Sam and Brittany, silently telling them to take everyone inside so that they could have some space and privacy.

"What happened?" Kurt asked softly. Malaya had relaxed almost completely. She was clinging to him so tightly though, he could feel her tiny finger nails digging into his skin. Blaine sighed and sat down next to him.

"That's just it. I'm not completely sure. She had her morning sessions with Artie and Mike, then was happily having snack time with Brittany when she kind of freaked out. From what I understand, another child was getting really close, wanting to hug and play with her. Brittany was encouraging the other child to sit in her own seat and thought it was fine. Brit turned her back for just a second, and then Molly was screaming and running outside. I ran out here the moment I heard her. You got here minutes later." Blaine reached out a hand to lightly run his fingers through the silky black hair that had fallen out of it's ponytail. He was so grateful when she didn't pull away.

"That was record breakingly fast, by the way," Blaine laughed a little. "Jen had just run into the house to call you."

"I was, um, already coming over here... for something else. Perfect timing I guess." Kurt distinctly avoided his gaze. Blaine just nodded, knowing that now was not the moment to push.

"I am continually amazed by the incredibly impact your mere presence can have on this little girl," Blaine smiled. If he was honest with himself, he was still feeling hurt by how Kurt had rushed out that morning. Heartbroken might be a better word. The blue eyed man could not have made it more obvious that any advances on Blaine's part would not be appreciated. This was his job and his calling though. Heartbreak or not, he cared about these families so much and taking care of them would always be his priority.

"Yeah, it's great," Kurt deadpanned sarcastically. "All I have to do is follow her everywhere she goes, sing the moment she's uncomfortable and all will be well. I'm the perfect example for preparing your child to be strong and self-sufficient. I should teach a class." Blaine looked at him in shock.

"Kurt." He moved so that he was directly in the other man's line of sight but was careful to not touch him. Neither of them needed a repeat of this morning. "First of all? She's two. Two, Kurt. The goal is not to be self-sufficient when you're two. She feels loved and comforted by you. That's a good thing." He cocked his head to the side to see what kind of impact his words were having and was glad to see the blue eyes glance up to meet his own.

"Secondly, please don't let this discourage you. Molly has made so much progress in such a short amount of time. It's been miraculous, actually. You always have setbacks when it comes to any type of therapy. That's how it works. The fact that we're dealing with Autism makes it even more complicated. Every child is different and there's so much we don't know about it. We have to take things in stride. Take the good with the bad... just like the song," he joked. Kurt finally cracked a smile and sighed as he looked Blaine fully in the eye. Without even thinking, he reached out and linked fingers with the other man.

"Thank you, Blaine... for everything. Why are you so perfect?" Kurt's relief and contentment turned into shock when he realized what he had said and done. He nervously pulled his hand away.

Blaine must have been just as shocked, as his expression mirrored Kurt's feelings exactly. They just looked at each other for a moment without speaking. Kurt swallowed nervously.

*This is your chance. Just tell him. Tell him how you feel. Tell him you think he's amazing.*

Blaine cleared his throat and glanced away shyly.

*Any moment now, Kurt. Feel free to stop making a complete ass of yourself today.*

"Um, well, thank you. I'm far from perfect... as you already know from earlier today. I-I wanted to apologize actually. I didn't mean to be unprofessional. I realize you aren't interested in me that way so I'll try to not be so... touchy-feely." Blaine looked up at him from under his lashes, silently begging the other man to tell him he was wrong, that holding his hand just now had meant something.

*Open your mouth, dammit! Do you want to lose him completely?!* Kurt started to feel panic rise up within him. *What the hell is wrong with me?!*

"It's fine. Don't even worry about it."

*That wasn't what I was supposed to say! Oh my god! Look into my eyes, Blaine. Know that I didn't mean it! Please!*

Blaine felt like he was on an emotional roller coaster of epic proportions. Each interaction he had with Kurt today had left him reeling. He felt like crying and quickly decided that he needed to make an exit before he completely embarrassed himself. He would have been shocked to know that Kurt was desperately fighting back tears of his own.

"I should go," he whispered roughly, refusing to meet Kurt's intense gaze. "You should probably just take her home for the day. We'll see you tomorrow."

He stood and walked back toward the house. He hadn't even gone on a single date with this man. He hadn't even had the chance to really tell him how he felt. Why the hell did this hurt so badly?

*Well, that's that.* He opened the door and walked inside without a backward glance.

Kurt sat there, clutching Malaya to him, not able to stop the tear that escaped from the corner of his eye.

*What the fuck did I just do?*

## **Chapter Seven**

*Please pick up. Please pick up. Please pick...*

"Hello?"

"Hey, mom." Kurt sighed in relief.

"Hey, sweetheart!" Tala's mom spoke in happy surprise. Kurt felt a little guilty at how thrilled she sounded to hear from him. He supposed he wasn't calling her nearly as often as he should. Just another thing that he was completely messing up.

"How are you, sweetie? I haven't seen you or my baby girl in almost two weeks!"

"I know, I'm sorry," he sighed. "Things have been a little nuts at work. We, uh... we actually had kind of a rough day though. I was wondering... god, I feel terrible now. We haven't talked in days and now it's going to seem like I'm only calling you because I need help... which I do, but I really..."

"Kurt?" She spoke with a laugh.

"Yes?"

"Bring her over here. I'm assuming that's where you were headed. She hasn't spent the night in forever and you know we love having her. I wish you'd ask for help more often. You sound exhausted, honey. Some time to yourself will probably do you good."

Kurt sighed in relief. "Thanks, mom. That's exactly what I was hoping for. I really do appreciate it. I'll be over in just a bit."

"Sounds good. Love you, dear. See you soon."

"Love you too."



*Please pick up. Please pick up. Please pick...*

"Hello?"

"Hey, dad." There was a slight crack in Blaine's voice, and a weariness that was more than obvious.

"What happened? What's wrong, kid?"

"What? N-nothing! Really, I was just calling to say hi."

"Blaine? You were never good at lying. Remember the time you broke a lamp, dancing in your room, and you were too afraid to tell us? You concocted that whole story about a mountain lion escaping from the zoo and jumping in through your window?"

Blaine laughed then, even though he was desperately fighting back tears. "I always thought you believed that? You never told me."

"Well, it was so imaginative we decided to let it go. Now what's wrong? I can tell that you're upset."

Blaine was silent for a moment. There were so many thoughts and emotions swirling around in his head, he didn't know how to begin.

"Alright, too much for over the phone, huh? We're eating dinner at six. I'll see you then."

"Thanks, dad. I love you."

"Love you too, kid."

"Malaya!" Tala's mom rushed out the front door to scoop her granddaughter up in her arms. Kurt walked behind with his daughter's bag in hand. As always, seeing his mother-in-law tugged at his heart strings just a little. Tala had looked so much like her mother. The small woman handed Molly off to her husband, who happily whisked the girl away into the house, and turned to Kurt. He went to offer her the bag, but she pushed it aside and pulled him down into a tight hug.

"What's on your mind, honey? Why are you so sad today?" She pulled away and took his face in both of her small hands, looking up at him in concern. He completely broke at the look of tenderness she gave him. Her eyes widened in surprise and she yanked him down into an even tighter hug.

They stayed that way for long minutes, hugging tight, swaying just a little, Kurt desperately trying to reign in his emotions. After he had calmed a bit, she pulled him down to sit on the front step with her, tugging her sweater a little more closely around her to ward off the chill. She gave him a look that said he'd better spill, or else. Before he knew it he was telling her everything, from how great things had been going, to his surprise at finally starting to heal from losing Tala, to Molly's meltdown that day, to the unexpected turn of events with Blaine. By the time he was done he had his face buried in his hands, feeling tired, lonely and quite positive that things would never be okay again.

He felt small arms wrap around him as her head rested on his shoulder.

"Oh, honey. I've been waiting for this."

