

# **Ace of Cups**

**by**

**sundaysalvation**

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

*Blaine Anderson never expected that the Kurt Hummel, newest fashion designer to rise to fame, was the same Kurt Hummel whose name was scarred across his palm. But they were soul mates, destined and determined to be together even through photographers, tabloid gossip and rumours.*

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## Chapter One

“Kurt! Kurt!”

The shout was from the crowd of people that had formed outside the new store that was opening. The glass doors were firmly closed for the moment but all the merchandise was laid out neatly, the clothes racks built around mannequins wearing the designs straight off the runway. The shop named was written in big silver letters, all lowercase: hummels.

Kurt Hummel was standing next to the closed doors, smiling at the press that had gathered to snap a thousand photographs and the ever growing crowd of fans. He could see the girl who had shouted his name, fighting passed a line of women who had been queuing for hours. She was waving her left hand and trying desperately to get his attention.

This was his second store, larger than the first. Kurt had started his fashion line on the website that Lauren had set up for him back in senior year. Upon his much anticipated move to New York, it had taken a while to open a store that would sell clothes from the website. He'd been forced to take job after job at coffee houses and restaurants like every other struggling actor or musician to cover the differences between his incomings and outgoings.

What had caused his lucky break was a paid internship at Marie Claire. Not only had Kurt gotten steady income for six months, but he'd made an important friend at the magazine. A friend who'd only been too happy to write a piece about hummels and had sighted Kurt as a new and fresh face amongst the designers for young men.

After the article was published in Marie Claire, Kurt's small store in a quiet street far away from the fashion district in New York had exploded with customers. He'd been invited to showcase a line, which he'd proudly named after his store, at a fashion show for upcoming designers. And Kurt Hummel had been named the best of the lot.

By his friend at Marie Claire, he'd been encouraged to put on a fashion show of his own clothes rather than part of a larger group. This was about a year after the first show and he'd been overwhelmed at the amount of people who had wanted to come and see his second line, a line he'd name 'k.h.'. Anna Wintour, the editor of Vogue and probably the most influential person in fashion, had been invited and an article on the show had appeared in the following edition of Vogue, accompanied by an interview with the designer

himself. From that point, it was expected that Kurt Hummel, who was definitely a household name, open up his second store.

“Kurt this way.” A photographer shouted, drawing the young designer out of his musings of the past and into the present. He turned to look into the camera lens and smiled, one hand resting on the handle of the glass door to his store.

The second hand on the big clock temporarily erected by Tina and Rachel moved ever closer to eleven o’clock.

“Kurt I think I’m your soul mate!” The girl yelled louder than before. She’d managed to break through the queue of women but the rope barrier stopped her from moving forward. She’d leant far over the barrier, holding onto a gold plated post to keep her balance. She’d thrust her left arm out, her palm stretched wide open.

Without even properly acknowledging her, Kurt said: “I’m flattered but your soul mate is out there.” Photographers snapped their cameras excitedly, documenting every syllable of the exchange. “I haven’t found my soul mate yet.”

The clock on the pavement read eleven o’clock. As if a bell had rung, the crowd went silent as they waited on bated breath to hear what the young designer had to say before he opened the store.

Kurt addressed the crowd of shoppers, made up of both women and men. For a moment, he revelled in their stares. They were here for his clothes, had been standing outside for hours to be the first people to buy from his store. He could hardly believe that his every dream had come true. At least, every dream after he’d given up on his Broadway dreams.

“I just want to thank everyone for coming out today.” He said. His voice projected perfectly over the crowd. Rachel would be proud. “I’m so pleased that I can open up this store for you. I’ve come so far in the past few years and that’s been because of all of you.”

Kurt reached out with his free hand and slid the key into the lock, turning it a quarter turn to the left to open the glass front doors.

“So welcome to hummels.”

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The name scarred on Kurt's left palm had appeared when he was thirteen. It had begun to develop at the same time everyone else's had. As such, there was so much excitement from all around that the fact that Kurt Hummel's soul mate was a boy didn't gain much attention for a while.

A name of someone's soul mate appeared on a person's left palm during puberty, written in the hand writing of the soul mate. It could happen at any point and would often take a few days for the full name to appear. The names were always scarred over the heart line on the palm. That was actually the origin on the name of that particular crease. It was also the reason why wedding rings were worn on the left hand. Left for love.

The last name of Kurt's soul mate developed first. He'd woken up on a dreary winter Tuesday morning to see three red letters proudly marring his otherwise pale palm: a capital A, a lowercase e and a lowercase r. Two days later, Kurt could read Anderson in the red handwriting of his soul mate.

It was another three days before the first name fully appeared. During that time, Kurt had spent many a boring moment in class doodling different combinations of his name and his soul mate's surname. Kurt Anderson. Kurt Anderson-Hummel. Kurt Hummel-Anderson. For him, the last one simply flowed better but he could discuss it at length with his soul mate when they decided to double barrel their surnames.

When he woke up on the Sunday of that week, weather still as grey and miserable as ever, Kurt's eyes had shot straight to his palm like they'd been doing for the past five days. And to his delight, the seven letters that had been taking their time to develop were scarred in their proper place. Kurt could read the name of his soul mate for the first time.

Blaine Anderson.

Kurt wasn't surprised at the appearance of a boy's name. He'd known he wouldn't end up with a Sarah or an Elizabeth since he'd understood what the names on people's palms meant. He hadn't told his father or anyone at school yet and knew that at some point in the next few days, the knowledge that Kurt Hummel had a boy's name on his palm would spread around the school.

Soul mates were soul mates. People were destined to be together despite the gender. It didn't stop the teasing though and in the past, men and women who had a name of someone of their own gender would

be attacked or tortured or killed for the names on their palms that they had no control over. In the present, there was far more tolerance but Kurt wouldn't get through the last months of middle school and high school without something being said and done to him.

Kurt passed his thumb over the red marks on his hand. He'd worry about that on Monday. Maybe no one would notice the complete name and it wouldn't go around the school for a while. Maybe his dad would forget to ask if Kurt's name had finished appearing; which wasn't likely as Burt had asked every morning since Kurt had rushed down to breakfast to show the scarring A, e and r that had appeared earlier in the week.

For now he turned over in his bed and cradled his left palm in his right hand. *Kurt and Blaine*, he thought, smiling to himself as he burrowed under the covers. *Blaine and Kurt*. He liked the sound of their names together.

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Nine years later and Kurt sat at the large drawing desk he'd brought from the first store to sit in the much larger office in his second store. He was staring down at the pink scarred letters that crossed his palm.

Blaine Anderson. He'd never even met the man. Kurt had known a lot of Andersons; there had been a few in McKinley over the four years he'd gone to high school and then a few more he'd met during all eight jobs and his internship at Marie Claire. Just over half had been men and none of them had been named Blaine.

He had a multitude of people claiming to be his soul mate though. He never released Blaine's name to the press: only his closest friends knew who Kurt's soul mate was. People would scream that they were his soul mate, much like that girl had screamed earlier, but they'd never scream that they were Blaine.

After the very first fashion show, Kurt had been cornered by one of the men he'd seen watching the show. The man, much taller than Kurt, blonde and very good looking, had thrust his hand into Kurt's face. A shaky and crudely written 'Kurt Hummel' had been drawn on his palm. Completely out of his depth, Kurt had backed away with his eyes wide and almost sprinted to where his family were waiting for him.

That man had been the first and certainly not the last of fans claiming to be the soul mate of Kurt Hummel.

“Knock knock.” Tina’s voice broke through Kurt’s musings as she stood in the open doorway, a pile of folders and loose papers in her hand. Kurt smiled when he saw her, an invitation for her to come inside, and reached out to grab the red knitted glove he had been wearing before he’d sat staring at Blaine’s name for a while.

He always made a point of wearing gloves, mostly fingerless, when in front of the cameras. He didn’t want a persistent photographer to accidentally snap a photo that would reveal Blaine’s name to the public. Then he’d have everyone claiming to be Blaine and Kurt would never find him.

“Have you noticed that most of the people who claim they’re my soul mate are women?” Kurt asked conversationally as Tina took a seat in one of the rolling chairs dotted around the room.

She nodded and used her feet to propel her closer to where Kurt was seated. At the last minute, she grabbed a pen from the unused computer desk. Tina had moved to New York after Kurt had opened up his store, on his request. They’d made all their competition costumes together in the choir room and both of their living rooms and when Kurt had been invited to put together the hummels line for the newcomer’s fashion show, Tina Cohen-Chang had been the only other person Kurt would let sew and stitch his outfits together.

Now, she was his assistant in everything and basically ran the day to day workings of the company for him. Mike, Tina’s soul mate who she’d met in high school, had moved with her after he’d completed his degree the previous year. That was the advantage of a soul mate: you knew that they’d wait for you no matter the time or distance.

“For fashionable women,” she replied, resting all files and papers over the open sketchbook Kurt had been working in, “they have absolutely no gaydar.”

They shared a smile. Tina knew the name that was scarred on Kurt’s palm. As did Rachel, struggling to find a role on Broadway as she navigated through all the other talented girls from the Midwest just like herself. She’d gotten into NYADA and had passed all classes with flying colours but out in the real world, experience stood over education in too many instances.

“I need your signature on these, Kurt.” Tina tapped the top pages with the pen, taking off the lid before she handed it to Kurt, “and you need to read through the resumes underneath. I’ve marked out the ones who

actually have potential but there's one or two that you might be interested in to train up to make clothes like only you and me can."

Kurt nodded and pulled the papers towards him. They fell off the top file and landed on the pencils left out the previous day. One rolled to the floor and landed with a soft thud. Kurt's eyes skimmed quickly over the forms; one for the authorisation for the website to be restyled to match his new store's interior design and the other for photographs of his clothes to be shown in an upcoming InStyle issue. He scribbled his signature on both and Tina whipped them away as soon as the pen nib had left the page.

"What's it like?" He asked after a moment. He pulled all twenty resumes closer, lifting them off the table and settling them on top of his crossed legs. Tina made a confused noise and looked up at him with an eyebrow raised. "To have Mike. What's it like to have found your soul mate."

It was a question he'd asked over and over. Tina was the only person Kurt's age who had found her soul mate and who lived within regular talking distance. Mercedes had found her Sam Evans at the same time as Tina had connected with Mike but she was living in LA as she desperately tried to get a recording contract. Rachel had dated Kurt's step-brother Finn for a long time but neither of them were soul mates, despite how they acted around each other.

"It's like-" Out of the corner of his eye, Kurt saw Tina pause and think of a description of what being connected to your soul mate was like, "-coming home. Coming home and knowing that whatever happens, you'll have that home."

That was a new description. Previous descriptions Tina had given Kurt about being connected to your soul mate had included finding the other half of yourself, knowing that you can just love and be loved no matter the circumstances, sheer perfection, like being surrounded by love all the time. All things that Kurt wished every day he could have already.

*Wow, this girl is studying at Parsons and worked at InStyle last year* he thought, pointedly ignoring the look Tina was giving him. He flicked to the next resume, which wasn't one that Tina had marked with a bright yellow circle around the name, and immediately took that one out of the pile. No previous experience at any type of drawing and Kurt needed someone who could be trusted to draw exactly what he needed to send to the manufacturers.



Tina reached out and rested a hand on Kurt's wrist. She turned his hand over so that if he hadn't been wearing gloves, Blaine's name would be right before his eyes. "You'll find your Blaine soon, Kurt. Don't ever worry about that. How can you not: you're too amazing not to find your soul mate."

Kurt laughed appreciatively at that and looked down at the resumes again. He could only hope so.

## Chapter Two

At the same time Kurt had been staring at the name Blaine Anderson on his palm, Blaine had been running his thumb over the scars on his own hand.

He was seated in a dark lecture theatre, an old and sleep-inducing professor droning on and on about something to do with the Industrial Revolution in England. He knew he should be listening and scribbling down notes like his friends were doing around him. But this man had no concept of keeping over a hundred college students interested and Blaine had seized the chance to stare at the name of his soul mate.

Kurt Hummel.

He'd always imagined that a name like that belonged to someone both elegant and beautiful. His brother Cooper had recently connected to his soul mate, a dainty girl by the name of Heather Barton. Cooper had imagined Heather as a small and soft spoken girl. The small part was right but soft spoken, not so much.

When picturing his future with Kurt, Blaine was sure that he'd be a passionate person but no more soft spoken than Heather was.

"This was an important moment in the Revolutionary times, as you can clearly see by the number of eyewitness accounts." The old man's voice sounded louder as he walked very slowly across the front of the lecture hall and passed the microphone that was permanently switched on.

Blaine's eyes left his left hand for a moment and looked up at the lecturer. He was pointing with a laser pointer at something on the PowerPoint presentation behind him but that Blaine didn't even bother to look at. Whatever he was rambling on about would be uploaded to the intranet a few hours after the lecture by the TA.

Those online lecture notes were sacred to the NYU students and had saved Blaine many a time when a surprise quiz had been sprung or an essay topic had been talked about while Blaine was too hung over or bored to pay attention to.

He'd passed the entrance requirements to get into NYU with flying colours and had chosen history to major in. Partly as a way to adhere to his father's requirement that Blaine do something useful with his

college degree and partly as a way to rebel against the same condition. History wasn't a nothing subject but what on earth could Blaine do with a history degree other than teach. And being a teacher wasn't the first choice for an Anderson son.

Then again, neither was being an actor but Cooper still managed to get away with that.

Blaine stopped rubbing the name across his palm and picked up a pen. He'd started writing notes, planning on paying attention to this lecture as there was an essay due in about three weeks' time. He'd had all the best intentions but fifteen minutes later he'd given up. Now he started doodling on the half written notes, which consisted of dates and some words about what took place on those dates scribbled beside them. Circles and geometric shapes and writing Kurt's name in cursive script took up the rest of the page.

The clock struck quarter to and as if a bell had rung to signal the end of the lecture, everyone began to pack up their bags. The lecturer looked up and spoke loudly over the noise of the movement of the class.

"Don't forget the essays are due in a few weeks' time." He tried to get his voice heard over the kafuffle but most people were ignoring him anyway. "I'll have office hours this week if anyone needs to ask any questions."

"For heaven's sake," Nick, one of Blaine's friends who had been sitting next to him during the lecture and who had managed to stay focused enough to take notes the whole time, grumbled to Blaine as they walked towards the end of the row. The crowd of students exiting the hall was moving quickly so the two boys waited until most of the people had passed before leaving. "Please tell me why I took that fucking module. He can't teach for love nor money."

Blaine laughed and agreed wholeheartedly, straightening the shoulder strap of his bag and he lifted it over his head to settle it more comfortably.

Nick turned around and raised an eyebrow. "You didn't pay attention to half of it!" He accused, his voice filled with mirth. "How would you know it was utter boredom?"

"Because staring at Kurt's name for forty-five minutes is far better than listening to him speak." Blaine countered, knocking his shoulder into Nick's playfully.

They reached the doors to the lecture hall and stepped out, the noise level increasing with the crowd of students still milling around the entrance. This particular lecture theatre exited onto the street next to an NYU building rather than most which led to the inside of university buildings. As such, Blaine and Nick stepped out into the bright sunshine and cool weather of the early springtime.

“Blaine!” An excited voice rang out from the crowd and both Blaine and Nick turned to look. “Nick!”

A girl broke free from the crowd and hurried to stand by them. Shorter than both boys, Jennifer Lewis had put her rucksack on both shoulders which left her hands free to type frantically on her phone. When the internet page she’d been searching for loaded up, Jennifer shoved the phone into Blaine’s hands. Nick peered over Blaine’s shoulder to be nosy.

*Kurt Hummel’s second store opening a total success!*

Kurt Hummel, designer, fellow person who hailed from Ohio and the man that Blaine was convinced couldn’t be *his* Kurt. Nick and Jennifer both insisted that of course this Kurt could be Blaine’s Kurt but Blaine never wanted to believe them.

He had been inexplicably drawn to the young designer though, ever since Jennifer had bought that copy of Marie Claire and Blaine had flicked through it one night before their friendship group went out for drinks at a bar close to their halls. The name of his soul mate had jumped right out of the pages and Blaine had stared unblinkingly at the title for minutes before even bothering to read what was written.

He’d skimmed the words. Kurt was from Ohio, just like Blaine, and had started his fashion line by selling clothes online. He’d opened up a small store in New York and the clothes had been described as “innovative and beautiful: a wonderful new collection for the fashionable male.”

After he’d gotten over the shock of seeing what appeared to be his Kurt’s name in the magazine, Blaine had rushed across the hallway to his dorm room, taking Jennifer’s magazine with him. He’d gone straight to his computer and opened up Firefox, typing *Kurt Hummel* into the search bar.

Kurt’s website, hummels.com, had been the first returned hit and Blaine had ordered far too many shirts and jumpers than he should have done. Even if this Kurt wasn’t his Kurt, the clothes had been beautiful.

Reading the newest article on the website Jennifer had found while she'd been avoiding listening to the lecture, Blaine saw that Kurt had opened up a second store in the heart of the fashion district here and there had been people queuing outside to be the first to buy in Kurt's new store.

"Have you gotten to the end yet?" Jennifer asked, her voice light and full of excitement. She even bounced on the balls of her feet, brown hair swinging with her movements.

With his thumb, Blaine flicked right down to the end of the article. He spotted the bit that Jennifer wanted him to read immediately, hearing Nick snort with laughter when he read the words as well.

*Along with the eagerly waiting fans was someone who loudly claimed to be Kurt's soul mate. Unfortunately for her, Kurt quickly assured her that she was not. In fact, he went so far as to say that he was flattered but that she should be looking for her real soul mate who was out there somewhere.*

*Kurt also informed us that he hasn't found his soul mate yet.*

*There are still the rumours about Kurt and Broadway actor Chandler Kiehl. It is known that they're friends from Ohio and they're always together for the photographs at red carpet events but neither has announced that the other is their soul mate. Maybe they're keeping it quiet for now?*

*After four years in the spotlight, you'd think that someone with Kurt's name on their palm would come forward to find out whether this handsome young designer was theirs. If he hasn't already been snapped up by Chandler.*

*The store itself is a beauty-*

Blaine handed Jennifer her phone back. "Just because I've got his name on my palm doesn't mean he's got mine, Jen." He said for what had to be the thousandth time.

"But what if he does!" Jennifer argued. She threw her hands into the air, tightly clutching her phone in one. She too had argued this a thousand times since she'd run into Blaine's room to get her magazine back and seen what had gotten her friend so flustered. "You could be Kurt's soul mate and then end up giving me all the free samples of women's clothing he'll give you that you won't use."

“And that’s why Kurt gets people saying they’re his soul mate every day.” Nick said. He threw an arm around Jennifer’s shoulders and dragged her down the street towards the subway, Blaine following behind the pair and rubbing the scarred name on his palm as he walked.

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Blaine lay on his bed that night completely unable to sleep.

He didn’t count himself a slave to fashion. He subscribed to Vogue, an indulgence the meagre money he had as a student didn’t discourage, and read that cover to cover but he didn’t watch Project Runway or America’s Next Top Model religiously. He didn’t slave over the fashion blogs and track any and all movement of the top designers. He wasn’t like Jennifer, who bought the latest trends and then replaced her wardrobe as soon as she could. But something about Kurt Hummel made Blaine want to know everything about him.

He’d bought his own copy of Marie Claire when Jennifer had demanded he return hers. He’d tried to get a ticket for the fashion show where Kurt had showcased his first line, failing because they’d been sold out before the designers had even been announced. He’d also rushed out to try and buy a ticket to Kurt’s second show but had failed due to popularity. He’d waited impatiently by the pigeon holes in halls where the students’ post was distributed on the day that the edition of Vogue with the article about Kurt had been delivered. He’d also read that article so often he’d ended up ripping the pages.

And when he immediately went out to buy another copy, he knew he was too obsessed.

The name on Blaine’s hand had developed when he been fourteen, which had been quite late in comparison with Blaine’s friends. Kurt’s name had appeared quickly: he’d woken up with two letters (K and u) on his palm and by second period, the full first name had developed on his palm. By the next morning, Kurt Hummel was scarred onto Blaine’s palm and he’d bounded down the stairs to reach the house phone to call his brother.

After he’d crowed down the phone to Cooper that his soul mate had a truly beautiful name, he’d gone to the yearbook on his shelf and yanked it off. He’d settled on the bed with his legs crossed and flicked through all the students of Westerville High. No Kurt Hummel.

Then when he'd moved to Dalton, he'd done the same. Surely at a school for boys there must be a Kurt Hummel. Again, no such luck.

When Facebook had become popular, Blaine had hurriedly typed Kurt Hummel into the search bar. His eager smile dropped immediately when he saw that there were fourteen Kurt Hummels in the US alone and the number only grew if he increased the search worldwide.

Now if Blaine searched for Kurt Hummel on line, most of the hits would be about the designer. And what was the likelihood that Kurt Hummel the designer was his soul mate?

Unfortunately, as Nick, Jennifer and most of their friends who had made the connection between the name on Blaine's palm and the new designer frequently pointed out, it was quite high.

They were both from Ohio. The interview with Kurt in Vogue had stated that Kurt was born and raised in Lima, which was only two hours away from Westerville. Kurt had been in his school's show choir: Blaine could have even competed against him in a competition.

They were also both in New York. Two people around the same age who came from the same area in the Midwest were both in the same city at the same time. Admittedly, Blaine had come to New York the year after Kurt as he was a year younger but that was a poor counter argument.

Little details stuck out that also shook Blaine's argument that this Kurt wasn't his Kurt. Like the fact that they had both been in show choirs. In the interview, Kurt had mentioned that he had originally wanted to be on Broadway but his passion for fashion had been far greater than that of a theatre actor. Blaine had begged for weeks for his family to visit New York just so he could see Wicked for his tenth birthday.

And how Kurt had gushed in the interview about how he regularly read Vogue as a teenager, keeping up with the latest fashions while he drew his own designs. That was the same as Blaine: minus the drawing of his own clothes.

There was also no denying that Kurt was gorgeous. His perfect fashion sense, his flawless skin, eyes that always sparkled in every photograph and his smile. The first photographs that had emerged of the designer had shown his genuine surprised smile, like he was shocked that there were photographs being taken of him at all. That was the smile Blaine liked best. The more recent photos were far more practiced.

“Don’t be stupid.” He said out loud. Blaine sat up in bed and roughly rubbed his hands over his face. He glanced at the clock. 2:48. Kurt Hummel the designer was *not* his soul mate and he’d prove it.

He had found the article Jennifer had shown him after the lecture, along with others written by journalists who’d been present at the store opening. One of them was bound to give explicit instructions as to where the store was. He had a day off tomorrow. Rather than writing the ridiculously boring essay, he’d go to the store and find out, once and for all, whether Kurt Hummel was his soul mate.

That decided, Blaine lay back down and turned onto his front. He burrowed into the covers to get comfortable in a makeshift cocoon and closed his eyes, refusing to listen to the annoying voice in the back of his mind that was asking what he would do if Kurt *was* his soul mate.



## Chapter Three

After showering, Blaine stood in front of the open wardrobe wearing nothing but his boxer briefs. He'd never been more appreciative of a single room than at a time like this, when he was going to try and speak to a fashion designer about whether or not he was his soul mate.

Blaine could hardly turn up looking like a homeless person or worse, like a poor student.

Yet, he also didn't want to pander to the stereotype that he was just another fan looking to pilfer off some freebies from their idol. Every person who had claimed to be Kurt's soul mate would just be looking to ride off his fame. To be honest, if Blaine walked into hummels and demanded to speak to Kurt himself, he'd be turned away and accused of doing the same thing. So he couldn't go to the store wearing any of Kurt's designs.

With a shrug at no one, Blaine pulled a pair of jeans off the hanger, it shaking on the clothing rail with the reactive force. He tugged them on, hopping around his small room rather than sit down, and pulled on a pair of socks. Now he bent over and rolled up the bottom of his jeans. Just a little bit. It was a habit that had stemmed from never being able to find a pair of pants that fit him properly while he was growing.

The top was a little trickier to choose but after a good few minutes of surveying the clothes he'd brought with him from Ohio when he'd left and the clothes he'd collected over the three years in New York, he pulled a white sweater with thin red stripes off the shelf. That would do.

Blaine took a few minutes in the mirror to look over his outfit. He'd left his hair ungelled after his shower but took the time before leaving to make sure every wayward curl was in perfect place.

He refused to believe that he was dressing up because he was going to meet his soul mate for the first time. Kurt Hummel the designer wasn't his soul mate and the whole purpose of this outing was to prove that.

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"Where are you off to so dressed on a Tuesday morning?" Nick asked when Blaine had grabbed a plate of toast and some marmalade. Nick was wearing baggy tracksuit bottoms and a half open shirt: he also had a

free day on Tuesdays and this was the day that both boys lounged around in comfortable clothing while they caught up on some work. Normally, Blaine didn't even gel his hair on days like today.

"I just need to run some errands." Blaine replied flippantly. He focused on spreading the butter and marmalade across his toast, catching the crumbs on the small plate underneath his toast. Technically, running errands wasn't a lie. It just wasn't the whole truth.

Unfortunately, Nick also picked up on that. "Errands like what, Mr Anderson?"

Raising an eyebrow, Blaine refused to answer. At that moment, Jennifer and another girl who lived on their hallway joined the two boys. Sugar didn't take history with Blaine but as they lived in the next door rooms to each other, they were still close.

"Good morning, boys." Jennifer said with a smile and a cheerful bounce. Sugar was equally smiley this morning and she forced her way into the seat next to Blaine. Jennifer's voice was overly happy when she continued speaking: "What are we talking about?"

"What Blaine's errands are going to entail today." Nick spoke quickly to avoid Blaine changing the subject. He was rewarded with a glare from his amber eyed friend.

"Errands?" Sugar took a bite out of a grape that she pulled out of the fruit salad/yoghurt combination she'd fetched for breakfast. "Do tell!"

"Are you finally going to admit that Kurt Hummel is your soul mate, Blaine?" Jennifer asked, her voice filled with a mock-seriousness that normally would have Blaine laughing alongside Nick and Sugar.

"He's not going to be my soul mate!" Blaine insisted. He took a bite of toast and endured the agonising rolling of the eyes that all three friends gave whenever this argument was breeched. Swallowing his bite of breakfast, he continued: "What is a fashion designer like him going to do with a soul mate who's a history student like me?"

Nick pointed his knife at Blaine, which would have been far more threatening if jam hadn't fallen to the table. "And why wouldn't a fashion designer have a history student for a soul mate?"

Blaine looked at the ceiling in despair. “Because he’ll have a model or an actor or someone more important as a soul mate.” His friends looked totally unimpressed by the repeated argument. “Fine. The errand I am running is to go to Kurt’s store and prove to you people that Kurt Hummel isn’t my soul mate.”

The three people around Blaine looked satisfied that he’d told them the truth. Sugar even looked overjoyed that he was going to hummels to ask about Kurt’s name written across his palm. None of them mentioned the other side of the argument: that Blaine would go to hummels and come back having found his soul mate. For that, Blaine was grateful; he still wasn’t thinking about that outcome as a potential possibility.

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### **Have you found your soul mate yet?**

Shaking his head out of fondness as he read the text from his friends, Blaine swiped his thumb over the screen of his phone and typed in the passcode. He typed out a response to Nick’s text as he walked, bumping into other people rushing along the New York street.

*I promise I will tell all later. Calm yourself!*

Blaine turned down a street, stepping sideways to avoid a mother dragging two children away from a huge department store. Slipping his hands into the pockets of his jeans, Blaine walked determinately towards the address he’d seen on the article online, checking with Google Maps to make sure he was heading in the right direction in the busy shopping streets.

If Google Maps hadn’t pointed him in the right direction, a string of five shoppers all carrying bags full to the brim with hummels written in elaborate cursive script would have told Blaine he was going in the right direction. It was still early in the day, just gone eleven, but there had obviously been a gaggle of people outside the store when it had opened.

After sidestepping a group of shoppers who refused to break ranks and form two lines on the pavement, Blaine saw the store he was aiming for. It was bright and obvious when compared with the darker shop windows around it. hummels had the front entirely made of glass and lights were turned on inside that shone out to illuminate the street outside. People passing by turned their heads to look at whatever was happening inside and a fair few of them changed their direction and opened the door to enter the store.

Blaine hurried down the street to the entrance and walked inside himself. He cut up two men who were debating whether to shop there or not but the sight of a young man walking into the shop convinced those two to enter as well.

The interior of the store with painted in shades of grey, blended from the lighter colours at the back of the store to the darker colours at the front. The floor and ceiling were also coloured grey, the floor made of a fake-granite material that contained bits of paint that would sparkle in the light. At the back of the store was a long till where no less than six people were serving the long queue of eagerly waiting customers. Behind the till were two double doors painted in the same grey as the walls around them which led to the work rooms and offices.

The clothes were organised around mannequins and Blaine's intensive studying of the fashion show Kurt put on to showcase his second line came in handy. Each mannequin was dressed in an outfit from the runway and the racks around the mannequin held the clothes from that outfit in all sizes. The racks along the walls contained the clothes from Kurt's first line, on the left, and from his online store, on the right.

The shop itself was full of people. Mainly women, holding up the dresses to their bodies to try and determine which size would be best to buy. Many would just buy the clothes they liked and return the sizes that didn't fit at a later date. There were plenty of men standing around and looking totally bored out of their skulls while they waited for their soul mates or girlfriends. Saying that, there was a large contingent of men who were frantically flicking through the racks to find the perfect shirt or pair of pants, throwing the chosen garment over the ever growing pile hanging on one arm.

Blaine rubbed his forehead, focusing on the pressure points to avoid a growing headache. This plan should have been thought out at a better time than ten to three in the morning. Of course Kurt's shop would be busy: it was the second day that it was open. His clothes were designer but not unaffordable to the middle to high earners of New York. Men and women would take a long lunch break, some people shopping on the request of their partners, just to buy from hummels in the opening few days.

Still, he'd come all this way to determine whether the Kurt Hummel who was his soul mate was the same Kurt Hummel that was probably sitting somewhere in an office at the back of this store.

Blaine walked forwards, aiming for the tills at the back of the store. All six employees were working, folding clothes and dropping them into the large bags at their feet with practiced skill. The one at the end

was taking the credit card of his customer so Blaine dodged the rope barrier used to stop queue-jumpers and walked right up to the till.

While the lady was punching in her pin number, he rested both hands against the edge of the counter and leaned over to speak to the man. He earned a large glare from the lady and a few people in the queue behind him.

“Can I talk to someone in charge?” He asked, speaking as loudly as he needed to. “Like a manager or someone who works at both stores?”

The man nodded but held up one finger to signal that he should be patient. Blaine nodded as well and stepped away from the counter. Unconsciously, he rubbed his palm with his thumb. As if touching the scars that formed Kurt’s name gave him courage.

*Relax, he told himself, It’s not like Kurt will even be your soul mate anyway.* The woman took her new purchase and the employee spoke quietly into the small microphone attached to the intercom. He pressed a headphone further into his ear as if to hear better, spoke again and then nodded. He beckoned to the next customer but focused on Blaine.

“Someone will be with you shortly.”

Blaine nodded his thanks and stepped further away from the till. The woman who had stalked up to the till he’d been hovering over gave Blaine a haughty look down the end of her pointed nose. Her purchase was at least double what the first lady had bought and when her eyes bulged slightly when the employee told her the price, Blaine laughed quietly.

After two more customers had paid for their clothes, one of the doors leading to the back room of the store opened and a small Asian lady wearing heels and a dress not made by Kurt walked out onto the shop floor. She looked around, smoothed the palms of her hands down the sides of her dress and strode straight to the man who Blaine had spoken to.

Blaine had been staring aimlessly at the shoppers in the store while he waited, watching how two men who were obviously close friends were recommending shirts to each other. When the employee pointed the woman in Blaine’s direction, the red head had just thrust a white shirt with tasteful stitching on the collar and cuffs into his friend’s hands.

"You wanted to speak to a manager?" The woman asked, tipping her head to the side as she looked at Blaine. In her heels she was still smaller than he was: something that didn't happen too often. "I'm Tina, I'm Kurt's assistant. Can I help?"

Blaine smiled and held out a hand. Tina shook it but didn't return the smile. It made sense: he hadn't introduced himself or even mentioned why someone would want to speak to a manager or someone in charge after the store had been open for a day and a few hours.

"I know you've gotten this a hundred times already," He started speaking. It was a rehearsed speech that he'd written in the shower that morning but he doubted that he'd stick to it. He couldn't remember half of it anyway, "but I have to ask..."

Blaine held up his left palm to show Tina the scarred 'Kurt Hummel' on his palm. He tucked his right hand into the back pocket of his jeans and waited. Blaine watched as Tina's confusion gave way to understanding when her eyes read the two words written there.

She looked up at him from under her lashes. "May I?"

Blaine didn't know what she was asking permission to do but he nodded and held out his hand for her to take. Tina cupped the back of his hand in the palm of hers and pressed down hard on Blaine's name. She pressed as hard as she could as she swiped her thumb down the length of Blaine's heart line.

Kurt's name faded to white as the blood was forced away from the surface of his palm. Then when the pressure of Tina's thumb left, blood flowed in its wake and the scarred Kurt Hummel turned pink once more.

Tina's eyebrows rose in surprise and Blaine sucked one side of his bottom lip into his mouth to chew on for a second. It was obvious what she'd been doing. People who had managed to cover up their name and draw Kurt's name on in makeup would have been left blushing. The pressure and the movement of Tina's thumb would have smeared the makeup and proven that Kurt wasn't their soul mate in one fell swoop. But Blaine's scar was genuine so he had nothing to worry about with that little test.

Tina looked up at him and waited for a moment. When neither of them spoke for a beat too long, Blaine hurriedly explained further: "I'm not trying to get anything. To be honest, I'm trying to rule this-" he

gestured to the rest of the shop “-Kurt out of the equation. I doubt he’s my soul mate. But if I don’t ask, I’ll always want to know, right?”

Slowly and almost reluctantly, Tina nodded. “What did you say your name was?” She asked and dropped Blaine’s captured hand.

“Blaine.” He smiled again. “My name’s Blaine Anderson.”

Nothing changed on Tina’s face, although she did lick her lips. Abruptly turning around, she walked over to the counter and bent down, reaching behind the counter to pull a pad of paper off a hidden shelf. Stealing a pen from behind the till, she held it out to Blaine.

“Would you mind writing your name down,” she explained, “and your number? That way I can contact you and I don’t have to worry about spelling your name wrong.”

Blaine nodded and stepped up, scribbling his name on the paper and writing his cell phone number down next to it. Pen hovering over the page, he triple checked his number and made sure it was completely legible. Just his luck to have spoken to someone at hummels, passed the first test to see if the mark on his palm was genuine but for his number to be completely unreadable so that they had no way of contacting him.

Tina took both pen and paper away from him and held the pad close to her chest. This time she held out a hand for Blaine to shake. “I’ll contact you as soon as possible with your answer.” She told him when Blaine hurried to shake her hand in return.

He thanked her graciously for her time and turned to leave. Her voice calling made him stop and turn around.

“Thank you, Blaine Anderson.”

Blaine smiled at her and turned around once more. He dug his phone out of his pocket, seeing a text from Nick and one from Jennifer waiting for him. He started typing on his phone as he made his way to the exit, completely missing the very small smile that had spread across Tina’s lips.

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Kurt had been sketching away for the better part of the day. He'd phoned his dad and had spent most part of an hour talking about how the opening had gone and how he still couldn't believe that so many people wanted to buy *his* clothes. Burt had sat on the other end of the line and just listened to his son talk with a proud smile on his face, unable to talk for very long as the garage suddenly filled with people looking for early morning appointments.

After lunch, Kurt had opened his sketchbook and looked over all the drawings he'd made in the morning. They were all of clothes for men, smart casual and unlike his other two lines. Kurt's first two official lines had been heavily based on the clothes he would have worn and did wear in his teenage years. These clothes were totally different.

The ones on the first page were of jeans and sweatshirts, simple clothes with stripes or checks on the sweaters. The next few pages added a cardigan into the outfit, often with notes saying that this fabric should be brightly coloured. A few outfits contained bow ties. Kurt frowned at those: why would he have an outfit where someone was wearing a bow tie with a polo shirt? Strangely it worked on the concept line drawing and he turned the page over, keeping the drawing.

Three knocks sounded on his door and Kurt looked up. "Come in."

Tina walked inside, shutting the door behind her and take a seat without being offered one. She held a folded piece of paper in her hands and looked entirely pleased with herself.

"I don't even know what I've been drawing the past few hours." Kurt admitted, pushing the sketchbook closer to his old school friend. Tina leant towards the desk and lifted a few of the pages to see the drawings herself. She never put down her folded note.

"I like the ones with the cardigans." She admitted, her eyes never leaving the thick drawing pages. "Why are they coloured so brightly?"

"Why not?" was the reply. Kurt and Tina shared a look filled with mirth and Kurt shook his head. He leant back in his chair and gestured to his sketchbook. "Those outfits would be very plain without some kind of statement. There would be nothing for anyone to look at. With the cardigans in bold colours, or plain colours and paired with a bright shirt, there's the statement."



Tina nodded her understanding. She closed the sketchbook carefully and pushed it over to Kurt with one hand. Settling against the back of her chair, she scraped her nails down the fold of the note in her hands.

Kurt pointed right at it. The way Tina was holding it; it seemed that she wanted him to ask about it. "What's that?"

"I had someone claim they were your soul mate again today." She replied, dodging the question for the minute.

"Again?" Kurt's voice was filled with boredom. One day after the previous attempt seemed like too soon. Couldn't he have any reprieve from overeager fans? "Why did you deal with it?"

Tina shrugged. "He asked to speak to a manager and as the manager was dealing with some inane problem with the guy who was here to service the lights, for heaven's sake, I dealt with it. I didn't know that he was going to claim to be a soul mate of yours: I thought someone actually had a complaint. Anyway, he wanted to double check that you weren't his soul mate because the Kurt Hummel written on his hand was genuine."

Kurt listened to what Tina had said but one word registered. "He?"

Tina nodded and the self-satisfied look returned to her face. She held up the folded note. "This is his name and number." She explained. Tina put the note onto the bare wood of the drawing desk and carefully slid it from her side of the table to Kurt's. "And I think you should take a look at this one."

Frowning, Kurt picked up the folded place piece of paper and opened it. He shot Tina another look, this one filled with confusion and looked down at the writing. His confusion melted away and instead shock was written all over his face. He lifted his eyes to stare at Tina and she smiled and nodded once. Diplomatically, she stood and left the office, peering round the door at her friend before she silently closed it to give him some privacy.

Kurt's blue eyes were wide as he looked at the hand writing. His breath was caught in his throat. What this the real Blaine Anderson who had come into the store today? Had Kurt's soul mate actually been just a few steps away on the other side of the sound-proofed double doors?

Kurt lifted his left hand that trembled slightly. He laid the note flat on his desk and rested his hand next to it, palm up. His eyes flicked from the scars on the palm of his hand to the name written across the paper. *Blaine Anderson. Blaine Anderson.* They were identical. The hand writing was the exactly same.

## Chapter Four

Upon his return to halls, Blaine had fetched his laptop and had set up shop in Nick's dorm room. He was sitting on the neatly made bed with his legs crossed, the laptop resting on his knees and notes spread around him. Nick was sitting at the desk with his notes in a similar state of disarray but neither boy was working on their essay.