He snapped his head up to look at her, surprised and having no idea what she meant.

"First, let me address what is going on with Malaya. Your friend at the Center is right. She has made so much progress. A day like today is normal and expected... and you are an amazing father. That little girl couldn't be more blessed." She squeezed Kurt's hand and he gave her a grateful and watery smile.

"Now, sweetie... and forgive me for this... but you're such an idiot."

His smile dropped from his face.

"Tala has been gone for two years, Kurt. Actually, we're coming up on three now. Trust me. I miss my baby girl every day and I'll never stop missing her... or be the same again. Life has to go on though. Tala will never be replaced. No one expects you to do that, but you need to start living again. You deserve it and Malaya does. This man sounds amazing and perfect for you, and if you're pushing him away because you're afraid of what it'll do to Tala's memory, well then... you're an idiot."

Kurt surprised both of them by laughing just a little. It was accompanied by more tears though, and he felt like a ridiculous, emotional mess.

"I know, you're right. Honestly, I really had decided that I wanted to try... getting close to him. I was going to the Center to talk to him, but when I got there Molly was freaking out and I just... I don't know, joined her in freaking out I guess."

She smiled and patted his arm.

"Time to stop freaking out, sweetie. Time to start being happy again." She kissed him on the cheek and stepped into the house. He stayed there alone for just a moment. Considering what she had said.

Blaine and his parents had finished dinner a few minutes back and his mother was now in the kitchen, cleaning up. Blaine would have loved to help, but his mother had insisted, ever since he was young, that the kitchen was the place for a woman and that her men needed to sit back and relax after a long day at work.

Even now, Blaine couldn't help but shake his head at the ridiculous, old-fashioned view his parents had on everything. To this day, he didn't understand how people so formal and ground in tradition could be so accepting and loving of a gay son, but somehow they were. He had been terrified to come out to them when he was a teen.

He had sat them down at the kitchen table after school one day, practically shaking and sweating bullets, before just blurting out, "I'm gay!" They had looked at him, then looked at each other. His mother had then smiled and patted his cheek, and said, "Of course you are, honey!" Then she walked away to bake some cookies. His father had nodded and patted him on the arm, saying something to the extent of, "You make sure I meet any boy you date. I expect whoever it is to be respectful of you and of me."

That was it.

They had loved Tyler. They all missed Tyler. It was still a slightly taboo subject for many reasons. His parents had grieved for Blaine so much, back all those years ago when his life had changed irrevocably. They really just wanted him to be happy again, more than anything.

That was why his father was so concerned about him. Blaine had seemed so happy in the last few weeks. The Center was going well... and there was an extra glow of excitement about his son's countenance that he hadn't seen in a long time. Now, all of a sudden, he was sitting there looking like someone had

simultaneously punched him in the gut, stolen his guitar and told him he could never listen to a Katy Perry song again.

"Alright, kid. Are you finally going to tell me what's eating at you?"

Blaine shrugged a little and opened his mouth to speak, but didn't get a chance to utter a single word.

"Hey, squirt!" Cooper bounced into the room and ruffled his brother's curls.

"Hey, Coop," Blaine sighed, but smiled. "What are you doing here?"

"Mom told me that you were here looking like someone stole all of your bowties and that I should be a good brother and come cheer you up. Plus, when one of us is sad she makes her double chocolate brownies and I was NOT gonna miss out on those."

"I'm glad that I rank right up there with brownies," Blaine said, much snippier than he intended. Both his father and brother looked at him with eyebrows raised and then glanced to each other.

"Wow." Cooper plopped down on the couch next to his brother and flung his legs across Blaine's lap. "Bitchy Blaine. That only comes out when the world is about to end. Spill your guts, little bro."

Blaine looked at them for only a moment before blurting out everything. How happy he'd been with the Center. Meeting Kurt and Molly the first day and practically falling head over heels. Telling himself every day to not fall even harder, but not being able to help himself. How well Molly was doing and how she'd responded so well to both him and music, making him fall for the blue-eyed pair even further. His excitement over finding out that Kurt was at least bi, and then the final, heartbreaking letdown of this morning and afternoon.

"What are you gonna do now?" Cooper asked slowly. Blaine looked at him like he was nuts.

"Nothing. I'm going to do nothing, besides back the hell off. Even if he's open to being with a guy, I'm obviously not the one he wants."

"Hmmm, you must be right. The only possible explanation is that he's not at all interested. Ooorrrr..." Cooper nodded, tapping his chin with his finger, as if he was thinking really hard. He then reached out and smacked Blaine on the back of the head. "It could also be that he IS interested and it scares the hell out of

him. Come on, Blaine. You know very well what it's like to go through the things that he's been through. You don't just wake up and decide you're ready one day and then have no more feelings about it."

Blaine just stared at him and then looked at his father. The older man nodded with an understanding smile before reaching out and patting his son's knee.

"Did he ever once say, 'I don't like you that way. Please stop showing your interest in me.'?"

Blaine wanted to say that Kurt wouldn't have worded it like that, but he knew that was beside the point. He simply shook his head.

"Well," his father spoke quietly. "From what it sounds like, you showed a little interest and he got scared. He ran... but he came back. Didn't you say that he mentioned coming back to the Center for a different reason, but you got distracted by what happened with his daughter?"

Blaine swallowed and nodded again.

"When you apologized for coming on too strong, what did he say exactly?"

Blaine had to think about that.

"He didn't say much at all, actually. He just listened and stared at me. I think he said something like 'don't worry about it.' He mostly just looked... freaked out." His voice slowed and became thoughtful at those last two words. He had interpreted the look of fear in Kurt's eyes as one thing. Fear of Blaine trying to come on to him... and not being interested. He hadn't considered the possibility that the fear was of how much the other man LIKED the interest Blaine was showing.

*Wow. Now what do I do?*

"So," Cooper smiled. "I repeat. Now what are you gonna do?"

Blaine just shook his head.

Cooper and Mr. Anderson looked at each other and rolled their eyes. They both stood and pulled Blaine to his feet. He was too surprised to protest, and just looked at them in shock when they shoved him out the front door.

"Go. Go talk to him now." Blaine's father pointed to his car, tossing him the keys.

"Don't I even get a say in this?" He spit out, still coming to grips with the fact that he was out on the sidewalk and no longer on the couch.

"Nope, you don't. If we left things up to you, you'd be pouting over how much this guy doesn't like you, instead of realizing that he probably does. Like, a lot. Go. Say I love you. Get your gay sex on. Call and tell us all about it tomorrow."

"I don't need to hear about the last part," his father rolled his eyes again.

"Is Blaine leaving?" His mother scurried down the hall, carrying a tray of brownies. "He didn't have any of my brownies yet!"

"I'll take 'em." Cooper snatched up two at a time and shoved them into his mouth. "He's not sad anymore. He's gonna go get his gay sex on."

Blaine saw his mother's jaw drop just before the door shut in his face.

*So, did you really think I'm ready? -Kurt*

*Ready for what dude? -Finn*

*For... A relationship. To be with somebody. -Kurt*

*Dude. You've been ready for months. You just needed to convince yourself. No offense, but you're kind of stubborn that way. -Finn*

*Thanks, Finn. I appreciate the support and the insult :p -Kurt*

*Anytime, bro :) -Finn*

Kurt smiled uncertainly to himself as he walked up to his apartment. Tomorrow. He'd let himself think and figure out exactly what he was going to say tonight. Tomorrow he would tell Blaine how he felt about him... and hope the other man didn't hate him.