Sugar had knocked on the open door and come into room without an invitation. She was chewing a piece of gum and her eyes sparkled as she bounded into the room and sat on the bed.

"You need to tell us what happened, Blaine!" She insisted patting his sock covered foot with her hand. "What was Kurt like? Is he as cute in real life? What did he wear?"

Blaine laughed at her excitement. "I didn't actually see Kurt, Sugar." He slowly closed the laptop lid and moved it off his knees onto the bed. "I never thought I would. I saw his assistant instead."

"And?" Sugar stared at Blaine with expectation. "What did Kurt's assistant say?"

"Nothing." Blaine shrugged one shoulder. He hadn't gotten an answer and he'd texted Nick, Jennifer and Sugar as soon as he'd left the store. It was typical Sugar though, to want to hear the story in person even though she already knew it. "She took my number and said she'd call me. I doubt I'll even hear anything."

Nick and Sugar exchanged a look. "When you do get a return call," Nick added, jotting down something on a piece of lined paper he'd been using as a plan for the essay, "I can't wait to rub all of your insistence in your face."

Blaine pointed his finger at Nick. "And when you meet your Jeff, I'll be happy to return the irritating favour." He frowned at his friends. "Why *are* you guys obsessed with my Kurt being *the* Kurt anyway?"

Sugar squeezed his foot, her painted nails brightly coloured against the black of his socks. Blaine wiggled his toes unconsciously to her squeezing right by them.

"If he is your Kurt, Blainey-" Blaine scowled at the nickname "-then we don't want you missing out just because he's famous! Plus, we'll get lots of free stuff as your friends and he can totally use my ideas in his clothing!"

Both boys laughed affectionately at Sugar's excitement and Blaine uncrossed his legs, swinging them over the side of the bed. He looked from Nick to Sugar and back again. "Drink? Anyone want a drink?"

Nick ordered a coke and Sugar wanted a fruit smoothie so Blaine took a moment to slip on his shoes before leaving the dorm. He tucked his hands into his pocket, feeling for his ID card and some change. Laughter rang out from the dorm just as he started to walk down the hall and for a moment he wondered what his friends were talking about.

How Tina had reacted at hummels had retrospectively surprised him. Blaine had expected Tina to turn him down immediately. Of course, he had no idea if Tina knew who Kurt's true soul mate was. If you accidentally saw the name on a person's palm, it was deemed polite to pretend as if you'd never seen it. Only when someone physically showed you the palm of their hand could you act on the knowledge of who their soul mate was. Tina might not even know who Kurt had been looking for. And she certainly hadn't gasped with surprise or thrown her eyes to the heavens in joy when Blaine had given his name.

But there was something. She asked for his number and for him to write his name down. And it was obvious that asking someone who was claiming to be your boss' soul mate for their number wasn't standard practice.

As he walked down the stairs, Blaine ran his hand over his hair in restlessness. He probably wasn't going to hear anything from hummels. Tina had probably thrown away his number as soon as he left the shop. And that's what he needed to tell himself to get through this period of where he thought far too much.

Upon reaching the cafeteria, Blaine grabbed a can of coke and tucked that into the fold of his elbow. Holding the cold can against his waist, he took a bottle of sparkling water off the shelf in the fridge and then made his way to the bar. He dropped both drinks on the counter and leaned over, grabbing the attention of the single person on duty. She'd been flicking through a gossip magazine and looked entirely unimpressed that Blaine was disturbing her break.

"A fruit smoothie without mango, please." He ordered. Sugar detested mango and would sit there picking out even the smallest pieces if a fruit salad contained the fruit.

Blaine pulled out the loose change in his pocket and dumped the whole lot on the counter. Out of the mess of coins he extracted what he could, quarters and dimes to make up three dollars. Then he scooped the rest of the mess and dumped it back into his pocket. For the rest of the cost of the drinks, he pulled out

dollar notes and handed the mess of coins and notes to the girl. She sent a second very unimpressed look as she counted out the three dollars in coins but couldn't fault Blaine's math. Giving a contrary smile, Blaine tucked the coke into the fold of his arm again, held his water in one hand and Sugar's smoothie in the other.

He began his return journey, swinging the bottled water in one hand while keeping a close eye on the smoothie as it slopped around the plastic cup. It would be just his luck that the drink spilled over the edge despite the plastic dome lid the girl had slipped on the smoothie before he'd left the bar.

A vibration in his pocket made Blaine pause and count the vibrations: two for a text, more for a phone call. When the vibrations continued passed two, he swore. Of course someone would ring him right when he had no free hand to use. He looked from his left arm, holding the coke at his elbow and the smoothie in his hand, to his right hand with the sparkling water and tucked the bottle into the small space between his waist and forearm. He pressed tightly with his arm to hold the two drinks but didn't squeeze the plastic cup.

He fumbled with his phone and saw an unknown number.

"Hello?"

"Hi, is that Blaine?" A familiar female voice answered, sounding cheery.

Blaine nodded as he replied, a habit that often brought teasing from people watching him talk on the phone. "Yeah. Who's this?"

"It's Tina from hummels." Blaine's eyes widened and he'd have been staring at her had they been face to face. "We spoke earlier?"

"Yes. Yes. I remember." Blaine swallowed, his mouth suddenly dry.

"Well, if you aren't busy tomorrow, we'd like you to come back to the store." Tina was saying, her voice sounding tinny through the phone, "We can talk more about what we spoke about then."

"Any specific time?" Blaine had lectures all morning and one late in the afternoon but he'd miss them if needs be. It wasn't like he could mess Tina around; she would have a far busier schedule than the student

who's missed lecture notes would be uploaded to the intranet soon after the lecture. And he might end up meeting Kurt, who would have a far busier schedule than even his assistant.

"How about after lunch. Say four o'clock?"

"Four's fine." Blaine licked his lips and pressed his phone closer to his ear. "I can get to you for four. Thank you, for ringing me back."

"It's no problem. See you tomorrow at four." The phone call cut off a beat later and Blaine was left staring up the staircase with three drinks pressed against his left side.

*Oh G-d*, Blaine thought even as he held the phone to his ear. Kurt Hummel's assistant had not only called him back but had actually invited him back to the store this time tomorrow. Something told him that this wasn't a normal situation that the people close to someone famous did when there was a claim of a soul mate. He had imagined being turned away, even laughed away, when he'd gone to hummels earlier in the day. He'd also imagined never hearing from Tina again and assuming that no contact was a no.

But to not only get a reply from Kurt's assistant but to be invited back? How was that a normal situation.

Blaine finally lowered the phone, pressing the button on the top to lock it and slipped it into the pocket of his pants. Blindly, he reached for the bottle of water and continued his walk up the stairs to Nick's dorm room.

Every angle he took, every thought path he went down, led to one conclusion. The little voice at the back of his mind that agreed with Nick, Jennifer and Sugar every time they argued for *the* Kurt Hummel being *his* Kurt Hummel was cheering. The rest of Blaine's mind was soon catching up: except for the cynical, pessimistic part that wanted physical proof.

Physical proof like seeing Blaine Anderson written in Blaine's own handwriting across the heart line of Kurt's palm.

--

Kurt stayed late that evening, long after the store had closed and Tina had locked the front door up for the night. After Tina had given him the paper with Blaine's number on it, he'd left his office to get a coffee and to tell Tina to ring Blaine and "get him back here ASAP".

He'd continued drawing but his eyes had strayed to the folded paper left on his desk. Kurt had moved the paper around the whole afternoon. It was first lying on his lap where he'd glance every few moments. Then he'd rested the paper, utilising the fold Tina had created, against a picture of him and his father outside the first hummels store. After the paper had closed one too many times, Kurt had taken some sticky tape and tacked the paper to the front of his desktop Mac. When it was stuck to the computer, he had to physically turn his head to gaze at the handwriting. Handwriting that he frequently compared to the scars on his own hand; the two matched every time.

"For G-d's sake." Kurt had muttered when he looked back at his sketch book to see that he'd managed to complete one basic sketch of a new outfit in the past three hours. He glanced at the clock ticking away on the wall by the window. It read quarter to ten. Mentally taking away three hour to account for time difference, he picked up the phone and dialled Mercedes' number.

The long distance dialling tone sounded in Kurt's ear and he rubbed his forehead as he patiently waited. At quarter to seven in LA, there was still every possibility that Mercedes was busy with a music video or a rehearsal for the concert tour she'd be singing as a backup singer for. His friend had been out in LA for years now: in Kurt's eyes, it was high time she moved from the background to the foreground.

"Hey Kurt!" Mercedes' cheerful voice sounded through the phone. "Hang on one sec'." Kurt heard movement through the call, smiling to himself as he imagined her setting down whatever she'd been doing to talk to her close friend. "Ok, what's up?"

Kurt licked his lips. "Someone came into the store today, claiming they were my soul mate."

"Again?" Mercedes echoed Kurt's earlier annoyance. "I saw that that one girl yelled out before you opened that shop of yours. Some people are crazy."

"You're just one of the lucky ones!" He insisted. "You don't need to look anymore."

The laugh that sounded down the phone line was filled with fondness. "What was so special about this guy then," she asked, returning to the original topic of conversation, "like how come you're ringing me about another poser."

"I don't think it's a poser." There was silence from LA so Kurt continued. "Tina met him: he wanted to talk to a manager and she said she didn't want someone complaining a day after we opened. And he said his name was Blaine, 'Ceds."

Mercedes gasped. "His name was Blaine? As in Blaine Anderson?"

"Yeah." Kurt sighed and leant back against the leather cushion on his chair. "Tina even got him to write it down. The handwriting matches."

"Why is this a bad thing?" Mercedes sounded excited through the phone line. "Kurt, you'll meet your soul mate soon. That's nothing to be worried about. If that's why you're ringing-

"You know it is." Kurt confessed. "What if Tina's wrong, or this Blaine's just got a similar handwriting to my Blaine?"

Kurt heard his friend take a deep breath and let it out in a loud sigh. "This is just nerves talking." She said. "You'll know as soon as you look at each other. You know what connecting looks like: you saw it happen to Sam and me."

Kurt gave a lopsided smile to the empty room. He'd been walking in the halls of McKinley with Mercedes when they'd heard the name of the new kid at the school. Mercedes had gone pale and Kurt had had to practically drag her to the exit, where they'd sat outside for the whole of the break between first and second period. It had been lunch time when she'd first seen Sam and Sam had first seen Mercedes.

Connecting was also known as love at first sight. Soul mates would see each other and connect even without asking each other's names on some occasions. Names were always exchanged prior to accepting that the two people were soul mates but that was tradition.

What Kurt had watched when Mercedes and Sam had seen each other from across the hallway would have cracked even the thickest wall around the coldest heart. And at the time, Kurt was still dreaming of the romance seen in Broadway musicals, where Maria and Captain Von Trapp would dance with each other and fall deeply in love. Of course, it was later revealed in the gazebo after Maria came back at they were each other's soul mates but Kurt would still smile wistfully at their dancing while they connected.

In a small voice, Kurt said "And what if it isn't him?"



"Oh honey." Mercedes' voice was filled with comfort. "If it's not your Blaine then you keep looking. Because your soul mate is out there and he'll be waiting for you just as impatiently."

Kurt shook his head to clear it. "Enough about my soul mate; tell me how Sam is."

They spoke for a while after that, crossing topics from Sam to the music video Mercedes was staring in as one of two backup singers. Talk then swung to Kurt's store and how he was eagerly drawing the first designs for his third line, a line that was currently unnamed but wouldn't be shown to the public as an official line until the following year.

"Call me tomorrow, after you meet him." Mercedes ordered when the conversation had reached a natural end. "I want to know how it goes."

"I will," Kurt promised. "I'll speak to you soon."

"Bye Kurt!"

They put the phone down simultaneously and Kurt's eyes immediately went to the handwritten Blaine Anderson stuck to his computer. G-d how he wished it was tomorrow already. Getting through the night knowing that this time tomorrow he could have connected to his soul mate was not going to be an easy feat.

--

Blaine had taken far longer to dress for his second trip to hummels. Again he knew he couldn't wear anything designed by Kurt just in case the first impression he gave his soul mate was one of someone who was looking to freeload some fame.

He'd finished his morning classes and had spent two hours after lunch standing in front of his open wardrobe, eyes running from the pants to the shirts to the sweaters folded on the shelves. The one stroke of genius he'd had was to take out a white shirt and a red and blue striped bow tie. He wanted to look his best, after all.

*Red bow tie needs red pants*, he thought. Blaine reached out for a pair of bright red pants, flicked his eyes to the bow tie again and then grabbed a pair of muted red pants instead. He'd quickly gotten dressed and

was tying the bow tie when he spotted a white sweater vest. That would work. Last but by no means least, Blaine yanked a grey stripy cardigan off the hanger and slipped his feet into dark blue brogues.

He pulled the door open after triple checking his hair was gelled and no curl was left untamed. He knocked on the open door to Sugar's room and stuck his head inside.

"Do I look ok?" He asked, spreading his arms wide and twirling on the spot.

Sugar nodded, her pen poised over the sheet of notebook paper she'd been writing on. "What's going on?" She asked when Blaine hurried out of the room. She quickly stood and walked to the entrance of her dorm room. "Where are you going? Somewhere interesting?"

Blaine didn't stop walking but he replied over his shoulder. "Maybe!"

He didn't see the smile Sugar gave or the jump she made, her head tipped back and her arms spread wide, but he heard the gleeful squeal. Blaine shook his head fondly as he heard her cheer. His friends were more excited about this whole situation than he was: and they didn't know the half of it. Once he'd brought the requested drinks back to Nick's dorm room, he'd managed to get all emotions under control. Inexplicably, the conversation had turned to the latest movie releases and which ones they'd go out to the cinema to see. Not that Blaine was ungrateful to have to focus off him and his soul mate for a while.

With the topic of conversation changed, he hadn't mentioned the phone call. He didn't want them to pester him with texts every five minutes while he waited to see Tina, and probably Kurt. He definitely didn't want to be pounced on when he returned to his dorm and any and all information dragged out of him. He'd rather keep what would happen today to himself until he could fully process it himself.

As he sat on the subway, Blaine's leg bounced with nerves. He was resting his chin in his hand, elbow leaning on the arm rest between him and a large lady chatting loudly to her husband.

What would he do if Kurt really was his soul mate? Blaine had spent so long denying the possibility that someone famous could be predestined to be with him. The likelihood was impossible so why ponder what could never be, he'd argue to himself.

However, he was now faced with the very real possibility that he'd have a famous other half by the end of the day. How would they even get to know each other? The unfortunate reality was that some soul mates didn't end up together. Even being soul mates didn't deter from personal circumstances and events in

people's lives that made each other incompatible. Blaine had wished hard all throughout his youth that he did end up with his soul mate, wishing from even before his palm had scarred with Kurt's name.

What would it be like, having someone famous for a soul mate? Blaine wasn't kidding himself and thinking that it would be easy. They'd have very little privacy, if at all. Maybe it was best that Kurt was a fashion designer rather than, say, an actor: an actor would be famous amongst all types of people while a fashion designer would be known to the fashion conscious of the world. There might be a fair amount of people who didn't know Kurt's name.

But with the people who did know Kurt's name and with the fans who would do like the girl did at the opening of Kurt's store? How could Blaine, who'd no doubt be standing next to Kurt, handle that? What about the rumours that Kurt was in a relationship with Chandler Kiehl? If that were true and an unwanted soul mate turned up, how would he be treated?

*No, he thought. He had to stop this thought process right away. There's still that chance that Kurt isn't my soul mate. I'll deal with the technicalities another time. With him, actually.*

The stop was announced and Blaine stood, rubbing his hands together to keep himself occupied and to keep his thoughts from wandering further. He retraced his steps from the previous day, once more dodging shoppers who walked in and out of shops. His breaths grew shorter and shorter as he neared the shop and the hammering of his heart grew louder and louder.

Blaine gazed into the store from just outside for a few seconds. The shop itself was less busy today but there was no shortage in customers for the large queue by the tills. Behind them, Blaine could make out the double doors leading to the back of the shop.

He quickly checked his appearance in the reflection on the windows. He straightened his bow tie, patted down his gelled curls and tugged at his sweater and cardigan so that they lay perfectly arranged on his chest. Blaine rubbed sweaty palms on the back of his coat and pushed the door open. A woman strode out with three heavy bags and Blaine took the time to take a deep breath while he allowed her to exit the shop before he entered.

The shop was quiet in comparison to the hustle and bustle of the busy street outside. People weren't shouting across the shop floor in here, instead they hurried from side to side as they searched for the

perfect outfit or saw exactly what they'd been looking for forever on the other display. Blaine ignored everyone in the shop and walked right to the back of the store.

He returned to the same till as yesterday but a woman was serving there now. She ignored him. Blaine licked his lips and waited until the customer at the till had left and the new customer was walking towards the empty till.

"You'll have to go to the back of the queue." The employee informed Blaine with a tired voice. Somehow he imagined that she'd experienced a lot of people just walking right to the front of the tills in her retail experience.

"No I'm not buying." Blaine hurriedly assured her. The new customer had dumped the clothes onto the top of the counter and panted a little with the effort of carrying them. "I'm here to see Tina? My name's Blaine Anderson."

The woman sighed and lifted the small microphone closer to her lips, pressing the earpiece into her ear like the man had done yesterday.

"I just love these clothes, don't you?" The customer said, turning to look at Blaine while the employee spoke to someone. Blaine nodded but didn't strike up a conversation.

"She'll be right out." The woman barely gave Blaine a second look as she sharply opened a carrier bag and placed it on the counter to bag up the newly bought clothes easily.

Satisfied, Blaine backed away. He licked dry lips again and stared at the double doors. Yesterday it had taken a little while before one of those doors opened and someone stepped out onto the shop floor to speak to him. Today, the customer who'd spoken to Blaine was just handing over her credit card when the door further away from where Blaine stood opened and Tina walked out.

She was wearing another dress, this time one of Kurt's early designs, and heels and she beckoned to Blaine. He walked closer, glancing nervously at the tills as he walked behind the people working. No one commented and Tina gave him an encouraging smile.

She didn't speak until Blaine had walked passed her into the backroom of the shop. As she closed the door, she spoke in a soft voice that wouldn't carry through to the public area of the shop.

“Thank you for coming, Blaine.” She turned around and gestured in the direction they would go. “I know that meeting today was at short notice. I’m glad you could make it.”

Blaine shrugged as if to say it was no trouble. Which it wasn’t. “Um,” Blaine tugged at the hem of his cardigan with nerves, “can I ask why we’re meeting? I think I know but I wasn’t sure.”

Tina’s mouth twisted into a lopsided smile. She stopped at a door, a nondescript door that was painted white like the rest of the backroom she and Blaine had been walking down. She leant against it and knocked twice. Blaine had continued walking for a couple of steps as Tina had stopped so abruptly but was watching her curiously as she pushed the door open without a vocal invitation being heard from the corridor.

She held the door open and stood in the doorway. From the hall, Blaine saw a long oak table with at least eight chairs situated around it, a large screen at the far end and a projector on the ceiling. He was being shown into a meeting room.

“I’ll let Kurt answer that question.” Tina’s voice was quiet as Blaine passed her, walking into the room first.

The room was flooded with light coming from two large windows on the opposite wall. Blaine turned his head and followed the line of the windows, looking back towards the wall that separated this meeting room from the corridor. He caught sight of the bluest eyes he’d ever seen.

And all his worries faded away to dust.

## Chapter Five

Kurt had been pacing up and down his office since he'd gotten back from the café from lunch. Rachel had called him and invited him out and they'd spent a large portion of the meal talking about soul mates and how neither had found theirs yet. Rachel had moaned briefly about her past relationship with Kurt's brother and then grumbled over how long it was taking her to find her own Michael Levine.

"He's just taking his time," Rachel said as she took a sip of her coffee, "Letting me find my feet on the stage before swooping in and sweeping me off my feet."

Kurt had made the mistake of asking how her search for a role on Broadway was going and was left listening to his friend talk for as long as she could about the sheer number of auditions she had gone to and why couldn't anyone outside NYADA recognise her talent.

It had proved a good distraction from the impending meeting Kurt had later in the afternoon and Rachel had wrapped her arms around him tightly when they'd left the café to go their separate ways.

"Everything will go wonderfully." She had muttered in his ear, forever wary of the watching eyes of people in the café and on the street. "And then you and Blaine can help me find my Michael."

It had taken a little while, but once he was back in the quiet of his office and was listening to the original cast of Wicked as he drew, the nerves returned. Once again, he kept looking at the note that was stuck to his computer monitor.

Blaine Anderson.

G-d he wished today proved fruitful. The worrying he'd done overnight and the extra time in the morning he'd spent putting together the perfect outfit would be laughable if this Blaine wasn't his Blaine.

A knock on the door made Kurt's head jerk up to stare at the wood and the pencil in his hand drop to the desk. Tina peered round the door, holding onto the frame as her eyes skimmed over the scene before her. She was smiling and Kurt's stomach clenched.

"Just got a call from the tills outside," She said, unnecessarily as Kurt knew the only reason why she'd stick her head round his door at four in the afternoon today, "he's here."

Kurt stood and smoothed down the grey blazer he was wearing. Tina left the door open but walked away towards the tills and Kurt slowly followed her. At the start of the day, he hadn't been sure where to meet Blaine. Or even how to meet Blaine. He couldn't go out onto the shop floor and introduce himself there. The customers would have a field day with camera phones.

No: their first introductions had to be private.

Yet, meeting Blaine in his office was extremely formal. Kurt didn't want to intimidate his soul mate from the very beginning of their new relationship. That was hardly conducive to a happy relationship with his soul mate.

He'd settled for the large meeting room a few doors down from his office. It was large enough that should they not be soul mates, Kurt could stand on one side and Blaine on the other while they awkwardly made their way through telling Blaine to keep the name of Kurt's soul mate out of the press. But it was also private so that if they did connect and they were each other's soul mates, they could talk or decide where to go with their relationship without prying eyes or ears.

Kurt shut the door to the meeting room behind him. He walked around the head of the table and pulled the rolling black leather chair next to the head of the table away from the table and sat down, crossing one leg over the other. He'd settled his hands on his knee and immediately felt uncomfortable.

So he stood up and walked towards the large window to stare out over the New York streets he could see from there. It wasn't too much of a view: this was a one storey building he'd purchased for his shop so the windows opened onto nothing in particular.

From the reflection he could see in the windows, Kurt pulled at the top of his black turtleneck jumper and straightened it. Then he turned around as he made an instant decision that maybe he should be sitting down. The door opened.

Kurt jumped a little at the abrupt end to his nervous musings but saw half of Tina's body as she held the door open rather than a strange man who witnessed his shock. Having no time to choose exactly where to stand or even if to sit, Kurt stopped where he stood and pulled sharply at the bottom of his buttoned blazer.

The man, or rather young man, who entered with Tina's beckoning made Kurt's breath catch in his throat. Kurt hadn't tried to actively picture what Blaine would look like as he hadn't wanted to have built a picture up in his head only to be disappointed. But whatever he'd been thinking about his soul mate, the Blaine Anderson he saw before him fit the bill perfectly.

He had dark hair that was gelled down to be under control but Kurt could see the curls underneath the gel and immediately wondered what it would be like natural. He was wearing a bow tie and a cardigan and Kurt's mind jumped back to his sketchbook and the drawings he'd made yesterday. Then Blaine turned his head to look around the room and they locked eyes for the first time.

*Wow.* Kurt thought as he looked into Blaine's eyes. This had to be connecting. This Blaine had to be his soul mate. Those eyes: were they green? Brown? Hazel? Kurt could spend hours guessing and still wouldn't have a definite answer. And he wanted to spend those hours guessing.

He was glad he hadn't been sitting down. Kurt offered a small smile, higher on one side than the other, and was pleased when the smile was returned.

"Hi." He said. When looking back, he could have cringed at the awkward greeting.

Blaine's eyes were wide and seemed to get progressively wider when Kurt spoke. The effect did make him look like a deer caught in the headlights of an oncoming truck but his eyes were still beautiful. They looked almost shining now. Kurt was happy to stare right into Blaine's eyes while he waited patiently for him – for his soul mate – to react.

It took longer than Kurt had expected and he was just about to repeat his greeting when Blaine blinked and stepped forward. His eyes didn't return to normal size and when he spoke he did so with a voice that cracked mid-word. "Hi." Blaine coughed and Kurt smiled at the other boy's attempt to control his voice. "I-I'm Blaine."

After quickly unbuttoning the rest of his half open coat, shrugging it off and draping it carefully over the back of one of the rolling chairs, Blaine held out a hand that trembled but when Kurt took it in his own, he immediately felt the warmth and felt a little more comfortable in the awkward meeting. He was glad he hadn't decided to meet Blaine in his office. He could only hope that Blaine would feel more relaxed with their minimal physical contact.



"I'm Kurt." He said, before giving a small embarrassed smile, "But I guess you knew that."

Blaine nodded and looked down at the table, his face reflected in the varnished surface. He dropped Kurt's hand like a stone but Kurt kept his arm up and reached out towards his soul mate again. He nodded at Blaine's left hand, currently stuffed into the pocket of his red pants.

"May I?"

Blaine wordlessly held out his left hand and stretched out his fingers. There, scarred over his heart line, was Kurt's name. Kurt had seen it written in make up before and had spent years imagining what it would look on his soul mate's hand. But there was nothing like seeing it for real. Seeing Kurt Hummel scarred into a man's palm in his own hand writing.

The joy Kurt felt at the genuine mark on Blaine's palm bubbled up inside him and it took all the restraint he had not to cheer out loud or jump around the room in happiness. When their eyes had met, they'd connected. Obviously, Kurt had never experienced it before but he'd seen it enough times with friends and had heard the descriptions. The warmth he'd felt flooding through his body when he'd locked gazes with Blaine, the comfort he felt when they'd shaken hands; they were all feelings associated with finding your soul mate. Feelings that Kurt had waited a long time to experience for himself.

Kurt gently took hold of Blaine's palm and ran his thumb over the scarring. It wasn't like what Tina had done yesterday: this touch was feather light and gave Blaine goose bumps up and down his arm. Before he was asked or Kurt's mark was even mentioned, Kurt unfurled his left hand and held it up next to Blaine's, displaying his own palm and the Blaine Anderson scarred there.

Kurt watched Blaine's face from underneath his lashes. At least his wide eyes had returned to their normal size. But the expressions that flew through them were astounding. Shock, disbelief, awe, contentment, happiness, elation. A very small smile graced his full lips and Blaine followed Kurt's example, cupping Kurt's hand in his own palm and running a fingertip lightly over the scars bearing his name.

"I didn't expect that when I came here yesterday." Blaine admitted in a quiet voice. Neither boy had noticed that Tina had closed the door and left them alone.

“What were you expecting?” When Blaine looked up again, Kurt’s eyes searched his face. He flicked between staring at those big eyes, the colour of which he still hadn’t decided, and Blaine’s lips. So luscious, so kissable.

“To be turned away,” Blaine gave a small half shrug, “to be told that I wasn’t *the* Kurt Hummel’s soul mate.”

“And are you glad you were wrong?”

Blaine flipped his left hand over and took hold of Kurt’s hand. In an automatic reaction, Kurt lightly stroked the knuckles on the back of Blaine’s hand. Both boys looked down at their joined hands and then back up at each other.

“Very.”

--

The newly connected soul mates made their way out of the back of the store, stopping briefly for Kurt to grab his coat and sunglasses from his office. Tina had waved goodbye to them from where she was crouched over someone frantically typing away at a computer, a genuine smile directed towards the two boys.

They were headed to a nearby coffee shop, tucked away and quiet and often frequented by famous patrons. Kurt’s sunglasses did little for anonymity but they walked down mostly empty streets so they didn’t attract unwanted attention.

Both boys were walking with their hands in their coat pockets and both wanted to stroll down the street without a care in the world while they held hands with their newfound soul mate.

“It’s here.” Kurt said, pointing to a brown door flanked by two glass windows. Kurt twisted the metal handle and pushed the door open, walking inside and hearing Blaine close the door softly behind him.

Kurt had found this coffee shop when he’d first come to New York. He’d made his way to these streets and window shopped in any store he could find. When he’d tired and needed some food, extensive snooping around the smaller streets for a coffee shop had yielded this place. Called Flat White, there was an open mike night once a week and daily specials that were popular enough to run out by mid-afternoon.

Working at Flat White for three months was the final job Kurt had had before his internship at Marie Claire.

They approached the counter, the till at one end and the rest taken up with a large display of cakes and panini. At nearly four thirty in the afternoon, the lunch food was finished and the afternoon cakes were sitting temptingly below the glass.

"I'll have a grande non-fat mocha," Kurt told the barista, still wearing his sunglasses even though the interior of the coffee shop was darker than outside. He looked at Blaine questioningly. "And?"

"A medium drip." Blaine replied, telling the barista and Kurt at the same time. He pointed to one of the plates of cakes in the display. "And some chocolate biscotti. Please."

The girl behind the counter nodded and turned away to make the coffees. They waited by the till, hovering in an awkward silence. Blaine had taken to staring at Kurt, still in shock that the very person he'd convinced himself couldn't be his soul mate was in fact his soul mate. He hardly took his eyes off the designer, not thinking about how it might make him appear. Kurt was also staring at his soul mate but he had the advantage of discretion as his eyes were hidden by the sunglasses. In the silence, Kurt studied the profile of Blaine's face and how expressive his whole face was, enjoying the view and company more and more despite the lingering uncertainties between them.

Blaine shrugged one shoulder after they'd been unknowingly staring at each other for a while as the barista fiddled with the coffee machine. He gestured towards the biscotti and said: "I thought we could share the biscotti."

Kurt opened his mouth to say that he'd love to but the girl behind the counter returned and pushed a large tray with two mugs full of coffee across the shining counter towards them. She crouched behind the glass and slid the door open, grabbing the biscotti with the tongs and then balanced the plate and the tongs in one hand while she closed the door. Once again, Blaine and Kurt watched her complete their coffee order in total silence and she told them the price when she'd straightened up.

Immediately, both boys reached for their wallets. "This one's on me." Blaine insisted as he pulled his wallet from his pocket first. Kurt looked like he wanted to argue – he'd been the one to invite Blaine to coffee after all – but Blaine turned away and held out a folded bill to the barista.

Conceding defeat, Kurt took hold of the tray and carefully lifted it from the counter, trying his hardest not to spill a drop of either coffee. He walked straight to the back of the shop and chose a table where the two seats were already positioned close together as opposed to opposite each other. That way he could sit right next to Blaine without moving the chairs and looking too eager.

Kurt carefully transferred first Blaine's drip, then his mocha and finally the biscotti from the tray to the table. He turned around, planning to head back to the counter to return the tray, but saw Blaine walking nervously towards him and changed his mind. He dumped the tray on a nearby table and shrugged his outdoor coat off, folding it in half and draping it on the back of the chair, tugging at the bottom of his still buttoned blazer to make sure it lay straight.

Slipping off his sunglasses, Kurt smiled warmly at Blaine, who returned the smile more tentatively. He followed Kurt's example and took off his coat, hanging it over the back of the chair in a far more haphazard manner that Kurt had. They took their seats and wordlessly pulled their respective coffees towards them, taking delicate sips as both tried to think of something to say to the other.

For his part, Blaine was staring unabashed at Kurt again. Kurt was looking down at his mocha, his eyes shining and his lips curled in a contented smile that hadn't made it into any magazines. That was Blaine's new favourite smile – and he did an internal jump of joy when he realised that he could have opinions on Kurt's smiles without being an obsessed fan. He didn't understand how the universe worked in regards to the destiny of soul mates, but he thanked whatever determined that he was the soul mate of Kurt Hummel.

Meeting him in person had been like nothing he could have imagined. Blaine could have slapped himself when he'd stood silent, eyes wide with shock, at his first meeting with Kurt. A small part of his brain was yelling at him to move, to speak, to do anything but stand there gaping like a fish. But Kurt was human too: Blaine had loved his embarrassment when he'd said his name and the feel of his soft hands holding Blaine's was something he wanted over and over again. They hadn't held hands when walking to the coffee shop but Blaine could only count down the days until they would be comfortable enough with each other to do just that.

A rational thought sped through his romance-filled mind. They had been sitting at their table in seats where the arm rests were millimetres apart and not saying a word to each other.

Summoning the courage he had buried under sheer excitement, Blaine said: "We should start again."

Kurt looked up from his coffee, hands still cupping the ceramic mug, and blinked in confusion. A frown appeared on his forehead, perfectly maintained eyebrows coming together. "What do you mean?"

Blaine placed both hands in the coffee table, palms up. "I know you as the fashion designer whose name matches the one of my soul mate. You know me as the guy who came into your shop saying that he had your name on his palm. We should start again. Just two regular guys who are meeting for coffee after they connected."

That made sense. "Ok." Kurt nodded, a small smile back on his face. He released the mug and held out a hand once more. "I'm Kurt, it's nice to meet you."

Blaine took Kurt's hand in his own, feeling the heat from the coffee and the comfort he felt by holding Kurt's hand again, and shook it. "It's nice to meet you Kurt. My name's Blaine." They let go and Blaine leaned forward towards the table and closer to Kurt. "Tell me something about you that I don't know."

"Well," Kurt briefly stared at the table then returning his gaze to Blaine's colourful eyes. He tried not to think of the interviews. If he and Blaine were starting again, he had to pretend his early life stories hadn't been detailed in interviews he'd given to reporters and magazines. "I'm from Lima, Ohio. Moved to New York four years ago but I've wanted to move here since freshman year of high school. My dad's a mechanic back in Lima, my step-mum's a nurse. My step-brother is also a mechanic but he's planning to go into Basic Training."

That was more like how a first date should go.

"Your brother wants to go into the military?" Blaine twisted his mug on the saucer to give his hands something to do. He wanted to reach out and cover Kurt's hand, resting on the table next to his phone.

Kurt nodded. "The army. He's happy as a mechanic at the moment, but I think the army is still his plan."

"My brother's in Hollywood." Blaine reached out and tore a small bite of the biscotti off, dipping it into his cooling coffee. "That's almost nothing after the army."

"Would I know him from anything?"

Blaine shook his head. "Just some commercials. But you'd think they were main parts in Oscar worthy films from the way he goes on about them sometimes."

Following Blaine's example, Kurt reached out and tore a bite from the other side of the biscotti. However, he popped it into his mouth without dipping it in the mocha. "You've just got one brother?"

Conversation flowed after that. Kurt had been shocked when Blaine told him they'd grown up not two hours apart from each other. Having read the articles about Kurt, Blaine already knew that but there seemed to be an unspoken rule around the coffee table that neither of them mentioned Kurt's fame. Having one partner knowing more about the other wasn't in the recipe for a good first date.

"So you were in show choir too." Kurt had crossed one leg over the other, the metal of the eyelets on his shoes glinting the light in the coffee shop. "What were they called: we probably competed against you."

"The Warblers?" Blaine phrased it as a question. They'd long since emptied their coffee mugs and Blaine was debating getting a second cup and offering to buy Kurt another mocha. Half a biscotti was left and Blaine kept nudging the plate closer towards Kurt, not wanting to take the last bit of biscuit away from his soul mate.

Kurt tipped his head back and laughed, eyes crinkling happily in the corners. That laugh, along with his small smiles, could keep Blaine going for hours. "We did compete against you! My junior year. So," Kurt frowned, "your sophomore, I guess."

Blaine's mouth dropped open a little. "We competed against each other, on the same stage even, and didn't connect?"

Something hardened in Kurt's face and he waved a hand to dismiss the comment. "I wasn't at McKinley at that point. So I'd have been in the audience."

Blaine made a questioning noise but Kurt shook his head. "Another time, I promise." He licked his lips and looked everywhere but at Blaine's forever colour-changing eyes as he continued: "It's not the happiest story so I'll tell you another time."

Kurt's left hand was resting on the table, fingers naturally curled a little towards his palm. Blaine took this moment to reach out and slip his hand into Kurt's, squeezing the fingers in a comforting gesture about a story he knew nothing about. Any negative feelings bubbling inside him about the events of his junior year disappeared as Kurt stared at their linked hands.

Blaine gently pulled at Kurt's fingers to expose the scarred Blaine Anderson across his palm. "If you don't mind me asking," Blaine also avoided Kurt's eyes as he spoke, "when did you get your mark?"

"At thirteen. It was right when everyone else was getting theirs so the fact that mine was a boy's name didn't make its way round school for a little while." Kurt looked up at Blaine from below his lashes. "What about you?"

"Actually I was fourteen." Blaine rested his left hand flat against the table. Kurt took the invitation and rested his hand over Blaine's, covering the scars that read Kurt Hummel. Now they held both hands awkwardly over the table in the position they were seated in. Neither of them wanted to let go in favour of sitting more comfortably. "So what: two years after you?" Kurt nodded, "Mine was the last of my friends to develop. But it feels like I've been looking for you forever."

Kurt's face lit up, affection written all over it. He licked his lips and spoke in a quiet voice, as if speaking too loud would ruin the moment.

"Me too," He stared right into Blaine's eyes, "That's just the nicest way I've ever heard it described."

Before Blaine could reply, the moment was ruined by Kurt's phone vibrating against the wooden table. It had been vibrating with one or two shakes periodically but they had been so engrossed in their conversation that they'd ignored it. And the incessant vibrating that showed someone was phoning would have caught their attention anyway, had it not been in the middle of a serene and romantic moment for them.

Kurt let go of Blaine's hand, the one in the more uncomfortable position, and tapped the screen once the vibrations had stopped. The one missed call was showing up, along with ten texts and at least a dozen new emails.

Looking up, Kurt caught Blaine's gaze and was immediately filled with guilt. It showed in his expression because Blaine shook his head dismissively.

"Don't worry, Kurt." He said, squeezing the hand he still held again. "If you have to get back, I'll buy you a second mocha another day."

"Oh no." Kurt replied immediately. "I'm buying the next one. And I know your coffee order now so there's nothing for you to do when we order."

He hated having to leave. Flat White had been a sanctum for them for the past two hours. No one had bothered them: either they hadn't recognised Kurt or they were polite enough not to come up and ask for a photo or an autograph. Yet, his store had been open for three days now and the team working diligently on promoting and advertising the company and Kurt's clothes needed attention. Some of the emails were probably about problems in the production line of his current stock. There were always problems in the production of stock.

They had felt so comfortable around each other, once the initial awkward navigation into a flowing conversation had subsided, that the time had flown. Kurt couldn't remember the last time he'd gone two hours without checking his phone for updates on hummels: even earlier at lunch with Rachel he'd answered two emails about advertising.

With Blaine, Kurt didn't want that. He had felt comfortable and natural: like home. Tina was right. Kurt had spent two hours with his soul mate and he already felt like it was home.

"Give me your phone." Blaine blinked at Kurt for a moment before scrambling for his pocket. It would be easier if he let go of Kurt's hand but he didn't want to stop having contact with his soul mate just yet.

Blaine unlocked it first before handing his phone to Kurt. He didn't let go of Blaine's hand either and awkwardly tapped on the touch screen. When he returned it, he said: "I've put my number in there." Kurt smiled impishly, "I trust you won't give that out."