*You know he didn't mean it, right? -Mercedes*

*Who? What? -Blaine.*

*Kurt. When he flipped out and acted crazy. He didn't mean to push you away. He's scared. I haven't been around him for a while but he's still Kurt, and I know his scared face. He likes you. -Mercedes*

*Yeah, I'm kind of starting to come to that realization. Do think it would be too forward to talk to him again so soon? Would I just scare him even further away? -Blaine*

*Well, like I said, it's been a while since we've been close. I can't predict how he'll respond. All I know is that it's obvious how much you like him... and after watching him today, I'm sure he likes you too. You'll regret it if you don't at least try. -Mercedes*

*Okay (taking a deep breath). I'm going for it. -Blaine*

*Hell yeah! Call with the details if things get juicy. -Mercedes*

Blaine rolled his eyes with a smile as he put his phone back in his pocket.

Kurt was just settling down with his and Tala's wedding album when he heard a knock on his door. He sighed and set it aside.

He knew it might have seemed weird and morbid to some people, but for him it was like closure. One last look through their life together before he took that final step to move on.

He skipped quickly to the door, hoping that whoever it was didn't intend to stay. The moment he swung it open, a white smile flashed his way and his heart sank.

"Isaac." Kurt didn't even try to put on his fake smile.

"Hey there!" Isaac grinned. They stood in the doorway awkwardly for a moment. Isaac glanced in to Kurt's apartment a few times, hoping the other man would get the hint and invite him in. Kurt got the hint, and he didn't appreciate it.

"What are you doing here, Issac?" Kurt sighed in exasperation. The other man finally got irritated then.

"What is your problem with me? I do great work for you. I'm incredibly nice to you. I'm a good looking guy. I just want a chance to be with you? Why do you always blow me off?

Kurt's mouth hung open before his eyes narrowed and he snapped. All of a sudden, Issac's strange comments and actions over the last few weeks, along with the creepy feeling the other designer gave him, made perfect sense.

"What's MY problem? What's YOUR problem? You barely know me! You don't want to be with me, you want to get laid! And yes, you WORK for me! Even if I was interested in you, which I'm not, it wasn't going to happen! I'm not going to get involved with someone I work with!"

Isaac laughed and took a step closer. Kurt swallowed hard, backing up warily.

"Fine. Call it what you want. Yes, I want to sleep with you. You're hot. You're worried about the job? Very well, I quit. The only reason I took this job was because I wanted you. I'll quit. We'll have sex. We can both move on. I'm not looking for a relationship here. Come on. Let's just..."

Kurt was starting to get extremely uncomfortable with how Isaac was trying to sneak his way into the front door. He quickly shut the door as far as he could, but Isaac was part-way through, and it stopped on his shoulders.

"You're seeming to forget the part where I said I'm not interested in you. NOT INTERESTED." Kurt glared, holding the door as tight as he could without trying to push the other man back. He was hoping that words would be able to solve this. Isaac had a good forty pounds on him, and he didn't relish the thought of trying to physically push him out of his apartment.

"What? It's not like you're with anybody else. It's one night."



"I don't do one nights... and there is someone else actually! You don't even come close to comparing with him! He's..."

He was cut off when Isaac lunged forward and kissed him.

*"You're seeming to forget the part where I said I'm not interested in you. NOT INTERESTED."*

*"What? It's not like you're with anybody else. It's one night."*

Blaine's heart was practically beating out of his chest. He couldn't believe what he had walked into. He was standing just off to the side behind Isaac. Kurt couldn't see him from where he was desperately trying to shut his door. Blaine was almost positive from Kurt's tone that he would turn the guy down, but he needed to hear for himself that Kurt was going to say no to this douche.

*"I don't do one nights... and there is someone else actually! You don't even come close to comparing with him! He's..."*

Blaine's heart soared. And then he was livid. He dashed forward and yanked the guy back. Then he was a little bit scared.

*Holy shit. This man is twice my size.*

Then he got angry again.

"I'm pretty sure he said he wasn't interested. I don't know what is wrong with you, but I generally don't grab a guy and kiss him when he tells me he's not interested."

"Who the hell are you, dwarf? You'd better get out of my..."

Kurt rolled his eyes, shoved Isaac back as hard as he could, and yanked Blaine inside by the hand. Just as he was slamming the door shut he called out, "I accept your resignation, asshole. Get away from my front door before I call the police."

The two men stood there looking at each other for a full thirty seconds after the door slammed shut, breathing heavily and staring uncertainly.

"Um, so that just happened." Kurt bit his lip and looked at Blaine, waiting for him to say something. He didn't know whether to laugh at the ridiculousness of the whole thing or be mortified. Blaine laughed just a little, but looked unsure.

"Are you... okay?"

"I'm fine. He just... totally caught me off guard is all. You walked up at THE worst possible moment... or the best, actually. I'm not sure how to feel yet."

"Well, I was there long enough to hear you say that there was someone else in your life."

There was a pause where they were both silent and staring. Hearts and minds racing. The silence was so heavy they could feel it weighing down on them.

"Please tell me that the guy is me," Blaine whispered. He looked like he was waiting to turn and bolt for the door the moment Kurt said no.

"You're the guy," Kurt whispered back.

"So, you are interested in me." Relief flowed through Blaine so intensely, he visibly sagged when the weight he had been carrying all day was suddenly lifted.

"Yes, I'm interested in you." Kurt was still whispering, and quite frankly looking like he was so terrified he might be sick. "A lot. Ridiculously so."

"Um, I gotta admit." Blaine spoke hesitantly. "You're saying you like me, but you look like you want to run in the other direction... then puke." Kurt closed his eyes and took a steadying breath.

"I'm scared of how much I like you." He took a step forward at those words without realizing it. "I've been with one person, Blaine. One. Ever... and it was my wife. We had been together since I twenty. Since she died... I've just been trying my best to make it through the days. I hadn't even thought about being with anyone else before now. Honestly, I never thought I'd feel this way about anyone again. I was convinced that the romantic part of my life was over. Tala was gone, and I had Molly, and that was it."

Both men had stepped closer together during Kurt's little speech and were almost nose-to-nose. Kurt was in tears by then and Blaine wasn't far behind.

"How I feel about you... it's so familiar and yet... not," Kurt choked out.

"I know what you mean. I really do," Blaine nervously reached out a hand to hold onto Kurt's, slotting their fingers together. He waited anxiously for the other man to pull away. They didn't exactly have the best track record. Kurt didn't pull away. He squeezed Blaine's hand in his own.

"You do?" He whispered. They were so close, they could feel each other breathing in and out.

"I think that I can relate to what you're going through more than you can imagine."

"Really? We should talk about that."

"We should. We have a lot of things to talk about, actually."

"Yes. We do."

Their lips were brushing up against each other and Kurt could practically taste Blaine from breathing him in.

"I'm tired of talking."

"Me too."

"Please kiss me now."

They didn't talk anymore... for quite a while.

## Chapter Eight

Kurt peeked out from under the covers, feeling confused for just a moment. Why was he waking up in the middle of the night? Why was he naked? ... Why were there a pair of arms around his waist?

He turned over sleepily before seeing the familiar curls resting on top of a pillow. A slow smile spread across his face as memories from last night flooded through him.

*Sweet and soft kisses swiftly turned passionate and desperate until they were stumbling toward Kurt's bedroom, racing together toward a release that they had both been craving for the longest time.*

*Neither men were the type for a one-night stand, so no relationship meant no release. Well, besides the occasional long shower, and that kind only held you over for so long.*

*Before they knew it, they were tumbling down onto Kurt's bed together, grasping and moaning as they tried to touch each other everywhere at once. Kurt had pinned Blaine down, holding the other man's wrists above his head as he ground into him at a frantic pace.*

*It was happening so fast, neither could believe it. If Kurt stopped to think, even for a moment, he probably would have terrified himself... so he didn't stop. He didn't let himself think.*

*Blaine had managed to loosen his wrists enough so that he could link his fingers with Kurt's, but went right back to letting the taller man press him down into the mattress, groaning and thrusting upward just as frantically.*

*Kurt managed to pull out of his sex-driven haze long enough to nervously breath out, "Are you okay with this?" Blaine practically growled at him.*

*"So help me, Kurt. If you freak out again and run away from me right now I will be so fucking pissed at you!"*

*Kurt's heart raced as he lunged forward once more, meeting Blaine's lips with a desperate, rough kiss. They both knew in that moment that this was not going to be sweet and beautiful. This was not making love. This was a fast and needy race to the finish. So fast, that there was no way they were making it out of their pants. They locked eyes as they felt intense sparks of pleasure streak through their bodies, building in intensity at an alarming rate. Before they could even process what was happening, they were moaning nonsensical words into each others necks and thrusting deeply one last time as they fell over the edge.*

*They collapsed into each other for a moment, breathing heavily and staring at one another in disbelief. It still seemed crazy to both of them that this had just happened. Only this morning, they had both been convinced that there was no chance of anything happening between them... ever. Now here they were.*

*They thought for a moment about cleaning up. They seriously thought about how much they needed to talk.*

*They made it as far as stripping down from their sweaty and cum filled clothing before settling down against each other and drifting off to sleep. Cleaning and talking could happen later. For now, this was enough.*

"Hi."