Blaine didn't reply verbally but shook his head emphatically. He clutched his phone tightly in his free hand, as if he were afraid that he'd let go of the phone and Kurt's number would be deleted. He blinked twice, considering the comment.

"Did you-" he licked his lips and Kurt tipped his head to the side while he waited for Blaine to regroup his thoughts. "Did you want to tell everyone that we've connected? Or did you want to keep it from the public?"

Kurt's eyebrows snapped together in a frown and Blaine hurriedly backtracked, a horrified look on his face.

"I didn't mean that you *wanted* to keep this a secret, or that you should, or that you should shout it from, from the rooftops or-"



“Blaine.” One word from Kurt stopped Blaine’s rambling mid-flow and he licked his lips again. “It’s ok. I just don’t want to end up on the front cover of Ok! or Us Weekly where all people do is take pictures of us while we eat. I’d like to at least get to know you before that happens.”

Blaine nodded. That made perfect sense. And he refused to wonder what life would be like when that did happen. There was no denying that it would. Kurt was a fast riser in the fashion world and his name was being spoken about with reverence at the twenty-two year old’s talent. With his public announcements that he hadn’t found his soul mate as of yet, the moment that Kurt stood up and said that Blaine was his soul mate, the press would have a field day.

And Blaine didn’t want to have cameras shoved in his face while he found out little details about Kurt. Like what his favourite colour is, how long it took for him to dress in the mornings, whether he sang in the showers and, for that matter, what music he would sing.

Blaine twisted around in his seat and grabbed hold of the corner of his coat. He tugged sharply and it followed Blaine’s movement, coming off the back of the chair quickly. He hadn’t let go of Kurt’s hand and when he turned back to the table, coat hanging by his side, he found Kurt’s eyes on him and filled with fondness.

“Can I see you sometime this week?” He asked, staring straight into Blaine’s big brown eyes. “Maybe on the weekend?” *For our first date* went unsaid. It was a superfluous comment as both Kurt and Blaine knew what meeting on the weekend would entail.

Kurt’s answer was Blaine’s beaming face. He nodded and said: “That’d be great.”

As the soul mates stared at each other, smiles on their faces and their hands still clutching each other’s tightly, they both had to suppress their emphatic feelings of joy that were bubbling through them. If they had been in private, Kurt would have held his clasped hands up to his face and rocked back and forth with a wide grin on his face. Blaine would have cheered out loud and spun in a circle, eyes and arms raised to the heavens.

For now, in public, they stared at each other and grasped hands tighter, linking their fingers together as they did so. Their outward and embarrassing expressions of excitement could wait until they were both in their rooms later that evening, having texted each other good night for the first time as soul mates.

## Chapter Six

Blaine hadn't stopped smiling for days. When he'd returned, Sugar, Nick and Jennifer had pounced on him and demanded to know where he had been all day. He'd made up something about going for a job interview at a café but his smile told them that he wasn't telling the whole truth. Still, no matter how hard they pressed, Blaine kept to what he and Kurt had decided and kept the truth to himself.

In lectures, his note-taking was even worse than before. In previous weeks during the most boring of lectures, Blaine would sit up straight in his chair and try to concentrate for the lecture, normally making it about fifteen minutes before giving up and relying on the online notes. Since he'd met Kurt and could now place a face – a beautiful face belonging to someone wonderful – to the name written on his hand, Blaine had turned up to the lectures in body but not in his mind.

He would text Kurt from inside the dark lecture halls, holding his screen up so that no one could peek over his shoulder to read the text because they were also bored or looking for a distraction. Sometimes Kurt would take ages to reply but he always gave a legitimate reason and would text for hours if he could.

The fact that Kurt would check his phone and reply to a text from Blaine at any point he could made the younger boy beam with happiness.

Blaine's phone vibrated twice in his hand in a rare moment that he was frantically scribbling down some information about the Industrial Revolution that he should use in his essay. An essay that was still completely unwritten. He finished his thought and even though he knew that the lecturer (not the old droning man this time but a young doctor who had a way with words) was still talking about something he could use, he couldn't resist unlocking his phone and reading Kurt's text.

**Are you busy tomorrow?**

Blaine didn't hesitate and was typing a reply before he'd fully registered the message.

*Not at all.*

**Can you meet me here just after closing time? Here as in hummels?**

*Of course. What are you planning?*

:)

Blaine locked his phone and looked up at the lecturer again. He'd moved on to another topic, one that Blaine wasn't particularly interested in and didn't need for his essay. He sighed and sat back in the uncomfortable wooden chair. His thumb moved slowly over his phone, stroking it absentmindedly. It was his current connection to Kurt and consequently, Blaine's current most precious item.

They'd texted regularly over the past two days starting from when Blaine had arrived at his dorms and closed the door to his room. He'd lent against the wood, tipped his head back so that it banged against the door and cradled his phone to his chest, a wide smile on his face.

Kurt had asked him when they'd unwillingly parted at the back door to his store that Blaine text him when he arrived home, so that Kurt could know that Blaine was home safely. It had taken the entire subway journey back to his dorms for Blaine to compose the perfect text.

*I've got home alright – so you don't need to worry. I had so much fun today, thank you.*

Their texts hadn't stopped since and as Kurt was so busy with the new store opening, they hadn't talked on the phone yet.

With the lecture ending in a few minutes, Blaine abandoned all attempts to pick up the thread once more. Instead he cast his mind around to try and figure out what to wear. He had to impress Kurt: this was their first date of course and Kurt was a fashion designer. It would hardly be right for the soul mate of a fashion designer to be entirely unfashionable himself.

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"Do I look ok?" Blaine stood in the doorway to Sugar's room again, with his arms spread wide so that she could see his outfit. He wore blue jeans, rolled up to just over the ankles and a white and black striped sweatshirt. He held a coat in his hand and a red scarf was tucked into one of the pockets.

"You asked me that the other day." Sugar said, slipping her eyelash curler back into her make up bag. She and Jennifer were off on a girls' night with a few of the other girls on their floor. "Where are you going?" She gasped and jumped out of her chair to run towards him. "Are you going on a date?"

She took Blaine's silence for a yes and squealed, hopping on the spot and clapping her hands together a few times. When Blaine held out his hand, the one not burdened with his coat, to calm her down, she took a step back and obviously looked his outfit over.

"You need something else, Blainey." Sugar grasped his free hand and pulled him out of the room, walking into the next door room and heading straight for Blaine's closet. Yanking the doors open, Sugar rummaged through Blaine's shelves. She pulled out a black and grey cardigan, which was tossed over her shoulder and landed on the bed. A grey stripy cardigan was similarly discarded.

"This one!" She said brightly and straightened from where she'd been bent nearly doubled. In her hands, she held Blaine's maroon cardigan and she thrust it towards him. Trusting her advice – Sugar was far more fashion conscious than Blaine, even though they both read Vogue from cover to cover together – Blaine put down his coat and slipped the cardigan over his arms. He walked to the full length mirror and buttoned it up.

Sugar came up behind him and had to stand on tiptoes to hook her chin over his shoulder. They both looked at the now complete outfit, which worked with the bold coloured cardigan.

"You've now been Sugared." Sugar laughed and pressed a kiss to the side of Blaine's jaw. "Go and wow your date."

Blaine turned his head and leaned a little away from Sugar in order to look at her over his shoulder. "Thanks." His voice was filled with sincerity and Sugar gave a bright smile to wave off the gratitude.

Ever the gentleman, Blaine let Sugar out of his room first, checked his pockets for his phone, keys and wallet and then locked the door. He slipped his coat on as he walked down the hallway and towards the stairs, nerves growing with every step.

Blaine had dated before. There had been Jeremiah – if that could be called dating – and then Sebastian – not that that involved much dating either – in senior year. There was something romantic about waiting for your soul mate, but some people didn't meet and connect until much later in life. Some people didn't meet their soul mates at all, or met briefly and didn't recognise each other for who they were. With his young crush on Jeremiah and the brief but memorable relationship he'd had with Sebastian, Blaine had had his share of dates.

The nerves that he'd felt on those dates were like comparing a tiny breeze to a hurricane. This wasn't just another boy, despite what Sugar had incorrectly deduced. This was Blaine's soul mate. The most important person in his life. The most important person that Blaine would ever have contact with.

Tonight would make or break their budding relationship.

Blaine shook his head and said out loud: "No."

He couldn't think like that. He and Kurt had gotten on fabulously in Flat White, after they'd dispelled the initial awkward silences. They talked like they had known each other for years and then had texted regularly about nothing in particular for the two interim days. Kurt had even sent Blaine a text about the pet shop he'd passed after a meeting and the canary he'd seen in the window and had wanted to buy.

Blaine had filed that away in his mind's box about Kurt for future reference. If Kurt really liked birds, then that could be a future birthday gift.

The time between Blaine's dorm room and hummels grew longer and shorter with each journey. The first three trips Blaine had undertaken lasted forever. The return journey after their coffee date and today's journey took no time at all. Blaine had been lost in his musings and when the crackly tannoy announced the stop he needed, Blaine jumped up in surprise and hurried passed grumbling passengers to stand by the doors.

The street was dark and nearly empty, street lamps shining brightly out of the night. The nerves only grew as he walked closer to hummels and Blaine took to staring at the cracks in the paving stones to focus on something other than the butterflies in his stomach.

Once reaching the back entrance to hummels, Blaine knocked a few times. He doubted that many people would be here. The shop had closed and he knew that only the necessary people stayed to cash the tills down and finish up their work once the shop itself closed. And this was a Saturday: granted the first Saturday the shop had been open, but employees would want to leave their jobs as soon as possible on a weekend.

Yet, no one answered Blaine's knock and he turned his head around when a dog barked from behind him followed by the sound of car horns in the distance. In the dark and the quiet, the back of hummels was intimidating. It did nothing to soothe his nerves.

Blaine knocked again but pulled out his phone and opened Kurt's number. He waited a moment – no answer at the door – and pressed the touch screen to call Kurt.

The dial tone sounded in his ear before Kurt's high and musical voice came on the line.

"Blaine!" Blaine smiled at the happiness he heard in Kurt's voice. "Are you here?"

Nodding, Blaine replied: "Yeah I'm outside. No one's let me in yet."

"I'll be right there."

Kurt put the phone down and Blaine held his cell in his hand, only slipping it into his coat pocket because a gust of biting cold wind blew through the small street at that point. He waited for a few moments, bouncing on the balls of his feet to rid himself of nerves.

The heavy silver back door opened to reveal a beaming Kurt. Blaine immediately smiled back and flicked his eyes over Kurt's long, lithe body. He looked fantastic. He was wearing tight black pants with pointed black boots, a pristine white shirt that was buttoned to the top, a black waist coat and a thin silver scarf wrapped twice around his neck. Blaine was immediately outgunned in the clothing department (not that he'd anticipated otherwise) but his soul mate really looked wonderful.

"You look amazing." Blaine said as he stepped inside the store. Kurt brushed imaginary lint from his black waistcoat and looked down at his outfit for a second before looking up at Blaine.

He frowned for a brief moment when he took in what Blaine was wearing and Blaine tugged at the bottom of his cardigan self-consciously. The frown lasted only a second and then Kurt beamed once more.

"So do you." He reached out and grabbed Blaine's hand, pulling him down the hallway towards the offices before he'd even had a chance to remove his scarf. Kurt walked beside his soul mate and glanced at him, emotion still written clearly on his face. "I'm really glad you could come tonight. I've been looking forward to this all week."

Blaine shook his head. "Me too. I couldn't wait to see you again after Wednesday."

"Your texts kept me going until tonight." Kurt dropped Blaine's hand, which felt colder from the abrupt end to the warmth Blaine felt when he was in contact with Kurt, and pushed a door open. The plaque on

the door read 'Kurt Hummel' and the inside was tastefully decorated with light walls, a dark wooden floor, and red skirting boards. A drawing desk was the main feature of the room but a computer desk was pushed into a corner away from the door. Comfortable rolling chairs were everywhere and Kurt jacket lay folded neatly over the arm rest of the chair behind the drawing desk.

Kurt was still talking while Blaine had looked around what he could only guess was Kurt's office. "I rang the restaurant that we're going to yesterday and they squeezed us in. Sometimes being a celebrity has its advantages." He looked up from where he was fiddling with the drawers and sent a blinding smile in Blaine's direction. "I really like the restaurant we're going to. I went there with my family when they came to New York the last time so it's got good memories already."

Blaine licked his lips and said: "I know I'll love it." *Because I'm with you* went unsaid but from Kurt's small smile, he knew what Blaine was implying.

He finished locking the drawers underneath the desk, storing away his precious sketch books for the night. He picked up the coat, a long grey pea coat that hit his knees and walked around the wooden desk to Blaine. Kurt followed Blaine out of the office, turning around to lock the door and then took Blaine's hand again.

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The restaurant they were going to was small, a deep blue awning over the front where outside tables must sit in the New York summer. The name was written in lowercase letters, babbo, with the Bs in black colouring and the vowels in red. Kurt tugged at Blaine's hand when he walked towards the door and Blaine stopped to look over the front of the restaurant. They hadn't let go of each other's hands through the entire drive from hummels to the restaurant (in the car driven by a driver, whose name Blaine hadn't caught and who Kurt had told that they wouldn't need him to pick them up later in the evening.)

Kurt was wearing his large round sunglasses again and in the dimly light foyer, he dipped his head so that he spoke quietly with the maître d who greeted them. The smartly dressed woman nodded once Kurt had finished talking, paused by the table where a reservations book was kept to cross out a line written there, and beckoned to Kurt and Blaine.

"This way, sirs." She said, her Italian accent pronounced. Kurt followed her and Blaine walked a pace behind him, following blindly as he looked around the restaurant they passed.

Red carpets were laid on the floor, the walls were a deep golden colour, the chairs were comfortable red leather chairs and the tables were made of a deep wood, although they were all covered with long white table cloths. Soft jazz music was playing in the main room but they were led passed the main room and into a private room where there were four tables, two of which were already occupied.

“This is our private room, sir.” The maître d spoke in a hushed tone to Kurt when they’d stopped at one of the empty tables. “You will not be disturbed here.”

They took their seats, Kurt sitting with his back to the door like he had done in Flat White. The maître d picked up the intricately folded napkin off the table, flung it open with an impressive snap and laid it on Kurt’s lap. Blaine scratched his fingertips on his pants with nerves when it was his turn to have his lap covered with a napkin that had been folded like an orchid.

He never ate in restaurants like this one. New York had its fair share of upmarket restaurants and its fair share of cheap places that poor students would frequent. He knew how to act in a restaurant like this, of course, but it had been a while since he and his family had gone out for a nice meal together. And that was the only time Blaine would go out to a nice restaurant.

Until he’d met Kurt.

They were presented with the menus but Kurt flicked his eyes briefly over his before folding it, laying it on the table in front of him, resting his arms on the table top and leaning forward.

“I asked for us to be here so that we weren’t disturbed.” He twisted the empty wine glass in front of him, long fingers curled around the thin glass stem. “I wanted tonight to be about us.”

Blaine also folded his menu but held it in his hands. “It’s fine.” He cast his eyes over the small room, music a little quieter in here and a huge white flowering plant the centrepiece of the room. “I’m glad we won’t be disturbed.”

Kurt beamed and Blaine opened his menu again. “You’ve been here before: what’s good?” He asked, looking up at Kurt from beneath long black lashes.

After giving his recommendations, Kurt shot Blaine a grin that spoke volumes of cheeky intention. “Don’t worry about desert though. I know the perfect place that’s not too far from here.”



"Is that why you didn't arrange a car to pick us up from here?" Blaine asked. He didn't know this neck of the woods too well but he cast his mind around to think of a place where they could just buy desert. He came up blank.

Before Kurt could answer, the waiter appeared and jotted their orders down on a small pad. He offered them the wine list but after a moment's silent communication, they both shook their heads at him. Blaine didn't handle alcohol all that well – he was a lightweight, something that greatly amused any college friend who tried to tempt him to get drunk – and wanted his memory of this evening intact. Not to mention he didn't want to make a complete fool of himself in front of his soul mate on their first official date.

He'd already made enough of a fool of himself by freezing where he stood when they'd been introduced.

The waiter poured a glass of water for them both and then lifted the unnecessary wine glasses from the table. Kurt took a sip of the water and then said: "I've been meaning to ask you since Thursday. You mentioned a subscription to Vogue."

His question unasked but Blaine still smiled with embarrassment and looked down at the table. He raised his hand and rested his forehead in it briefly before looking up Kurt again.

"Yeah." He shrugged. "I've subscribed to Vogue for years. It's an unhealthy addiction."

"It's not unhealthy." Kurt's face was earnest and he leant towards Blaine again, resting his arms on the table. "I do too. I've read it cover to cover for years. Since high school."

"Was it your dream?" Blaine cocked his head to the side. "To be featured in Vogue?"

"I like how you said featured. And I won't deny that that article is pinned to the wall near my bed." They shared a laugh. "But what would say was your favourite edition?"

Blaine knew the answer to that question immediately but pretended to think about it. "It was from a few years ago." Six years in fact. "But the Marion Cotillard cover is probably-"

Kurt gasped and threw out his hand to cover one of Blaine's, resting next to his water glass. "That's my favourite too!" Blaine gaped at him for a moment, remembered that he was on a date with his soul mate and quickly closed his mouth. "Nothing since that edition has come close. She's-"

“Amazing.” They said in unison and laughed again.

In one fell swoop, all the nerves Blaine had had on the journey to hummels and the journey to the restaurant were gone. Brushed away with a sweep of a broom. He was on a date with his soul mate. There was nothing more perfect than that.

“Being on Broadway was my dream for a long time.” Kurt had started digging into the side salad that accompanied his entrée and was looking at the plate while he spoke. “But I think fashion just took over.”

“Not that that was a bad thing.” Blaine raised an eyebrow and Kurt blushed, the red on his cheeks showing up clearly against his pale skin even in the dimmed lighting in the restaurant.

“No.” Kurt shrugged one shoulder and speared a bean onto the fork containing lettuce, alfalfa and a slice of tomato. “I still wanted to be up on stage in front of a crowd of people while they watched me sing a classic Broadway song.”

“What’s your favourite Broadway show then?” Blaine slipped a slice of the salmon into his mouth and chewed while watching his soul mate.

“Wicked.” Kurt replied without hesitation. He too took a bite of food and gestured towards Blaine, asking the same question with his actions.

“Mine’s Les Misérables.” Blaine smiled and wiggled his shoulders in a cocky manner. “I wanted to be Marius. The scene where he connects with Cosette... I always wanted to perform that.”

“Why didn’t you?” Kurt had rested his elbows on the table, crossed his hands (still holding the cutlery) and perched his chin on the back of his hands. “Why chose history rather than a theatre programme. And don’t give me rubbish about you not wanting to perform.” Kurt pre-empted the line that Blaine was already preparing in his head, “you were the lead singer for the Warblers. You must love the performance.”

For this conversation, Blaine laid his knife and fork gently on the plate: one to either side and hanging off the edge with the base on the table top.

“My dad.” Blaine focused on the bottom of the goblet with his untouched water rather than look into Kurt’s very blue eyes. “He didn’t think that the theatre was a good enough career.”

“Your brother’s a Hollywood actor.” Kurt pointed out, his voice sounding outraged already.

Blaine shrugged. “Cooper was-” he thought around for an appropriate word to describe his brother “-not the favourite, but he did what was expected.”

Blaine went quiet for a moment, again thinking of the correct words he’d need to tell Kurt about the status of things at home. But Kurt filled in the gap for him. “Your brother has a girl’s name on his palm.”

Blaine nodded and he cupped his left hand in his right, thumb resting over Kurt’s name scarred there. It was an action he’d done a hundred times over since he was fourteen, whenever the topic of the brothers’ soul mates was broached.

“My family knew I was gay before my mark developed. But I know my dad was holding out for an unexpected girl’s name. So was my mum, for that matter.” Blaine finally caught Kurt’s gaze and saw no pity, only curiosity and perhaps a little sympathy. “But once I had your name scarred there, they had to accept it.

“They didn’t stop me from things. Like I was still allowed to perform in the Warblers and I was allowed to go for extensive shopping trips and have my subscription to Vogue, but something like theatre as a job...” Blaine shook his head.

He licked his lips and frowned obviously, putting on a deep voice when he spoke to badly imitate his father. “You need a degree in something useful Blaine. Maybe law or a science so you can convert easily to pre-med.” Blaine shook his head and spoke in his own voice. “I would have just ignored him completely and applied for music programmes but he’s still my dad.”

While Blaine had been talking, Kurt had also put his knife and fork down. When Blaine’s face lost the happiness that had been ever present since Kurt had opened the heavy back door a few hours ago, he reached over and took one hand in his own. He hooked his fingers around the edge of Blaine’s hand and squeezed. Telling him that he was here even if no words were said.

“I’m lucky.” Kurt spoke in a quiet voice. “My dad already knew. It wasn’t that hard for him to figure out. So when your name developed, he wasn’t surprised at all.”

“He sounds like a wonderful person.”

Kurt nodded emphatically, his eyes shining. “He is. He means the world to me. And he’ll like you, I know it.”

Blaine sent Kurt a look that clearly said he didn’t believe a word of what he just said. Kurt’s father would probably scare him to pieces until he was accepted into the Hummel family. Just because Blaine was Kurt’s soul mate didn’t stop the need to get a parent’s approval for the relationship. From what Kurt had said and how he spoke about his father, Burt Hummel was an important man for Blaine to impress.

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“So where are we going to for desert?” Blaine asked as they stepped out into the evening after paying their cheque. There was a cold wind blowing down the street and Blaine shivered, tightening his scarf around his neck. Kurt also shivered and Blaine immediately stepped closer and slipped an arm around his waist to share some body heat through the coats.

It was a moment of silence and comfortable walking away from the restaurant before Blaine realised that not only did he have his arm around Kurt’s waist and hadn’t removed it but Kurt had put his arm around *his* waist.

The first reaction was to stiffen in shock and his eyes opened as wide as they had done when they’d met that first time in the large meeting room. However, the panic that coursed through his body lasted milliseconds. His mind firmly reminded his locked muscles that they’d spent an afternoon, two days and an evening of friendly and flirty conversation between newly connected soul mates.

He could hold Kurt’s waist without worry. Hadn’t they held hands for the journey to the restaurant? Blaine was with his soul mate. It didn’t matter that his soul mate was a famous designer who was lucky to get away with not having an unwanted entourage of paparazzi tonight. Their decision to keep the fact that they were soul mates out of the public eye for the near future meant that if there had been photographers snapping photographs while they walked, Blaine certainly couldn’t have his arm around Kurt’s waist. He’d enjoy this while he could.

“Blaine?”

Kurt’s voice broke through his musings and Blaine noticed they’d stopped walking. He’d been blindly following Kurt while he’d had his momentary mental crisis. Blaine shook his head once to clear it and then

sent an apologetic look towards Kurt. That was returned by an amused stare complete with one eyebrow raised.

“I was saying that we’re going to a crepe hut that I found a year or so ago.” His voice was mirth filled with teasing. Kurt started walking again and because they were tied together with their arms around each other, Blaine followed suit.

“Have you found everywhere that’s small and amazing in this city?”

Kurt laughed, throwing his head back and the sound musical. Blaine couldn’t help but smile in response to that laugh. Another favourite thing to add to the ever growing list about his soul mate.

“No.” Kurt shook his head and then reached up to move a lock of hair that had fallen down from the perfect coif and return it to the original place. “No I haven’t found everything. I needed jobs to get by before I bought my first shop and handed out my resume to any place that had availability. I just found places close to where I applied for jobs.”

Even having been in New York for three years, Blaine knew the famous tourist spots and the student places and that was it. Kurt had been in the city for an extra year, but he knew of the smaller places: smaller and fantastic. It was those that gave the city its flavour and personality.

They walked and talked about nothing and about everything. The tea parties Kurt would hold in his front garden with his dad. The dancing that Blaine would do in front of the television, Cooper learning the same moves behind him. Kurt being caught in the middle of a food fight during a lunch time performance with New Directions. Blaine giving a lunch time performance with the Warblers but this in the senior common room and resulting in a chorus of cheers.

Details about each other that both would eventually know and would only cement their relationship.

They passed an advert for a musical and Kurt gestured to the poster.

“I actually wanted to get us tickets for that tonight.” He turned from the poster and watched Blaine instead. “But Chandler couldn’t get me the tickets. So I chose the restaurant and crepe hut instead.”

Blaine looked back at the poster and saw the details the second time. The first time he’d glanced at it and saw it was advertising Mamma Mia! Now he looked at the poster a little closer and saw the name Chandler

Kiehl underneath the picture of the smiling girl in a wedding dress. Blaine's mind immediately jumped to what he knew about Chandler Kiehl: and what he knew was always connected to Kurt.

He tried to keep his voice steady as he asked: "How do you know Chandler Kiehl?"

Kurt had been watching the ground while Blaine had chewed his bottom lip and stared at the poster advertising Mamma Mia! Now he looked up at Blaine with a confused expression over his face. Blaine didn't repeat the question: he knew Kurt had heard him.

Kurt looked uncomfortable. He rubbed the back of his neck and actually worried at his lip for a moment. Blaine's heart seemed to freeze. Was Kurt going to tell him that Chandler was the old love of his life or even an old flame?

"You remember when I told you that I wouldn't have competed against you in my junior year?" Kurt asked. Not how Blaine had expected the explanation to start. He nodded despite his confusion. "Well there was this neanderthal at my school who was bullying me quite badly.

"I don't know whether he hated that it wasn't my name on his palm, or that he didn't like that I was completely comfortable with a boy's name on my palm or, I don't know. But he attacked me numerous times, even kissed me in the locker room and then threatened to kill me."

Blaine stopped walking and stared at his soul mate, his mouth a little open. "Oh my g-d, Kurt!" He exclaimed but Kurt shook his head.

"When my dad found out he obviously pulled me from McKinley and I went to North Lima High instead. That was just before the sectionals that we competed against you. At North Lima, I met Chandler. Who also has a boy's name on his palm and he was completely fine about it. So we became friends. I was only at North Lima for a few months but Chandler and I stayed friends after I moved back to McKinley, joined by our love of Broadway and New York. And we're still friends now."

Kurt shrugged and looked right into Blaine's eyes. "I don't see him as much as I'd like to, what with my workload and his rehearsals, but he was there for me at one of the most important times of my life. So he's a good friend."

Blaine had been rubbing his hand up and down Kurt's back, fingers splayed and palm running over the coarse material. The proximity and the steady movement over his back soothe any anxiety gained from talking about a profound memory. Kurt took a deep breath and then smiled.

"Come on." He jerked his head in the direction they'd been walking. "The crepe hut isn't too far from here and I really want one."

It took another ten minutes of walking in the chilled spring air to reach the crepe hut and it was nothing like Blaine had imagined. He'd pictured a very small shop named Crepe Hut. Where Kurt was taking actually was a hut in the middle of a large pedestrian only road that sold crepes. Two people were busy working inside the hut, pouring the crepe batter onto hot plates and adding savoury and sweet fillings according to the order. There was a small queue and Kurt immediately dragged Blaine towards the end of it.

They reluctantly relinquished their holds on each other's waists. Public, and cameras, were around now and their date had gone undisturbed so far. Neither Blaine nor Kurt wanted to jinx their luck that evening.

"Can I have a sweet one with bananas and nutella?" Kurt asked, almost bouncing on his toes with excitement when they finally reached the front of the queue. He had rested both hands on the wooden counter of the hut and now looked back over his shoulder to Blaine. His eyes asked the question and Blaine moved closer to see what was available. He barely resisted resting a hand on Kurt's back. He was desperate to have contact with his soul mate again.

"Um, can I have just sugar and lemon juice?" Blaine asked then spotted a large half full bottle of syrup. "And some maple syrup, please?"

The man inside the hut nodded and didn't look up at either man. He simply poured the batter onto the griddle and expertly made their crepes. Only when he handed over the two sweet filled crepes did he see who had ordered them and his eyes widened a little when they rested onto Kurt. He didn't spare a second glance for Blaine and just held out his crepe for the other man to take.

Kurt paid and they walked a little away from the crepe hut. Blaine was watching the man inside and it took the next customer three attempts to make their order before the man finally stopped staring at Blaine's famous soul mate.

Was that what it would be like all the time? Kurt couldn't go to get a desert from a hut in the middle of a random New York street without being stared at. Blaine immediately wanted to step up close to Kurt and force his attention away from the stares. Although, Kurt hadn't noticed: or if he had, he wasn't making as big a deal of it as Blaine was.

Shaking his head to clear his thoughts, Blaine tore a little crepe off with the plastic fork and dipped the plain crepe into some of the syrup and sugar filling further in the cone. He slipped it into his mouth and could have moaned at the taste. Soft crepe, sweet filling: it melted in his mouth perfectly.

He must have made a sound because Kurt looked up from his own desert and smiled widely.

"They are amazing aren't they?" He asked. His eyes were sparkling and the smile on his face was wide. Anyone would have smiled if they had seen him like that: looking wonderful and acting like he had no care in the world. Blaine was already on a high with his emotions from the whole date they'd had but seeing Kurt like that made his heart sore. And he was Blaine's soul mate. Blaine could see all of those moments for the rest of his life.

Blaine's eyes flicked from Kurt's very blue eyes to his lips. G-d he just wanted to kiss him then. If they hadn't been in public where someone had already recognised Kurt as the fashion designer, Blaine would have leant in and pressed his lips to his soul mate's.

As it was, Blaine finished his mouthful and watched Kurt tear a piece off his crepe, spear a slice of banana on the fork and slip the food into his mouth. He raised his eyes and saw Blaine was looking at him, a small smile on the younger man's face.

Kurt shrugged and Blaine explained: "You're beautiful."

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They stood outside Blaine's halls of residence with their hands linked once again. Both of them had finished their crepes in relative silence and then had walked for a little more, talking about life. When they had starting huddling with each other, walking closer and closer together for warmth they had reluctantly called it a night. There seemed to be an unspoken decision that going to either person's house – and only Kurt's was counted because secrecy would have been shot to hell had NYU students woken up on Sunday with Kurt Hummel leaving the halls – was not on the cards tonight.



The cab ride had been serene; they had held hands over the middle seat and looked at each other without saying much. They didn't need to say much: they were comfortable in silence.

"When am I going to see you again?" Blaine asked after he'd slipped enough money through the glass partition towards the bored taxi driver and had slid out of the cab after Kurt. "I know there's so much to do with your shop but I want to see you all the time."

"You're not alone there." Kurt shrugged and held out his hand for Blaine, who slipped his free hand into Kurt's. Now they were holding both hands while they faced each other on the cold empty street. A car occasionally went passed them and voices were heard shouting and singing from a few streets over but once the cab that had brought them to Blaine's dorms drove away, they were alone.

Still, Blaine watched Kurt's eyes move around the street and look for any prying eyes. He still had the same happy and contented look that Blaine had loved when spotting it back at the crepe hut. But something else was present in Kurt's eyes: worry about being somewhere that a stray photo could cost the budding relationship dearly.

Blaine looked at his dorms. The door was locked tight for the night: Blaine's ID card and key would let them in. The outer doors were glass but the inner door was thick wood and Blaine doubted there'd be students milling around the entrance to halls at this time of night; they'd either be out drinking or in their rooms working.

Letting go of both of Kurt's hands, Blaine dug into the pockets of his jacket to produce his ID card and key. He opened the door and tipped his head towards the inside, letting Kurt walk into the halls first. Kurt then, after checking with Blaine that he should continue, led the way passed the second door. Blaine quickly closed both doors, rubbing his hands together for a second to get used to the abrupt increase in warmth.

"There's a little more privacy here." Blaine shrugged one shoulder and took one of Kurt's hands. He never wanted to let go of this man. This perfect man. Who was his soul mate. Blaine doubted he'd ever get over that fact.

Kurt took a breath, once more cast his eyes around to make sure that no students were standing on the stairs or walking towards the halls on their way home. Then he took a stepped closer and pressed his lips to Blaine's.

Kurt's lips were soft, oh so soft, but he was pressing hard and Blaine's head moved back with surprise and the force before he realised what was happening and he pushed too. His eyes slid shut and he just felt. Kurt's hands in his, Kurt's lips on his own.

It was a short kiss and was just lips pressed together but the excitement that flooded through Blaine as he and Kurt opened their eyes at the same time was uncontrollable. Kurt looked almost shocked that he'd kissed Blaine and he kept silent, waiting for Blaine's reaction.

Which was to let go of Kurt's hands, step even closer, wrap his arms around Kurt's waist and kiss him again. Now Kurt's arms went around his neck and squeezed, keeping Blaine's head and, therefore, lips exactly where they were.

If Blaine enjoyed holding hands with Kurt, and holding his waist, it was nothing like kissing him. Maybe it was the fact that they were soul mates or maybe it was the perfect date that they'd had that evening. Blaine could have spent every moment kissing Kurt. He couldn't picture anything better.

A cheer from outside the building made them break apart but they stayed in each other's arms. The drunk students passed by without a care in the world and inside, Kurt and Blaine laughed at their noise and the abrupt end to their kiss.

"I should probably go home." Kurt's voice was filled with sorrow at the night ending. His eyes were shining again and Blaine couldn't help but sneak a kiss again.

"You'll text me when you get home?" He kept his voice low and Kurt smiled while he nodded. They kissed again, three short kisses, and a second noise from the outside stopped them again.

Blaine stood at the doorway, his hand resting on the open door and his head tipped to the side as he watched Kurt wave in his direction before he got into the ordered cab. He waited until the cab had driven off down the street before bounding up the stairs two steps at a time. He rested against the closed door of his room once he'd got back and took out his phone, staring at the black screen.

It wasn't until he was in bed nearly twenty minutes later, smiling up at the ceiling that Blaine's phone vibrated twice with a text.

**Good night Blaine :)**



## Chapter Seven

Sugar bounded into Blaine's bedroom and leapt face down onto his bed, her legs bent at the knee and dangling in the air. She gave Blaine, who was sitting at his desk and watching Sugar in the mirror, a wide smile.

"How was your date?" She asked in a sing-song voice. She even batted her eyelashes at Blaine in an attempt to make him answer.

Blaine shook his head and carried on scribbling a plan for his essay that he'd been writing before Sugar had barged in. He wrote for a few seconds to deliberately keep her in suspense.

"It was good." That was a total lie. 'The best night of my life' was a better description of how Blaine really felt about the previous night with Kurt. He could barely get his soul mate out of his mind and the kiss they'd shared just a few metres away and down a few flights of stairs was at the forefront of Blaine's memory.

"That's it?" Sugar sat up straighter, still lying on the bed but pushing her torso into the air. "Blainey you have to give me *something*! I was so excited last night when you came to me to make sure you looked ok. I told everyone I was with you were on a date: how will it look on me that all I have to tell them is 'it was good'?"

"Oh Sugar, you didn't." Blaine twisted around in his chair, hooking an arm over the back to keep his balance. He didn't want to be pestered by girls left right and centre because Sugar had told them that he was dating. His relationship with Kurt would be hard enough to keep from the press but persistent college girls who were far too over excited about gossip would be hard to control.

"Of course I did!" Sugar stood and walked over to where Blaine sat. She crouched down, perching her bum on a large pile of books, folders and roughly folded clothes. She squeezed Blaine's arm. "We all want you to have fun while you wait for Kurt. And I know this guy isn't your Kurt but he'll have to be good enough for you while you wait to meet Kurt."

Blaine barely suppressed a flinch when she spoke about his date being a person to spend time with while he waited for Kurt. His mind immediately jumped back to Kurt, specifically the kiss, but a small part felt

bad that he was hiding Kurt from his friends. Friends who had spent weeks trying to convince Blaine that Kurt Hummel was *Blaine's* Kurt.

Blaine could laugh about that now. He had been inexplicably drawn to the designer, wanting to know all about him, they'd grown up a mere few hours away in the same state and he'd been convinced the Kurt Hummel hadn't been his soul mate? His flawed argument disproved, all the facts lined up in Blaine's mind and led to the conclusion that he'd been in a serious place of denial. Not wanting to believe that his soul mate was right in front of him.

"Sugar?" Nick's voice came from the open door. "Do you mind if I talk to Blaine for a moment?"

He was holding his cell phone in front of him and gave a small smile to his friends, although the expression in his eyes was serious.

Sugar jumped up. "My two favourite gays want to talk? Say no more! I'll be next door should you need me."

Sugar pressed a kiss to Blaine's cheek and then to Nick's as she passed him. Blaine finished his sentence and then capped his pen. He turned to smile at Nick, who walked over and placed his cell right on front of Blaine.

He pointed to the touch screen. "Apparently Kurt Hummel was spotted out and about last night." Blaine tapped the screen to see the article and Nick carried on talking while he skimmed the words. "Spotted out in the middle of town with someone who had their hair gelled and wearing a coat that I know I bought with him last winter."

Blaine stopped scrolling down the article as he froze with Nick's words. His friend's tone was teasing but there was a real question behind the banter. He blinked and then continued to move the article around until he found the very picture Nick had seen.

Kurt was the focus, standing in the middle of the dark and grainy picture in his pea coat and silver scarf wrapped around his neck. He was holding the crepe up and the photo had captured a moment when he was tearing a piece away from the main crepe. Standing just to the side of Kurt was Blaine: only his back, but Blaine could clearly see his black coat and gel-controlled hair in the photo. It was obviously taken with a camera phone and sent to the tabloid but nowhere in the article did it question who Kurt's companion was.

“So?” Blaine tried to make his voice nonchalant. He only hoped he managed it: Nick knew him too well. “I bet lots of people have my coat.”

“People who have your coat, your gelled hair look and were out on a date last night with Kurt Hummel?” Nick took his cell out of Blaine’s hands. “I know you were on a date last night: Sugar told Jennifer and together they told everyone who had ears and half a brain.”

Blaine shrugged and Nick said: “You never did say if that girl from hummels called you back.”

Answering the unasked question, Blaine lied: “She did but it was nothing. I told you that Kurt Hummel wasn’t my soul mate.” A stab went through his stomach. He hated lying to his friends. “It’s just a coincidence.”

Nick left after that and sent a suspicious look in Blaine’s direction. Blaine replied with a bright smile and turned back to his plan. But seeing that photo from last night had turned his thoughts away from his degree and to Kurt again. Not that Kurt had been far from his mind since they’d met on Wednesday, let alone since the name had developed on Blaine’s palm.

He wanted to plan a date. Kurt had planned last night’s date and it had been perfect. Now Blaine wanted to do something. He knew what he’d like how could he manage it when he was dating a celebrity who was trying to keep his new relationship with his soul mate under the radar of the press?

He shrugged and picked up his pen once more. He’d work it out.

--

*Can you take Tuesday afternoon off?*

Kurt’s phone rang in the middle of the meeting but being the boss he could check the text without getting a disapproving look. After all, he rationalised to himself when other eyes in the room turned to look at the phone, he could be answering an email about some other important work.

The presentation he was listening to was about the website and the current demographics the site attracted. Blaine’s text was far more interesting than numbers being shoved in his face by people in ill-fitting suits.

Tina was sitting next to him and she watched him answer the text with a smile on his face, knowing simply from the smile who had contacted her old friend.