Blaine blinked sleep heavy eyes and slowly focused on the beautiful face in front of him. A ridiculously happy grin spread across his own face as he sighed happily and leaned in to nuzzle their noses together.

"Hi."

"So, we're naked."

"Yes, it would appear that we are."

Kurt burst into an absolutely adorable giggling fit then and Blaine couldn't help but pounce on him and attack him with kisses, causing him to laugh even more. After a few minutes of playfulness where they tickled and kissed and cuddled, Kurt let out a sigh and settled himself down so that they were face-to-face on the pillows. He wrapped one of the blankets around him a little more tightly and pushed a pillow in between them. Blaine looked at him in distress

"What are you doing?! I want to naked cuddle you some more!"

Kurt laughed and reached a hand out onto the pillow that separated them, wiggling his fingers to show Blaine that he wanted to hold his hand. The curly haired man gave him his hand with a little glare, showing him that he was not happy with this turn of events.

"We will cuddle naked plenty. I promise. Right now we really need to talk though, and I can't think straight enough to do that with your ridiculously hot body pressed next to mine."

"You think I'm ridiculously hot?" Blaine practically glowed.

"Yes, but stop distracting me," Kurt tapped his nose with a smile. "We don't even know where we stand and what we are, Blaine. I just kicked a guy out of my apartment because I said I don't do one-night stands and then... this. I feel a little bit like a hypocrite right now."

"This is just a one-night stand to you?" Blaine's smile fell from his face.

"No!" Kurt spoke in a rush, reaching a hand out to cup Blaine's cheek. "Not at all! I really hope it isn't for you either, but it's not like we have a relationship. We kind of just jumped into bed together. I just... I think we really need to talk and figure all of this out."

"You're right," Blaine sighed. "Let's talk. For the record though, I don't feel like I just jumped into bed with you. I feel like I've been waiting for this moment for forever." Kurt sighed happily and linked their fingers together once more.

"Could you be any more perfect?"

"Last time you said that you freaked out and stopped talking to me."

"Are you going to hold that over my head for forever?"

"No," Blaine smiled apologetically. "I'm sorry. You can't blame me for being a little gun-shy though."

Kurt just laughed a little and rubbed his thumb over the back of Blaine's hand.

"Well, maybe we should start by just finding out a little more about each other."

Blaine nodded in agreement and before they knew it they had fallen into an easy flow, sharing everything from stories of their childhood, to how and when they came out, to their past loves.

For Kurt, the last topic had one subject. Tala. It was far and away the most amazing, and at the same time, the most painful part of his life... up until Molly. He was surprised at how easily the memories flowed out of him. Before he knew it, he was telling Blaine about everything. How they had met. Falling for her so fast. The horrible yet memorable vacation they had taken the second year they were married. Building their business... The nights of despair and loneliness after she died, thinking he would never find happiness again.

Blaine listened in silence, soaking up every word that Kurt uttered. Learning about Tala taught him so much about the other man. The more he learned, the more he fell in love with him. Tala sounded amazing and Blaine was sure he would have loved her too, had he known her.

Finally, Kurt steeled himself and asked one question that was heavy on his mind.

"Does it bother you to be with someone who was in love with a woman for so long?"

Blaine looked at him in shock.

"Of course not, Kurt." He reached out a hand and stroked back the loose hairs that had fallen into the blue eyes. "Why would you even ask that?" Kurt shrugged.

"So few people in my life have understood. Back in high school I seemed like I was so obviously gay. Falling for Tala surprised me just as much as everyone else. I-I truly don't even know how I would classify myself now. I mean, I suppose the obvious answer is that I'm bi, but... All I know know is that before Tala, I would have said that I was gay. Then I fell in love with her, and that was it for me. Now, I see you... and you're the one that I want," he whispered. "How do you feel about that?"

"I feel blessed beyond belief that such an amazing man wants to be with me, Kurt." Blaine ran soft fingers down the other man's cheek. Kurt swallowed away the emotion that was threatening to overwhelm him at being accepted so unconditionally.

"This is who you are. Tala is a part of who you are. I don't care about labels or classifying people a certain way. I care about who a person truly is on the inside... and I'm quickly falling for who you truly are."

Kurt couldn't find any words to respond, so he just reached across and pressed a light kiss to Blaine's lips before wiping away the tear that had escaped.

Blaine kissed him back before taking a deep breath of his own. It was his turn. Like Kurt, his list of past loves consisted of one person. Tyler. He told Kurt how they had met when they were just sixteen and had been together for the most part until college. Kurt's eyes widened as Blaine spoke softly of Micah and how they had pretty much adopted him over night. When he moved on to Micah's diagnosis of Asberger's, he started to get a little emotional.

That was rare for him nowadays. It was so long ago now, and he had found ways to heal and move on. Talking to Kurt though was a whole new level of deep. He felt connected to this man in ways he couldn't explain. Sharing this part of his life wasn't just stating facts and history, it was sharing a piece of his soul. Kurt gasped when Blaine spoke of the diagnosis and how they had tried their best to offer the young boy everything they could to help him.

The pillow and blankets were quickly removed then. Both men were feeling so vulnerable and intimately connected by sharing these stories, and needed to absorb each others strength and support by being physically close.

Blaine trailed off after telling of their struggles in accepting the diagnosis and trying to figure out how to live their lives from that point on. Kurt held him close and was silent, waiting for the inevitable. Tyler was no longer there. Micah was no longer there. Even the anticipation of hearing the end to this story made his heart ache. They lay there in silence for long moments. Blaine collecting his courage and Kurt steeling himself for what he might hear.

"One day," Blaine whispered. "The three of us were in the back yard. Tyler and I were talking... and all of a sudden we noticed that Micah was missing. We were absolutely frantic. We ran together into the front yard when we realized that the gate was open. It was like it happened in slow motion. I saw Micah run into the street. I saw the car barreling down on him. They didn't even see him. I tried to get there in time," he choked out in a rough voice. Kurt clutched the other man close to his chest, unable to stop the tears that started streaming down his own face. "It was like my legs just wouldn't move fast enough. Tyler though..." At this point Blaine was sobbing so brokenly that Kurt could barely understand him. Kurt just held him, rubbing soothing circles on his back, hardly believing the amount of heartbreak and loss the two of them had to bear. Blaine tried to take a ragged breath and rushed on as quickly as he could, as if he feared he would never be able to say it if he didn't get it over with.



"Tyler moved faster than me, I guess. Maybe he was closer. Maybe it was the adrenaline. I really don't know, but he got to Micah first. He screamed so loud, he was so terrified... not for himself but for Micah. Tyler pushed him out of the way just in time... but the car hit him instead."

Kurt couldn't stop himself. He was crying openly now too. Both of their tears mingled together and they shook as they clung to each other desperately. The blue-eyed man stayed silent though, knowing that this was not the end to Blaine's story.