**This Tuesday? Of course.**

Kurt placed the phone back on the table. He was smiling. The presentation was detailing a drop in the interest of women 25-35 which wasn't the best of results but Kurt's soul mate had just invited him out of another date. He wasn't going to stop smiling for a while.

--

On the following Tuesday, Blaine once again made the journey on the subway to hummels but this time he walked right in through the front door and smiled at everyone who looked his way on the subway and in the store. He aimed straight for the double doors and ignored the funny looks he gained from the employees as he walked right round the tills and pushed open one of the double doors to get to the back of the store.

He was still smiling to himself, and everyone around him, as he wandered through the back of the store. A few people were stitching on mannequins and a couple more people were tapping away at their computers. Blaine didn't spare a second glance once he'd passed them, even though the receptionist who was always on the phone sent him a confused look.

Kurt's door was firmly closed and Blaine knocked a few times, waiting for an invitation inside. He stepped closer to the door, one ear almost pressed against it, to make sure he didn't miss Kurt speaking.

"Come in!" The voice was muffled but perfectly audible. Blaine took a moment to straighten the bowtie and then pushed the door open.

Kurt was bent low over his drawing desk, one hand pressing on the sketchbook and one hand gripping a pencil. He looked up from his drawing only when Blaine closed the door. The look on his face could only be described as elation.

Blaine walked swiftly forwards, rested a hand on the desk and bent over it to kiss Kurt hello. Even the few seconds they kissed, it was perfect. That's how Blaine had taken to describing how kissing Kurt felt. It was cliché and he knew that if anyone knew how he thought about it, he'd be teased none stop for hours.

But when Blaine drew away a little and opened his eyes, his breath caught. Kurt's eyes were closed and his lips were poking out a little, his cheeks a little flushed and the blush showing up against his porcelain skin. The midday sunlight streamed the windows behind Kurt and it highlighted the lighter brown in his hair.

G-d he was beautiful.

Finally Kurt's eyes opened and he smiled properly at Blaine.

"I could get used to that greeting." He let go of both the sketchbook and the pencil and leant back in his chair. Blaine took the time to tug one of the extra rolling chairs towards the desk but he sat right on the edge to stay as close as he could to his soul mate. He slipped the rucksack off his back and placed it carefully on the floor by his feet.

Finally tearing his eyes away from Kurt, Blaine looked at the sketches on his desk. They were wonderful; just of the body and the clothes in varying shades of grey. The one Kurt had been working on when Blaine had walked it was a sketch of someone in dark pants, a plain polo shirt and a bowtie. He looked at the drawing, focusing on the bowtie and unconsciously lifted his hand to touch the blue bowtie around his neck.

"Do you like them?" Kurt sounded nervous as he asked. Blaine nodded and pulled the sketchbook closer.

The drawings on the three pages before were similar to the latest one, with different colours and styles on the shirts. All featured bowties. One was coloured, in shades of grey, exactly like the one he had worn for their coffee date.

Blaine frowned at that and pointed to the bowtie. "This looks like mine." He said and looked up. Kurt's eyes were earnest, like he was waited on bated breath to hear what Blaine had to say about the prototype designs.

"It is. At least, like yours."

Blaine turned another page and was hit with drawings like the ones he'd worn on their first date: cardigans drawn and labelled to be with bright colours, striped sweatshirts and chinos.

"Are these my clothes?" He asked, not looking away from the sketchbook. He turned another page and saw an outfit he filed away for a later date. He didn't have a thick jumper in white but he did have polo shirts



that he could wear with the collars pulled out of the jumpers that he did have. Maybe he could get Kurt to root through his wardrobe and give him ideas.

“Those ones are.” Kurt’s voice was unexpected and broke through Blaine’s musings. He continued to flick through the sketchbook and smiled at clothes in the same style that he would wear. Three more outfits were new but using clothes that he already owned and he filed all of them away as good ideas.

“Those ones,” Kurt commentated, Blaine finally reaching the front of the sketchbook and looking at very rough drawings of striped shirts and bowties, “I drew before I met you.”

Blaine’s eyes shot up and he stared with his eyes wide open at Kurt, who nodded. “You drew these before you met me?” Kurt nodded again. “But they are just like what I wear.”

Almost lovingly, Kurt took back the sketchbook and closed it, slipping it into the open drawer below the desk.

“I just had ideas and drew them. I didn’t even realise I was drawing what you wear until I met you and saw practically one of my drawings off the page.” Kurt gestured to what Blaine was wearing today, dark jeans rolled up at the ankle, a checked shirt, a big red jumper and the blue bowtie. “I’m pretty sure what you’re wearing today is drawn in that book, at least in part.”

Kurt stood and walked around the desk, perching on the edge. Blaine slid back a little further on the chair so that he could look up Kurt easier.

“I guess we really are soul mates.” Kurt smiled brightly and pressed his lips to Blaine’s again.

--

His plan for the day had been to go to the park, take their time with eating the picnic and then stroll lovingly through the park until they were too tired or too cold to continue, at which point they would journey to Kurt’s apartment and spend the evening together there.

It had worked, in theory. Blaine knew of a private place in Central Park where a bank of trees hid a smaller almost enclosed area from the large green on the other side. They had walked there under the watchful eye of Kurt’s driver and then, on Kurt’s insistence, he’d left them to their date. Blaine had whipped out a blanket, which had been stuffed into the bag as a last minute addition, and laid it on the grass in

preparation of their picnic: ultimately sitting on the blanket, talking continually and eating Blaine's cooking for nearly three hours.

During that time, Blaine had thanked his mother and grandmother a thousand times over that he'd learnt their cheesecake recipe. Once they'd eaten their share of the exotic-type salads (pomegranate seeds worked wonders in Blaine's opinion) and the chicken marinated in honey, Blaine had pulled the box of cheesecake out of his rucksack.

To say Kurt had been pleased was an understatement. He'd taken one bite and declared it heavenly. Blaine had smiled widely and his chest had puffed out almost unconsciously. The desert that Blaine loved baking whenever he could just so happened to be his soul mate's favourite type of desert. What with Kurt admitting earlier that he'd been drawing Blaine's clothes and now this; Blaine was enjoying being this perfect man's soul mate.

However, the cheesecake eating had been interrupted by an untimely reminder of Kurt's fame.

They had been so absorbed in their food and each other's company for the past half hour, neither had noticed the increase in people peering through the trees or also setting up shop in the small area of the large park. They had noticed the increase in noise but had dismissed it. They were taking advantage of the warming weather and soft sunlight; why couldn't others?

It wasn't until the flash of a camera bulb taking a picture of the two that they even looked around. Kurt was wearing his sunglasses but it didn't help. His face had jerked away from the small bite of cheesecake he had left on his fork and saw a crowd of people. They were standing in a circle around the couple, whispering to each other and pointing in their direction. A few people had camera phones pointed their way and the flash had come from a tourist's camera.

"Oh my g-d." He'd said, his voice filled with anger and annoyance. "I thought the people paid to take pictures were like vultures but the ordinary public are just as bad."

Blaine quickly shoved the Tupperware boxes into his rucksack and gently pried the paper plate out of Kurt's hand. He pushed the last few bites of the cheesecake into the box with the spare slices and carefully closed the lid. Blaine was devastated. He really hadn't wanted to attract attention and he'd wagered that a less travelled area of Central Park in the middle of March would be safe from curious fans.

He and Kurt rose at the same time and Blaine finished packing up the picnic by haphazardly stuffing the blanket over the food. He went to press a hand to Kurt's back but stopped himself at the last minute. He knew that he needed to give Kurt some form of comfort; he just didn't know how to do so without increasing the interest of the public armed with cameras. Kurt's date had been ruined too after all. He settled for resting his hand on Kurt's upper arm but a second flash of a camera sent Kurt into another rage of muttering under his breath.

"Don't they have anything better to do than stand around like we're animals in the zoo?" He licked his lips. "There's a zoo in this very park but they choose to watch us instead."

They didn't speak again until they'd left the park and Blaine dropped his hand from Kurt's arm. Now they walked at a slower pace with the back of their hands brushing together as their arms swung. Blaine kept shooting glances towards Kurt, who was frowning while staring at the ground. The occasional flash of a camera alerted them to the continual presence of nosy public. Every time a picture was taken, Blaine had to resist the urge to turn around and reacting. If Kurt was handling it by ignoring everything around them then Blaine had to do the same.

"I'm not sure what your plans were for the rest of the day," Kurt said a few moments later when the average number of pictures taken per minute had dropped considerably, "but I can call Edward, have him pick us up and then we can go somewhere else. Get us away from the people who have nothing better to do than act like inane, brainless-"

Blaine put a hand on Kurt's arm, stopping his rant mid-sentence. "We can go back to yours, if you like." Blaine said before checking the time on his watch. "We can always finish the cheesecake or cook some food together, if you'd like that."

A smile appeared on Kurt's face at the suggestion and the dead weight that had settled in Blaine's chest lifted a little. He'd planned this date to include a lengthy stay in the park and he couldn't help thinking it was entirely his fault that they'd been spotted. Seeing Kurt smile with even an ounce of the same happiness he'd had before they were interrupted made Blaine feel like this was the lowest point they could be at and the only way to continue on was to go up.

--

Kurt took charge in his kitchen as soon as they'd walked through the apartment door. He'd hug his coat in a cupboard in the porch area and then bustled away, leaving Blaine to put his coat and bag alongside Kurt's and follow. He stared at the coats, side by side in the cupboard, and felt far more at home in a place he'd never been to before than he did in his dorms.

"How do you feel about a beef bourguignon?" Kurt called from the kitchen as Blaine made his way inside, glancing around the apartment as he did so. "I don't have any bacon though."

The apartment was as tasteful and fashionable as Blaine had expected. From where he walked before he hit the kitchen, he was the living room with its white sponge painted walls and red skirting boards, dark wooden floor and long red drapes covering the windows. While there were the customary couches, arm chairs and wall-mounted television in the living room, Blaine saw numerous photographs of people who could only be Kurt's family and friends dotted around the room. A magazine lay open on the coffee table and a pile of them were stacked on a small side table near the door to the living room.

"Blaine?"

Blaine followed Kurt's voice into the kitchen and saw the other man standing by the open fridge. He kept one hand on the door but was looking over his shoulder to find Blaine, the muscles in his shoulders clear under his shirt and the tendons in his neck stretching in such a way that Blaine's eyes followed the line of them to the collar of Kurt's shirt before he even responded.

"We could always go for something lighter." Blaine offered as an alternative. The beef would probably be frozen and half-defrosted-before-cooking beef bourguignon wasn't the greatest meal, even if it was cooked by a master in the kitchen, as Kurt claimed to be.

"Like what?"

Blaine walked even closer and pressed himself to Kurt's back, sliding one hand around his waist to hold Kurt's body in place and hooking his chin over Kurt's shoulder under the pretence of looking in the fridge for ingredients. Kurt leaned back into Blaine's embrace and turned his head to watch.

"We can always make a carbonara." Blaine pointed to where an open packet of smoked salmon was placed in prime position on a shelf. "We can make it with smoked salmon instead of the bacon."

Kurt laughed and Blaine felt the laughter through where his chest was pressed to Kurt's back. He turned to look at Kurt, catching his gaze easily and comfortably. Blaine could stare into Kurt's eyes for hours, he'd discovered today. They were forever changing: blue, green, grey, mixtures of all three. So expressive, so beautiful.

"Ok, Mr Anderson." Kurt said and pecked Blaine on the lips as he spoke. "Wow me with your smoked salmon spaghetti carbonara."

It took a moment for the boys to step out of each other's arms but eventually they did, Kurt going to perch on the tall stool by his granite counter and Blaine diving into the fridge to pull out all the necessary ingredients. He put the pasta onto boil, smiling to himself as he felt Kurt's eyes follow him around the kitchen.

Being unfamiliar in Kurt's kitchen, Blaine had to open many different cupboards and drawers until he found the correct utensil. Kurt would point out the correct spot for whatever Blaine was looking for and the thank you that Blaine gave each time was a quick peck on the lips.

"Do you mind if I put some music on?" Blaine asked, an idea striking him as he stirred the bubbling spaghetti. He kept one hand moving the wooden spoon in circles in the pot but turned around to look at Kurt as he asked, sending a blinding smile Kurt's way. "I can wow you with my cooking and singing, if you'd like."

Kurt waved a hand as if to say 'sing away'. He pointed towards the spaghetti pot and said: "I can stir while you get your background music set up if you'd like, Blaine Warbler."

*Blaine Warbler?* Blaine couldn't help chuckling at the fond nickname and briefly imagined a seventeen year old Kurt teasing a sixteen year old Blaine with that nickname while they sat in a restaurant or a coffee shop discussing their competing show choirs.

"I've got an iPod dock in the lounge that'll play in the kitchen." Kurt called out as Blaine bustled out of the kitchen to take his iPod out of his bag and plug it in. The *Blaine Warbler* tease had sparked a memory and while the sentiment would be a little out of place, he couldn't resist. He quickly scrolled down to the chosen song, karaoke version still loaded onto the device from years past, and pressed play.

The last time he'd sung this song it had been with the Warblers, a cappella and with over a dozen teenage boys singing backup. This was still Blaine's song though.

He assumed the same position they'd been in by the open door of the fridge, cupping both sides of Kurt's hips in his hands this time and pressing his lips to the join of Kurt's jaw and neck before he sang the opening line.

*"You think I'm pretty without any make up on,"* Kurt immediately laughed, throwing his head back to rest it comfortably on Blaine's shoulder as the words of the song finally identified the tune that had been so familiar.

*"You think I'm funny when I tell the punch line wrong."* Blaine stepped back from the stove and pulled Kurt with him, making the other man drop the wooden spoon in the nearly cooked spaghetti.

*"I know you get me, so I let my walls come down."* With the third line, Blaine quickly spun Kurt around in his arms until they faced each other. The brief pause in the singing gave enough time for Kurt to cup Blaine's face in his hands and kiss him.

As he sung, Blaine walked Kurt back to the seat, returning each of the love-struck looks Kurt sent his way. He also had to strain the spaghetti and stir in the creamy sauce, which wasn't in the original choreography but Blaine added in more looks over his shoulder towards Kurt as he cooked and sung simultaneously.

When the music finished, Kurt clapped appreciatively but he fixed Blaine with a raised eyebrow and amused look. "Neither of us are teenagers." He pointed out.

Blaine shrugged and spoke to Kurt while he was adding the smoked salmon to finish off the meal. "So? The sentiment stands." He turned around, two bowls of spaghetti carbonara in his hands and a small smile on his face. "And Katy Perry is amazing."

--

They'd eaten the spaghetti sat side by side at the dining room table, talking about the music that they both liked and musicals that they both wanted to see with each other. Kurt had been admittedly impressed by the carbonara which had made Blaine's heart swell with joy. The fiasco of being caught by the public out in the park seemed to have been banished from Kurt's mind and the joyous smile that had been ever present during their time in the park was back. Blaine was also extremely glad that he'd impressed Kurt with his

cooking: the old saying that the way to a man's heart was through his stomach was a regularly repeated phrase in Blaine's extended family.

Kurt had insisted they eat the remaining pieces of the cheesecake in the living room, once again sitting side by side on the large leather couch that took up most of the room. Once they'd finished their deserts, Kurt had turned on the TV, choosing a random episode of Project Runway that was being shown at the time but the TV was on mute and neither Blaine nor Kurt was watching the episode.

They'd migrated from sitting snuggled up next to each other to Kurt straddling Blaine's lap, fingers breaking apart the gel in Blaine's hair and he cupped the back of his head to hold their lips together. They were kissing fiercely, mouths wide moving against each other in sync , tongues deep in each other's mouths. Blaine had both hands on Kurt's ass, alternating between rubbing and squeezing his firm, round ass through the rough material on his pants.

They were moving their hips, Blaine thrusting up to meet Kurt's downward thrusts, never quite perfectly timed and continually sending sparks of pleasure through his body, all aimed at his crotch. The grip Kurt had on the back of his head tightened and a moan was ripped from Blaine's through at the sharp pain that morphed into pleasure instantly.

He let go of one of Kurt's ass cheeks and hooked his fingers into the belt hook at the front of Kurt's pants. He pulled and brought their hips together at the same time. Even through the thick denim, he could feel the outline of Kurt's hard cock pressed against his own and he couldn't resist and extra thrust while he held Kurt's hips to his own.

"Oh g-d, Blaine," Kurt's voice was lower than usual and hearing the lower register sent a shiver down Blaine's spine. Their kiss broken, Blaine let go of Kurt's other cheek and cupped the back of his head, bringing Kurt's neck closer to his seeking lips. He licked his way from collarbone to jaw , Kurt's tipping his head in the opposite direction to allow far more access.

The intense heat from Kurt's body, the feel of his moving on Blaine's lap, all of it was driving Blaine to lose any sense of control. He wanted more: wanted to keep his lips pressed against Kurt's neck, tasting the light sheen of sweat mixed with sheer arousal; wanted to feel Kurt's cock pressed against his own without any barrier of clothing.

Blaine groaned against the soft skin of Kurt's neck when the other man took control and rolled his hips down, a perfectly angular thrust that put enough pressure of Blaine's cock to drive him wild. He let go of Kurt's belt hook and slid his hand down the back of his pants, cupping soft and overheated flesh and feeling sparks from wherever his fingertips touched Kurt's skin. He drove his hand as far down the back of Kurt's tight jeans as he possible could, having greatly appreciated the pants before but cursing their restrictive movements now.

Kurt tightened his grip in Blaine's messed curls again and wrapped his other arm around Blaine's back, gripping the back of his shoulder and forcing them even closer. Blaine was pressing open mouth kisses to Kurt's neck, switching from licking to kissing every so often, but couldn't control the groan as he felt Kurt's tugging at his hair.

"You ok?" Kurt asked, his voice low, filled with lust and whispered in Blaine's ear. The shivers that shot down Blaine's spine could have been from the spike of arousal or the proximity.

Blaine nodded, pupils wide, lips flushed, glistening and inviting. They leant forward simultaneously, kissing feverishly. The room was filled with the sounds of their kisses, their heavy breathing and the soft squeaks of the leather couch as it protested their unstoppable thrusts.

Kurt tore his mouth away as if starving for air but held his lips against Blaine's, open and panting for breath. "I can't come in these pants Blaine." He said, voice still low and laced with arousal.

Blaine spoke without thinking, completely surrounded by Kurt and never more comfortable speaking what he thought: "So let me blow you."

They opened their eyes and stared at each other, lust filled deep blue meeting lust filled golden brown. Blaine paused for a moment, not letting go of his grip on Kurt's neck or his ass, as what he'd just said broke through the roaring in his ears. The idea was a good one.

"G-d Kurt, please let me blow you." He insisted. He leant forward and caught Kurt's lips again, coaxing them open and massaging Kurt's tongue with his own. He felt Kurt's moan start in his chest, not a hair's breadth apart from his own, but didn't stop kissing Kurt, not wanting their lips to part even for a second.

After a long kiss, Blaine felt Kurt nod and it was like that was a signal to move. Blaine took his hand out of the pack of Kurt's pants and undid the button with one hand while they continued with their fiery kiss.



Kurt's hands were scrambling at the bottom of Blaine's shirt, Blaine not having noticed when they'd left his hair, and every skim of Kurt's long, thin fingers across the heated skin of his waist sent sparks to his cock.

Kurt's pants were unzipped and Blaine's top had landed somewhere behind the couch before they broke their kiss and moved. Kurt slid to one side, settling on the couch as he tugged his jeans over his hips. Blaine sunk to the floor, on his knees in between Kurt's spread legs. Not breaking eye contact for a second, he leant forwards to take over pulling those tight and inviting pants down Kurt's long legs. Kurt tugged his shirt over his head and laid it on the couch, chest heaving and loud breaths filling the room.