"I got there, Kurt... and it was so... so awful. I'll never, ever forget. There was blood everywhere. I dove down next to him and cradled his head in my lap. I knew in that moment that he was already gone, but I didn't want to believe it. I just sat there. Holding him and rocking, telling him to wake up. Telling him that I needed him and that he couldn't leave me. Micah was screaming, a neighbor had taken him at that point. Someone must have called 911 because out of nowhere paramedics and police officers were prying him out of my arms and telling me there was nothing more they could do. I just sat there, in the middle of the street, covered in his blood... wanting to die."

His tears had slowed and he turned his head to look Kurt in the eye once more. They were huddled close, arms and legs intertwined, eyes red and tears streaming down their faces.

"I'm sorry," Kurt whispered.

That sorry was so much more than an apology or sympathy. It told Blaine that Kurt understood. He understood every detail and nuance of his emotions. Terror in the moment of tragedy, the grief, the anger, the denial, more grief, the refusal to move on, the realization that your life still needs to be lived, the fear of being hurt and having everything torn away once again... he understood it all. No more words needed to be spoken. They truly could not have asked for someone more perfect to share their deepest sorrow with.

They continued to lie there for the longest time. They held each other close, stroking their fingers over the others skin, pressing light kisses to cheeks, lips and necks. The emotions they were feeling were so heavy and intense that every kiss and touch was electric and filled with meaning.

Finally, Kurt asked the one question that had yet to be answered.

"What happened to Micah?"

"Social Services took him initially after the accident. I petitioned to get him back, but a great aunt of Tyler's stepped out of nowhere, we didn't even know she existed, and petitioned for him too. She was older, experienced, had a steady income and was actually related to him. The courts gave her full custody. She was originally from Italy so she took him there as soon as everything was finalized... I haven't seen him since."

At that point, Kurt could no longer think straight. The amount of loss and sadness in the room seemed insurmountable.

He only stared into Blaine's eyes, and Blaine stared back. Their connection was so deep, they could barely withstand the powerful emotions that were sweeping through them. Finally, Blaine spoke. His voice was still heavy, but it was strong and determined now.

"We're both broken, Kurt. We are both damaged and have been beaten down by life... but look at us. We didn't let it stop us. We rose to the challenge and did the best we could with what we have. And now here we are. We found each other. We're broken and bruised, shadows of who we used to be... but that's the beauty of it. We can understand what the other has been through better than anyone else. We will love and accept each other, broken or not, and heal each other in ways that no one else could."

Kurt let out something in between a laugh and a sob and linked their fingers together.

"You're right. We really couldn't be more perfect for each other. We... we haven't really talked about where we stand with each other yet, so I have something to say."

Blaine nodded, suddenly feeling nervous, but not knowing why.

"I've struggled and been afraid and ran from you, but I'm done with that. I'm just going to say what I feel and tell you... that I need you. I want you. I want you for me and I want you for Malaya. I don't ever want to be without you again. You make Molly and I whole again. Please be with me, be with us. Let us call you ours."

Blaine surged forward suddenly, pressing Kurt back onto the bed. He straddled him as he leaned down to caress Kurt's mouth gently with his own. Pressing kiss after kiss, becoming deeper and heavier until both men had to break away, gasping for breath.

"I take it that was a yes," Kurt whispered with a laugh.

"That was definitely a yes." Blaine went back to peppering kisses up and down Kurt's neck, stopping on occasion to suck lightly before moving on, leaving small red marks in his wake. Kurt groaned in delight, clinging to Blaine's back and reaching up to thread his fingers through his hair.

"What do you want, baby? What can I do to make you feel good?" Blaine pulled back just far enough so that he could look Kurt in the eye, breathing heavily and lightly rubbing the tips of their noses together. Kurt started to protest that this wasn't just about Blaine pleasing him, but he was interrupted by an intense kiss that took his breath away.

"I need to make you feel amazing right now. Please let me. I need to do this for you. For us."

"Make love to me," Kurt said in a soft and steady voice, after staring at him for just a moment.

"I can definitely do that," Blaine smiled and leaned down to kiss the other man, but Kurt stopped him with a small push of his hand and nervous look in his eye.

"I've... never... I've never been with a man like this before."

Blaine looked deeply into his eyes, swallowing away the sudden nervousness he felt at knowing how much rested on his shoulders.

"I'll take care of you. Do you trust me?"

"In everything," Kurt smiled.

Blaine smiled back and leaned down again, pressing Kurt deep into the mattress as he kissed and stroked every inch of his body.

He took his time, slowly bringing Kurt pleasure in every possible way he could imagine. He kissed and sucked lightly at the dip between his neck and shoulder. He nibbled and breathed into his ear. Bit by bit, he worked his way down and began pressing feather light kisses and licks to one nipple while massaging the other with the tips of his fingers. Kurt was moaning loudly and squirming anxiously on the bed by this point.

"Please Blaine! Please... more!"

Blaine smiled to himself at the sight before him. Kurt's head was tossed to the side, hair mussed and sticking up on end, lips red and swollen from kissing. Best of all, his body twitching and thrusting lightly, desperate to be touched further.

He scooted himself further down on the bed and gently pushed Kurt's feet all the way up so that he was spread open wide. He quickly sank down so that his mouth was pressed up against Kurt's entrance and felt a shiver of anticipation ripple through the other man's body.

He pressed a light kiss to the small hole, eliciting something between a high pitched sigh and a broken moan from Kurt. He grinned to himself. *If he thought that was good...*

He started with small licks and wet kisses, rapidly moving on to sucking and swirling his tongue in and around the puckered hole that was slowly relaxing and opening up for him. Kurt's moans were loud and desperate by this point and he had threaded his fingers tightly through Blaine's curls, holding the man's face firmly in place. Blaine would have felt smothered if he hadn't been so enjoyably caught up in the pleasure he was causing.

Kurt's opening was so wet and slick with saliva by now, that Blaine decided there was enough lubrication to go a step further. He continued to place kisses and suck lightly around the edges, but lifted his hand to carefully press in a finger.

He felt Kurt tense beneath him at the intrusion and pull back for just a moment, before lowering himself back down, encouraging Blaine to continue.

"Is it okay? Do you want me to keep going?" Blaine pulled away, wiping his face lightly on the sheet to rid himself of the moisture dripping from his chin. Kurt nodded quickly, his eyes closed.

"Just, go slowly please. It's been a long time since I did anything like this to myself. I'm not used to it anymore."

Blaine smiled when Kurt spoke a little abashedly. He was sure that if his cheeks weren't already flushed pink from the pleasure he was receiving, he would be blushing from embarrassment.

One by one, bit by bit, he pushed his fingers slowly inside of Kurt, stretching and scissoring as he went. By the second finger, Kurt had groped blindly into the drawer next to his bed and tossed some lube down to

him. Blaine could see that it was filled pretty much to the top, and realized that Kurt meant it when he said that he hadn't done this type of thing in a while.

With the added lubrication, things went even more smoothly. Kurt was soon trembling and writhing from the feeling of being so full, yet not full enough. Blaine propped himself up just a bit and reached a hand to stroke the other man's neglected penis, which was fully hard and twitching, just aching to be touched. In the same moment that he grasped Kurt's throbbing dick, he thrust his fingers deeper inside and stroked, seeking and massaging until...

"Holy fuck! Ohfuckohfuckohfuckohfuck!"

Blaine grinned and looked up so that he could take in the vision of Kurt coming completely undone. He wasn't prepared for what he saw though. One of Kurt's hands had reached up and was threading through his own hair, fingers flexing and grasping desperately. His other hand was clinging tightly to a handful of the sheet, knuckles white. His skin was flushed pink and beads of sweat were breaking out on his forehead then dripping down the side of his neck. He was moaning and panting wildly, thrashing and writhing in frantic little motions, practically begging Blaine to move, to touch... to just fucking do something. He looked completely and utterly wrecked. Blaine almost came right then and there.

"Do it now! Please do it now! Oh my god, Blaine! I will scream if you don't fucking do it now!"

Blaine sat up suddenly, yanking Kurt forward and up into his lap.

"Condoms," Blaine whispered, grasping both his and Kurt's shafts as best he could in one hand, stroking them together. Kurt yanked open the drawer next to the bed, ripped the box open and flung it aside after he managed to grab hold of one. He took over stroking Blaine before quickly sliding the condom in place, then slicking them both up one more time.

Kurt rose up in Blaine's lap and closed his eyes, pressing their lips together as he sank down rapidly onto Blaine's dick. They both groaned loudly into each others mouths as they connected and became one. They stayed there, clinging to each other desperately for a moment, as Kurt adjusted to the stretch and the fullness.

Kurt opened his eyes and looked down at Blaine as he began to move slowly. His eyes filled with tears that he couldn't contain. The intense emotions, along with the almost violent streaks of pleasure that were

coursing through his body were too much. This whole experience was so familiar and yet so vastly different from what he was used to.

Making love with Tala had been just that, loving and sweet and tender. This was something else altogether. It was still loving and tender... but it was intense at a level that he had never experienced. They were clinging to and grasping at each other as if their very lives depended on this moment. The knowledge that he was being filled and claimed in this way for the very first time only added to the intensity. It was powerful and deep. It was more than he could have asked or hoped for.

Blaine reached in between them and started caressing Kurt's dick roughly in his hand. Kurt was already so close that he was practically dripping cum. The rapid strokes, along with Blaine's shaft slamming constantly into his prostate was more than he could handle. White flashes shimmered around the edges of his vision and wave after wave of continually building pleasure coursed through him. His gut clenched and heat exploded from every nerve ending in his body.

"Shit! Blaine! Holy Hell! Don't stop! Please! Oh my..."

He thrust himself down one final time as he tipped over the edge completely, screaming down into Blaine's shoulder as he came so hard he thought he might pass out. Blaine grabbed him and pushed him back down onto the bed, pushing his knees up almost to his head. He pounded into him several more times before his own orgasm came to a head. Kurt saw stars every time Blaine bottomed out and rubbed directly over that bundle of nerves inside of him. His orgasm stretched and continued in crashing waves that almost brought him to tears

"Fuck, Kurt! So good! So tight! Fucking shit! Kuuurt!" He thrust in a final time as Kurt's muscles clenched down on him once more, coming hard and deep inside the other man.

They kept moving and thrusting in slow motion as they rode out the incredible high. Finally, they became too sensitive for the continued stimulation and regretfully pulled away from each other, gasping desperately for air.

Blaine snatched up the top sheet from Kurt's bed and used it as a makeshift towel, cleaning them up as best he could without actually having to get out of bed. He wiped at both of their chests and stomachs, cleaning off the residue from Kurt's orgasm. He then reached the sheet down and dabbed lightly at Kurt's sensitive hole. It was slightly red and stretched, but didn't look too sore.

He collapsed then, partly on top of Kurt and partly at his side. They gazed at each other with heavy eyes, knowing that sleep would soon claim them both. They tucked a blanket around themselves more snugly, intertwining their arms and legs so that they were wrapped around each other completely. They pressed light kisses and slowly rubbed the tips of their noses together, breathing each other in and smiling goofily. They were drifting off within moments, but before Kurt could slip away completely he heard a slurred whisper in his ear.

"I know you'll probably think it's too soon, and that it's the orgasm high talking... but I love you. I love you so much. I love everything about you. I love Malaya too. I love you for your past. I love you for our future. I just... I wouldn't change a thing about you, Kurt. Just the way you are. I love you."

Kurt smiled.

"Would it be totally lame of me to say ditto?"

"No," Blaine laughed. "I would find it adorable."

"Good, cuz I'm too tired to repeat all of that, but it was amazing and perfect... so, ditto."

They laughed once more as their eyes shut, sleep refusing to be denied for another moment. Their breathing slowed as their chests rose together, rhythmically. Even in their relaxed state, they refused to let go of one another. Both men clung tight and rested peacefully, fully content in their sleep for the first time in longer than either could remember.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Eight months later...**

"Come on, Molly. Daddy's gonna be here soon. Let's get ready to go."

Blaine smiled softly at the three-year-old and held out his hand. His heart pounded in his chest when she immediately set down her toy and hopped over to slip her hand in his. He clutched the small fingers in his own before heading down the hall. It still amazed him at times how quickly she had accepted him as a permanent role in her life. She responded to him almost as well as she responded to her father. Small surprise though, seeing as she spent all day with him at school, and all night with him at home.

Four months after their special night together, Kurt and Blaine had given up all pretense of taking things slowly and moved in together. Blaine had been spending more nights at Kurt's than he was at his own place, and it just made sense. They had found a fabulous apartment uptown and happily called it their own. It felt symbolic for them to get a new place together, not to mention it just made sense. Blaine's place was a bachelor pad, with no room for a family. Kurt's place was full of memories of Tala. A place that was new, that was both of theirs, just felt right.

They had worried initially about how the change would affect Malaya, but they worried needlessly. Her new room was filled with floor to ceiling windows, and the sunlight, along with rainbow reflections, were soothing and comfortable to her. She would stay in her room for hours if they let her, just smiling and watching the rays of sun dance across her floor.

Also, she already knew Blaine, and was more comfortable with him than most people in her life. If anything, she thrived under the change. They all thrived.

Malaya was content and happy. She had two adults in her life who loved her unconditionally and would have gone to the moon and back, just to see her smile.

Blaine finally felt complete. Everything he had wanted, for so very long, was now his. He had been aching and empty, but Kurt and Malaya had filled him to overflowing.



Kurt was finally healed. It had taken time, and patience, but he was himself again, if not better. He loved and was loved in return. Better yet, the man he loved, loved his daughter. Life couldn't get any better.

Except it did.

### ***Two months ago...***

*"Kurt, can you please hand me the big spoon?"*

*Kurt looked up from his sketch distractedly.*

*"What big spoon?"*

*Blaine gave him an exasperated eye roll and nodded toward a drawer across the kitchen.*

*"The same big spoon we use every single time we make pasta, honey. The one with the slots. Hurry please!" He yanked his hand away from the pot that was starting to boil over with a slight curse.*

*"We do own pot holders, babe." Kurt cocked an eyebrow at him as he handed over the spoon.*

*"Then hand me one of those too... smart ass." Blaine stuck his tongue out at his boyfriend and ducked when a pot holder was tossed at his head.*

*"I said 'hand me one', not throw one in my face!" He shot Kurt a look of annoyance that quickly faded when the other man stepped to his side and placed kisses along his neck.*

*"I see how it is." Blaine tried to sound irritated, but his huge sigh of contentment gave him away. "You get all mean, criticizing and throwing things at me, and then you think you can just win me over by... Ooohhhmygodyes..."*

*Kurt smiled as he latched on to that little spot right in the crook of Blaine's neck. The one that practically made him melt.*

*"Let's get going with dinner so I can..."*

"Da."

*They both froze, then looked down. Malaya was standing next to them with a small hand on Kurt's leg. Kurt put a hand to his mouth and sank to the floor in shock, crouching next to her.*

*"Malaya? Do you want daddy? Are you talking to me?"*

*Both men stayed perfectly still and quiet, hearts thundering in their chests. The silence of the room echoed in their ears.*

*Malaya watched something unknown over Kurt's shoulder, blue eyes bright. She reached out a hand and tapped his face lightly, before turning and meeting his eyes... only for a moment. Then she smiled.*

"Da."

*Kurt shook for just a moment before pulling her tightly into his arms.*

*"Yes! I'm daddy! Yes! Oh my god! Oh Molly, I'm so proud of you!"*

*Blaine watched with his mouth hanging open, before throwing both hands in the air and punching with duo fist pumps.*

*"I knew! I knew it!" He jumped and danced around the room, laughing and pointing back at his boyfriend. "I told you, baby! I told you she was so close to talking!"*

*Kurt looked up at him and choked out a happy sob as he kissed Malaya's head.*

*"She looked at me too, Blaine! She actually made eye contact! Real eye contact... WHILE she was talking to me!"*

*Blaine stopped his happy dancing then, and sank down onto the floor with his two loves. He wrapped his arms around them and held them close.*

*The pasta overcooked and eventually dried up in the pan. They didn't even notice.*

"Alright, sweetpea." Blaine set her down in a chair in the music room. "I'm going to finish up. Do you want to play with a drum while you wait?" He looked at her expectantly and she flashed a brief look at him, meeting his eyes for just a moment while excitedly making the sign for the word 'more'.

He smiled and handed her one of the little bongo drums from his stash and she snatched it into her lap, tapping at it happily with a random rhythm. Seeing that she was settled and content, he took a quick peek through the other rooms, wanting to check on everyone one last time before leaving.

He, Kurt and Molly were leaving that evening to go on a vacation. A first for their little family. The first of many, he thought with a smile.

He glanced out the window to see Artie loading his group of kids into the Center's van for their latest "Life Skills" session. Today they were all going to a local grocery store in order to work on proper etiquette for when they went out shopping with their families. That was a tough one, but so necessary. He smiled at Artie's energy and enthusiasm as he counted the heads of the kids and then swung himself into the van. Sam grabbed the wheelchair and set it in the back, climbing into the driver's seat. This was a pretty big job, watching after all of the kids in a public place, so they were tag teaming. Blaine felt a little thrill of excitement flow through him as they drove away. Making progress in the area of social development was huge. He smiled, thinking of how happy the parents would be to lesson a stressor like that in their lives.

He stepped into the kitchen, where Brittany was teaching a lesson on eating properly with utensils. A majority of the children in her current group were making significant progress in this area. He leaned against the frame of the door, and watched as she set bowls of applesauce and spoons in front of each child.

"Wait." She said in a kind but firm voice, as some of children moved to dig right in, a couple with their bare fingers. She held up her hands in front of her and wiggled her fingers in the air, showing them the sign for 'wait'. Blaine smiled widely again when all but one of the children immediately responded by mimicking the sign and watching her intently. She cheered and clapped for them, telling them how awesome they were, before moving on to help each one with their own bowl.

With a happy sigh he poked his head in on Mercedes in a speech therapy session. They were currently working on a word exchange method with all of their non-verbal children, and so far, it was going incredibly well. Each child had a small book filled with pictures of items that they used every day. Food, drink, toys... even faces of family members. The goal was for the child to take the picture of what they were

looking for and hand it over to their therapist. If they wanted something to drink, they would take the picture of a glass and place it in the hand of an adult. Immediately receiving the item requested would reinforce it as positive behavior and encourage more communication. It had been wildly successful, and that included Molly. The little girl had her own book at home and used it frequently. It was a step toward becoming completely verbal, and Molly was a great example of this. She had only progressed to three words, 'Da', 'Hi' and 'No', but it was light years from where they had been. They couldn't have been more thrilled.

Blaine walked toward the "Free Play" room to look in on Jeff and Nick. They were currently playing their own little version of 'duck, duck goose', and Jeff was pretending to run in slow motion around the circle, while Nick chased behind, carrying a small boy on his shoulders. The curly haired man laughed at their antics before moving on.

He quickly stepped down the hall to see the last two groups in progress. He leaned against the wall in the hallway to peer into both Mike and Puck's rooms at the same time. The "Sensory" room and the "Gross Motor" room were both filled to the max. Children were bouncing on therapy balls, rolling around on little scooters and swinging back and forth on a suspended swing in Puck's room, while a majority of the kids in Mike's room were splashing and laughing at the water play table.

His heart felt incredibly full as he watched so many children interacting happily, not only with the therapists, but with each other, which was a tremendous step. This was what he had wanted. This was the difference he had wanted to make. The pain of the losses in his life were eased by helping those in need. There was no better way to heal than to set aside your own pain and give of yourself to others.

He glanced down then, when he felt a small hand on his thigh. Molly was standing there, patting him and pointing into the gross motor room. He smiled and scooped her up in his arms, knowing exactly what she wanted.

"You wanna go for a ride in the big swing one last time before we leave?"

She showed him the sign for 'more' enthusiastically as he took her in the room, setting her in the net swing that was suspended from the ceiling. After giving her a little push that elicited small giggles, he stepped back and took a deep breath. Kurt would be here at any moment, and then they could start in on the fun they had planned. He reached a hand subconsciously into his pocket, fingering the small box that he had been carrying around for almost two weeks now.

Tonight, before they left on their trip. Tonight was the night. He bounced on the balls of his feet excitedly as he stepped forward to give Molly one more push.

Kurt jogged up the front walk of the Center. He was running a bit late, but it couldn't be helped. He had stopped for something very important on the way. He reached into his satchel and reassured himself that the little bag containing precious cargo was still there. He had special ordered the ring a month ago, and was more than a little relieved when he finally got the call that it had arrived today. He had really wanted to be able to do this on their trip.

As he opened the front door to the Center, he was flooded with sudden memories from the last months of his life. The first time he had entered this house he had been so broken still, trying desperately to be there for his daughter, but still mourning Tala every day.

He loved Tala. He would always love Tala. Malaya was a piece of his wife that he would always carry with him.

Life was so very different than what he had expected. So different and so wonderful. He knew how very blessed he was and was thankful for it every day. So many people went through life without finding even one true love. He had found two. He had lost his first, and been healed by his second.

He said a quick hello to Jen, then stepped down the hall to where Blaine was pushing Malaya in a swing. His heart skipped a beat at how they were both laughing and smiling, and he quickly moved to join them. Molly's face brightened when he called her name and she reached out her arms, letting him sweep her up from the swing. Kurt hugged her close as he stepped forward to kiss Blaine hello.

As the two men leaned in, connecting their lips in a soft kiss, Malaya reached up hands and placed one on both of their cheeks.

"Da."

They pulled back just enough to look at her and smile, Blaine wrapping his arms around both of them. She had a rare moment of complete connection, looking her father straight in the eye and patting him on the cheek before opening up her mouth once again.

"Da."

They grinned at her happily, but before they even had a chance to speak encouraging words, she turned to Blaine. Once again, she kept up the elusive connection and looked straight into his eyes, her own sparkling their electric blue. She patted him on the cheek too, and smiled.

"Da."

The men looked at her in surprise and then slowly turned to each other. A smile spread across Kurt's face.

"That's right, jellybean. That's daddy too."

The hearts of both men pounded wildly as they leaned in to kiss tenderly once again. As they lingered in the kiss, they both had the same thought.

*Tonight. It's gonna happen tonight.*

**The End :)**

## The Proposal

"Blaine? Molly?" Kurt stood at the doorway, tapping his foot impatiently and checking his watch.

The car was packed, and they were meant to be on the road twenty minutes ago. He had carefully planned out their entire evening. They would drive for a couple hours, just to get a start on their vacation, before stopping at a hotel for the night. He had specifically looked for a place that rented out suites so that he and Blaine could have some alone time, even though Malaya would be with them. Room service would be delivering champagne and strawberries precisely at eleven. He planned to ask Blaine to tuck Molly in, giving him time set up some candles and music in their room.

He fingered the small ring box in his pocket excitedly, hardly able to wait to slide it onto Blaine's finger. He was pretty big on romance though, and felt that the special scene he had planned for the hotel room would be worth the wait.

He sighed impatiently and glanced at his watch once more, before stalking back into the apartment, intent on searching them out. He caught himself when he felt his irritation rising. This was supposed to be a special evening. The last thing he wanted was to start it off poorly by being cranky. He took a deep breath, telling himself to let go of his frustration at running late.

*What are they doing, anyway?* He walked down the hallway, peering into the bathroom and then their bedroom as he went. He heard a soft voice coming from Molly's room then, and was just about to burst in when he caught a sentence that stopped him in his tracks.

"We want Daddy to be surprised, jellybean."

Kurt's heart did a little flip-flop, and he smiled as he paused by the door. He loved that Blaine had caught on to calling Malaya by her nickname. At first he thought that it might be weird, or even hurt a little, since Tala had once used that nickname too. He was pleased to discover that it didn't bother him in the slightest though. In fact, there was something comforting about it. Blaine couldn't take Tala's place. He didn't even want to try. He was like a sequel in their lives. The next part of their story. The fact that he joined Kurt in calling Molly by her special nickname felt like that tiny bit of closure that made him a true part of their family. I made him another parent for Malaya, and she definitely accepted him as such. She responded to

him as well as she responded to Kurt, and calling him "Da" earlier that day... well, that was just the icing on the cake.

"Do you remember how we practiced it at school?"

Kurt assumed that she responded in the affirmative somehow, because he then heard Blaine laugh.

"That's my good girl. I am so proud of you, Molly. Daddy is going to be so excited!"

Kurt was practically bursting with curiosity then, trying to figure out what his surprise was. He figured that Blaine had taught her a new word or sign, since he mentioned practicing at school. Suddenly, he felt a little guilty. Whatever it was, Blaine was going through great pains to surprise him and here he was, eavesdropping. He took a couple of steps backward, as silently as possible, before clearing his throat to make Blaine aware of his presence.

"You guys about ready?" He asked from the hall before stepping forward once again, fully in the doorway of Molly's room. He caught Blaine scrambling with something out of the corner of his eye, and saw him squeeze Malaya's hand. He was crouched down next to her and they both turned to look at Kurt innocently. Kurt eyed them both with curiosity and smiled.

"We've gotta get on the road. What are you guys up to?"

Blaine bit his lip and bounced on the balls of his feet just a bit as he gave Molly a gentle push forward.

"Go on, sweetpea. Do it just like we practiced."

Kurt felt excitement and love for his little girl wash through him as she stepped forward. She was making the incredibly rare eye contact, and had a smile in her electric blue eyes as she approached him. He slid down into a crouch, feeling his heart race as she stepped directly in front of him and reached for his hand.

"Da," she said softly. She took his hand in hers, and look of deep concentration crossed her face. His heart was beating like crazy in anticipation. She had never interacted so deliberately before. She brought up her free hand, and his heart leapt.

She was clutching a ring in her tiny palm. She took her time, carefully attempting to fit the circle over his ring finger.



Kurt felt tears immediately prick the corners of his eyes, and he looked up at Blaine with a ragged breath. His boyfriend was looking back at him with the brightest smile he had ever seen, and tear-filled eyes of his own. Blaine stood and moved over then, settling down just behind Molly to watch her work. Kurt's tears spilled over then as he glanced back to his little girl.

She was concentrating heavily, but not quite able to get the ring into place. Her little tongue was poking out of the corner of her mouth as she worked. The need for fine motor skills, along with the attention span to do a specific job like this, was stretching for her. The fact that she was working so hard to accomplish her task was just as exciting to Kurt as what the ring meant.

She let out a little sigh and held the ring closely up to her face to examine it, as if trying to figure out why she couldn't get it to fit. Kurt and Blaine both looked at each other with watery smiles, but stayed silent. They were always in agreement that Malaya should figure things out for herself, if it all possible, and this was no different. She looked back down to Kurt's hand and brightened as she grabbed his pinky finger. She slipped the ring onto his smallest finger easily enough, then turned back to Blaine with shining eyes.

"Oh, jellybean! You did so good!" Blaine laughed and pulled her in for a hug. Kurt crooked his finger slightly so the ring wouldn't fall off and held out his hand to admire it. He leaned forward, kissing Molly on top of the head.

"Thank you, baby girl!"

She reached out hands to pat both men on the cheek, before squeezing out of their grasps, having had enough of the physical contact. She trotted over to her floor to ceiling window, and sank down to stare contentedly out into the bright city lights.

Kurt and Blaine watched her for just a moment, before turning back to each other and laughing nervously. They were still down on their knees in front of each other, and Blaine grinned as he slipped the ring from Kurt's pinky to his ring finger.

"We tried," he shrugged with a smile.

"It was perfect," Kurt whispered softly. Blaine looked at him blissfully and reached out a hand to cup his cheek.

"Kurt, I can't even begin to tell you what you and Molly mean to me. I am so deeply, so madly, in love with you. Before I met you, I was just barely living. Losing Tyler and Micah... it almost destroyed me. I found a way to live again, even to find some joy in life... but it wasn't enough. The only real joy I had was in my work. There was nothing for me outside of that. Then, I looked out in a crowd one day, and happened upon the two most beautiful pairs of blue eyes I'd ever seen. My life changed in that moment, though I didn't realize quite how. I'm a different man. I'm alive again. I want to be with you... always. Please tell me that for as long as we live..."

He trailed off then and paused. He looked down and swallowed away the intense emotions that were threatening to overwhelm him. One look back up at Kurt told him that his boyfriend was having the exact same reaction.

'As long as we live.'

That sentence had an incredible amount of depth for the two of them. It brought pain and not a little amount of fear. They both knew what it was like to lose that one special person in your life. They knew what it was like to have your heart ripped from your chest, to feel as if there was no possible way to find happiness again.

Yet they had. Here they were, both happier than they'd dreamed possible.

So what would happen if they lost that one special person yet again? Could you come back from that?

It would have been easy to let the fear overtake them. It would have been easy to live a sheltered life and never risk getting hurt again... but what kind of life would that be?

No. It was worth it. For this kind of love? Always.

"Please tell me that for as long..." Blaine tried again, but his voice cracked in the middle of the sentence and he couldn't quite finish. Kurt shook his head and leaned in. Their lips met in emotion-filled kiss after kiss. Kurt reached up a hand to wipe away his boyfriend's tears, and Blaine caught the hand with his own, pressing a kiss to Kurt's palm.

"Just... will you, Kurt? Will you marry me?"

Kurt looked at him and smiled brightly, but didn't answer. He instead reached into his pocket with his free hand, and slowly pulled out the little box. He heard Blaine gasp lightly and let go of his hand. He laughed and took Blaine's hand back in his own as he popped the box open with one hand and held it up.

"I feel like I can answer you best by simply showing you what I intended to give you later on tonight."

They looked at each other and laughed once more, before rushing together again, this time in a much more heated kiss. Kurt was just pulling Blaine tightly into his arms when he felt the ring box slip from his fingers. He pulled away from Blaine in surprise to see that Malaya had come back up to them and taken the box from him.

She had a look of deep concentration once again in her eyes as she gently took the ring from it's place and took Blaine's hand in her own. She pulled his fingers up so they were at eye level for her, and carefully slid the ring into place on her first try. She looked excitedly back at Kurt, letting out the tiniest squeal.

Kurt laughed and pulled her into his arms for a tight hug, exclaiming what a smart girl she was and how much he loved her. Blaine looked at the ring gracing his finger with misty eyes, before pulling the both of them into his arms and holding them close. Kurt nuzzled down into his neck.

"Yes, Blaine. I'll marry you."

"And I will definitely marry you," Blaine whispered.

They pulled back to gaze at each other, just absorbing the enormity of the moment, and reveling in how happy they were. They leaned in for another kiss, by this point completely forgetting that they had been planning to leave the house at all.

As their lips met, Malaya snuggled herself down in-between them, letting herself enjoy a rare moment of extreme physical closeness. She reached behind her for Blaine's left hand and then took her father's left hand, holding them both in front of her little face. Her blue eyes sparkled as she traced over the shiny rings with a petite finger. She sighed happily and began humming a familiar tune as she leaned back against her two dads, a tiny smile spreading across her face.

**The End... For Real :)**