From his position between Kurt's knees, the sight that greeted Blaine was indescribable. He couldn't resist running his hand up Kurt's pale and firm chest, flicking his thumb over one of his nipples until it peaked. He tugged the waistband of the pants over Kurt's knees but the sight of Kurt palming himself over his boxer-briefs stopped his movements. Blaine licked his lips and looked up at Kurt from under his long lashes.

Even with pants around Kurt's knees, Blaine leant forward and pressed his mouth against the silhouette of Kurt's cock, straining against the fabric. Kurt moaned and took his hand away, letting it rest on the nape of Blaine's neck, not applying any pressure but a constant reminder of whose cock Blaine's mouth was desperate for. He moved his mouth up and down the shaft, tongue pressed against the fabric, and his eyes never dropping Kurt's gaze. Blindly he pushed Kurt's pants down as far as they'd go and Kurt kicked the bundle of denim off one foot to free his legs.

Blaine was massaging Kurt's strong thighs as he mouthed over Kurt's cock, Kurt's legs spreading wider apart to fit perfectly around Blaine's broad shoulders. Locking gazes once more, Blaine carefully lifted the waistband of Kurt's underwear over his cock, tucking it under his balls as his cock sprang free and bobbed against his taut stomach. Kurt lifted his hips to allow Blaine to pull his underwear off completely, joining his pants bunched up on one leg. As he drew Kurt's underwear off his legs, Blaine stuck his tongue out and licked, tasting pre-come and seeing the muscles of Kurt's thighs jump.

Kurt moaned and the pressure on the back of Blaine's neck increased ever so slightly. With the hand not still tangled in Kurt's underwear, Blaine took hold of the base of Kurt's cock and held it straight up. He leaned forward and licked at Kurt's balls, testing the feel on his tongue before running his tongue up the underside of Kurt's cock until he could wrap his lips around the tip.

Blaine lowered his head, taking more of Kurt inside his mouth and never once breaking eye contact. His soul mate's cock stretched his mouth, tongue pressed against the vein running down the underside, the feel so hot, so smooth. With the feel of Kurt's cock heavy in his mouth and the sight of his blue eyes, so dark and so beautiful, Blaine could barely think straight. He untangled his hand from Kurt's clothes and pressed the heel against his own cock, straining against the constricting pants he still wore.

He bobbed his head, hollowing his cheeks every time he rose, never dropping eye contact and totally losing himself in Kurt's gaze. He kept one hand wrapped around the base of Kurt's cock and alternated between rubbing Kurt's inner thigh, gently rolling his balls and pressing down on his own cock with his free hand.

Kurt's hand migrated from the back of his neck until it was tightly gripping the curls pulled free from the gel, the pull of his hair making Blaine moan around Kurt's shaft, an effect that resulted in gasps and moans from Kurt.

"Oh g-d Blaine," Kurt said, voice even huskier as Blaine took more and more into his mouth. He gagged a little the first time he tried to swallow around him and lifted his head slightly. A brush on knuckles against his cheekbone made Blaine look up at Kurt, having dropped his gaze momentarily. Even through the arousal, Kurt's blue eyes were shining.

This time he held Kurt's gaze as he bobbed his head once, twice, swallowing each time he moved down and hollowing his cheeks as he rose. Kurt's thighs shook and the hand twisted in his hair tightened, telling Blaine without words what he needed to know.

"Oh g-d, g-d, Blaine." Kurt threw his head back against the top of the couch as Blaine dipped his head one more time and swallowed. Kurt's hips lifted to force his cock even deeper into Blaine's mouth as hot spunk filled Blaine's mouth. He swallowed as much as he could, small streaks still leaking out from the corners of his mouth.

Blaine leant back, sitting on his haunches with the heel of his hand once again pressed against his cock. He was aching hard and the sight of Kurt basking momentarily in his afterglow only increased his arousal. He used one finger to wipe the trails of come from around his mouth and sucked it off, lips swollen from the blow-job circling his finger in a pale imitation of what had taken place only moments ago.

Kurt opened his eyes and smiled weakly at Blaine before leaning down and smashing their lips together, prising Blaine's open and hungrily kissing. Blaine moaned, swung his arms up and around Kurt's neck and held on for what seemed like dear life. The kiss itself did nothing but heighten just how turned on he was and he knew that he wouldn't last much longer, the blow-job he'd given Kurt almost making him come in his pants.

Kurt slowly sat back against the couch, drawing Blaine off his knees and up onto the couch to straddle his legs by never breaking the kiss. Now he cupped Blaine's firm ass, slapping one cheek and unbuttoning the pants with his other hand. The immediate release of pressure made Blaine gasp into the kiss but it morphed into a moan when Kurt expertly unzipped his jeans and took Blaine out of his underwear. He squeezed the hot hard flesh and began moving his hand, dry friction just too much but exactly what Blaine needed.

It didn't take long. Blaine was strung out and the whole scenario was heightened by the simple fact that this was Kurt. After only a few minutes, after Kurt had licked a broad stripe down the middle of his palm and returned his attention to Blaine's cock, Blaine was panting against Kurt's lips, gasping Kurt's name between breaths.

Kurt's hand twisted under the head of his cock and Blaine tipped over the edge. He came with a cry, tore his lips away from Kurt's, white streams spilling onto Kurt's stomach. He panted, resting his forehead against Kurt as his soul mate jerked his hand a few more times, squeezing out the last drops of Blaine's come.

The silence was filled with heavy breathing again and they opened their eyes briefly before Kurt leant forward to press his lips to Blaine's in a sweet kiss that suited the afterglow. Then he fell back against the couch and once again rested his head on the back of the large cushion they were sat on.

Blaine felt Kurt's chuckle before he heard it, his bare chest moving and making Blaine, who had collapsed against him, move too. He lifted his head and watched Kurt stop laughing, wipe his sweaty hair off his forehead and then finally look at Blaine.

Blaine shrugged and asked *what* with his eyes.

Kurt gestured to the couch and said: "We shouldn't have done this on the leather."

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Blaine had stood first, stumbling a bit on shaky legs before helping Kurt stand up. They laughed as the sound of Kurt unsticking from the leather couch filled the room, completely unsexy after the sex they'd just had. Kurt struggled to gain his balance from the pants still stuck around one ankle and together they pulled the tight jeans off Kurt's leg and stripped Blaine of the pants they hadn't bothered to remove at all.

Kurt, now completely naked, was moving around the room and scooping up their clothes, hanging them over the arm that was also holding his boots. Blaine picked his pants and underwear off the floor where he'd just left them and followed Kurt further in the apartment, finally taking the time to look at his soul mate's naked body.

Kurt was flawless, all lines and toned muscles. His back and shoulders were strong, his ass round and firm and his legs long. Kurt turned around abruptly and Blaine's eyes flicked from where they'd been staring at his ass while he walked to looking at Kurt properly.

He had a knowing smile on his face but didn't comment. Instead he jerked his head to the closed door behind him as asked: "You are staying tonight, right?"

The previous night's romanticism was out the window. Blaine nodded emphatically and Kurt beamed. "The bathroom's through here, if you wanted a shower. I can have one after you."

Blaine followed Kurt into his bedroom and looked around, dropping his clothes onto a large wicker chair close to the door. This room was also painted in white but the skirting boards were dark blue that matched the soft carpet on the floor. A large king sized bed took up a lot of the space, shelves covered the whole of one wall and were filled with books and pictures and trinkets from Kurt's past. One door was firmly shut – Blaine guessed that was the closet – and the other was half open, which led to the bathroom.

Kurt came out of the bathroom wearing a light blue, short sleeved robe and Blaine wanted to tear it from his body, not wanting to lose the sight of Kurt's naked body or have barrier between him and that soft skin. Then he mentally shook his head to clear his thoughts, gave Kurt a quick kiss and walked into the bathroom to shower.

The bathroom was large and contained a double shower with sliding glass doors. Blaine stood still for a moment to imagine the shower sex that he and Kurt could have in the spacious shower. Then he slipped

inside, turned to shower on and was blown away by the pressure. He could stand under this shower for hours, water beating onto his back and warm enough to lull him into comfort. He could have taken a long shower, had it not been for the beautiful boy in the next room waiting for him.

Blaine borrowed the shower gel that was resting on the floor of the shower as opposed to the basket stuck to the wall at hand height. He had to use Kurt's shampoo though, washing as much gel out of his hair as he could. A large part of him cursed that he didn't think to pack extra gel in his rucksack: he didn't want Kurt seeing his hair wild and untamed the following morning. But he'd rather wash the gel out now as he'd slept with his hair gelled before; the next morning hadn't been a pretty sight.

Stepping out the shower, Blaine roughly towel dried his hair, ran his hands through it to tame it again and then wrapped the fluffy towel around his waist.

"All yours." He said when he stepped back into the bedroom. Kurt had been busy. He'd closed the curtains, gotten them both a glass of water for the night, and had laid out fresh underwear, pyjama pants and an unwrapped toothbrush for Blaine.

Blaine dressed while the water started again and used the towel to dry his curls as much as possible, brushing his hair flat every so often. He didn't want to have an afro of wet curly hair when Kurt left the bathroom.

Once Kurt had returned to the main bedroom, Blaine slipped away to clean his teeth and then hopped into the bed on what he hoped wasn't Kurt's side. Kurt didn't say anything about the side he'd chosen when he peeled the covers away and got in himself. The main light was off and Kurt leant over to turn off the side table lamp he's switched on to stop him from hurting himself in the dark room.

They gravitated towards each other without thinking about it. Blaine rested his head on a soft pillow and opened his arms. Kurt twisted under the covers until his back lay against Blaine's bare chest and his head was half resting on the pillow and half on Blaine's outstretched arm.

"Goodnight," he heard Kurt mutter and felt him press a kiss to his arm.

Blaine followed suit but kissed Kurt goodnight on the side of his temple. They closed their eyes and fell into sleep, more comfortable sleeping in each other's arms than they had even been while sleeping alone.

## Chapter Eight

Kurt woke from the vibrating of his phone in the pocket of his pants. Normally his phone was on the side table right by his bed so when the vibrations woke him up, Kurt stretched out a hand and sleepily groped for his phone. When he found nothing but the vibrations continued, Kurt sat up in his bed and looked around the room through bleary eyes.

He threw off the covers and padded his way across the carpet, pulling his phone out of his pants. The room was dark, the only light coming from the neon glare of his phone and the weak March sunlight shining in through gaps in the curtains. Kurt briefly turned back to the bed, saw that Blaine had rolled over and was still fast asleep, then left the room and answered his cell.

“Did you have a nice time at your picnic?” Tina’s voice sounded far too awake for the time it was and Kurt took far longer to process what she said than usual.

“What?” He walked into the kitchen, stone floor cold against his bare feet. His mind produced images of the bar and the events that had driven them to go inside. “There are pictures up already?”

“Yeah.”

Kurt held the phone by his ear with his shoulder and used both hands to pour the coffee beans into the grinder, looking to make sure the door was shut before he turned it on.

“How bad is it?”

“Not that bad.” Kurt could tell that Tina was trying to make light of the situation. His phone beeped at him in his ear and he took the phone away to see a text had been received. “You weren’t drunk or doing anything that could cause a scandal. Most of it is speculation about Blaine.”

“I knew it wasn’t a good idea to go to the park.” Kurt tipped the ground coffee beans into the machine, filled it with water and then turned it on. He took a seat at the counter and waited for the coffee to brew. “I just-”

"You are allowed to have fun with your soul mate." Kurt rubbed his forehead as he listened to Tina. "But there were lots of people who were witnessing your fun yesterday. Do you want me to release a statement about it?"

"No. I'll make sure that Blaine and I see each other in private for a while and this should blow over." Kurt said, twisting an apple in his free hand, "The media will stop talking about it eventually and while fans have the memories of an elephant, I can handle them."

It was silent on the phone for a moment before Tina asked: "How was it last night then? You had fun?"

"Of course. He's still here, actually." Kurt smiled to himself, thinking of Blaine lying fast asleep in his bed. "Asleep at the moment."

Tina gasped in delight, her voice joyous as she spoke: "Well get back to him then. I don't want to be the one to tear you out of your soul mate's arms." She paused then when she spoke once more her voice was laced with a teasing tone. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

Kurt shook his head, laughed and said: "Goodbye Tina."

He left the phone on the kitchen counter with the unread text message and turned around to pour some of the freshly brewed coffee into a mug. He added mocha syrup and poured a small amount of the coffee into the mug. Kurt took a sip before picking up his phone again and reading the text.

*You have to tell me everything. Who is this guy? I can't believe you haven't told me before now! I want to meet him. Can I come round and meet him?*

It was from Rachel and Kurt had to smile at her excitement. He had told Mercedes about Blaine and obviously Tina knew, but his overeager, loud-mouthed friend was currently in the dark. Kurt had yet to tell his family and the likelihood that Rachel would keep it from Finn, despite them not being together any more, was little to none. If Finn knew then within the hour, Carole and Burt would also know.

He'd opened up the text to reply to Rachel when the kitchen door opened and Blaine wandered in. It was like the smell of the freshly brewed coffee had drawn him out of bed because his eyes were barely open and he was rubbing one with the heel of his palm.

He smiled when he opened his eyes enough to see Kurt sitting at the counter. "Morning." He said, his voice sleep filled and croaky.

Kurt stood and poured a second mug of coffee for Blaine, plain coffee just like the drip he'd ordered in Flat White. He held the mug out to Blaine with a smile and his own greeting.

"Good morning." He leant down the height difference between them and pressed his lips to Blaine's in a coffee-flavoured early morning kiss. His eyes then moved to the curly mop that was Blaine's hair. Kurt had known it was curly: stray curls escaped the gel all the time. But this was really curly.

"It's a mess isn't it." Blaine said. He tried to pat down the curls with his free hand, not making a single ounce of difference.

"No. I like it." Kurt pulled at one of the curls and then let it go, watching it recoil into the nest of the curls. "You only need a little bit of product and you could wear it curly all the time."

They stepped apart from each other and took seats on opposite sides of the kitchen counter. Blaine sipped his coffee and Kurt bustled around the kitchen, opening the fridge to take out eggs then crouching to take out a frying pan.

"Do you like eggs for breakfast?" He asked, raising his voice to be heard as he looked in another cupboard for a glass mixing bowl.

Blaine made a strangled noise, like he'd tried to breathe while taking a sip of the hot coffee. Kurt spun around on his knees and watched Blaine stare at the clock for a few moments.

"What's wrong?" He asked. He looked at the clock himself before returning his gaze to watch Blaine.

"I've got a lecture in an hour and a half." Blaine explained and he rubbed his face vigorously with his hands. "I don't know how I'm going to make it there on time. I've got to-"

Kurt stood up straight. "Sit. I'll make you breakfast. You can borrow some of my clothes. And then I'll drive you there." He raised an eyebrow when Blaine looked like he was going to argue and turned around to crack the eggs into a bowl only when Blaine visibly acquiesced.



Kurt whipped up two omelettes containing feta cheese and spring onions, cooked a few slices of toast and was immediately thankful that he'd taken over cooking from his father. Blaine had been glancing up at the clock while he'd been cooking but one bite of the omelette had him relaxed and eating the food like a starving man.

After clearing up from breakfast, Kurt took the first shower and took extra time while Blaine was showering to search his wardrobe for something that Blaine could wear. He knew his style: he was drawing his style from before they'd even met. But the height difference between the two would make finding perfect pants an issue.

Kurt pulled out a white polo shirt, a white, grey and black sweater vest and laid them on the bed. He hurried to put some toner and moisturiser on his face, forgoing the longer routine for today. One morning wouldn't hurt and he could spend extra time tonight making sure this morning's dry skin was well and truly taken care of.

When Blaine came out of the shower and had slipped on the underwear left for him, Kurt dragged Blaine into his closet and flicked through all the pants available. He mentally matched them to the tops he'd already left on the bed and decided on grey Capri pants. Why he still had these in his closet he didn't actually know but as he held them out for Blaine to take, he was glad he did.

"You'll have to roll them up." He said. Blaine took the pants and walked into the main bedroom to get dressed, giving Kurt some space to add the final touches to his own outfit.

"Was that a crack about my height?" Blaine called out to Kurt from the bedroom, his voice full of mirth. Kurt merely smiled to himself as he ran his fingers over the silk and satin ties in one of the drawers he'd opened. He chose a red one and pulled a black knitted sweater he'd had for years off a shelf nearby.

"Come on." Kurt picked up his keys and sunglasses from the dresser and jerked his head towards the door. Blaine stood up, tugging nervously at the hem of the sweater Kurt had lent him. Nodding his approval, Kurt led the way out of the apartment and towards the bottom floor. They stopped for a last minute kiss on the threshold of the apartment and then hurried downstairs after a text alerted Kurt to the arrival of his car.

The journey from Kurt's apartment to the lecture hall wasn't long but Blaine kept periodically checking his watch. He had no supplies for his lecture bar a pen that was discovered in an outside pocket of his bag. He

wasn't worried: he could borrow paper from Nick. The time ticked closer and closer to nine am and the New York traffic seemed far more irritating than usual.

Kurt reached out and laid a hand on Blaine's arm. His leg, which had been twitching from nerves at the lack of time, stopped moving and he fixed brown eyes on Kurt.

"I should probably warn you." Kurt kept his voice low. "The pictures from last night are already up online. Tina said that the articles are mainly about who you are and speculation about why you were with me."

Blaine's eyes widened and he stared at Kurt without saying anything for a second. The car jerked forward and then pulled up to the curb right outside the lecture theatre.

"I guess I'll have some fun in this lecture then." He said in what he hoped was a nonchalant manner. Blaine grabbed the strap of his bag and hoisted it onto his shoulder. He went to open the car door but Kurt tightened his grip on Blaine's wrist.

He leant forward and caught Blaine's lips just as the younger man turned his head to look at him again. The kiss lasted a few seconds but Kurt couldn't resist pecking a second kiss before they separated.

"Have fun in your lecture." He said. He immediately laughed when Blaine rolled his eyes dramatically and opened the car door. He stepped onto the sidewalk and bent down to see into the backseat one last time. He raised his hands to his lips and blew a kiss to Kurt, who caught it playfully. Then Blaine closed the car door and hurried into the lecture.

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He was only a few moments late but everyone was seated when Blaine pushed open one of the doors and slipped inside. The lecturer (Blaine noticed with a grimace that it wasn't the interesting one from last week but was Dr Johnson, the dead boring one from Monday's lecture) hadn't started speaking and was still passing round a set of lecture notes. Blaine grabbed one, glad that he would have something to write on, and slid into the seat next to Nick.

He had taken off his coat, dumped the empty Tupperware box-filled bag under the fold down seat and set the notes and his pen on the bench before him before he noticed that the lecture theatre was filled with low murmurs and most people were staring at him.

Blaine looked at Nick and raised his eyebrows. "What's going on?" He had an idea; especially after Kurt had just told him that there were photographs of him online.

Nick bent his head closer to Blaine and kept his voice low to keep their conversation private. "Most of them just think you've done a walk of shame." Nick muttered. Not even Jennifer on Nick's other side reacted like she heard what was said. "But that's because they just don't know where to look."

"Where to look?" Blaine also kept his voice down.

"Where to look online." Nick shoved his phone into Blaine's hands. Neither registered the start of the lecture. "And which sites show you in picture after picture with one Mr Kurt Hummel. And don't give me garbage that you happened to be in the park with him. Do you want to change your story from Sunday?"

Not replying immediately, Blaine looked down at the phone in his hand. He used his thumb to flick through the photos and articles. Most were from their picnic at the park, some from their brisk walk out of the park: one even captured Kurt's joy at seeing the homemade cheesecake. Blaine bristled at that picture. It had been a private moment between them and here it was, splashed over the internet and no doubt the tabloids. Nick had opened two full articles and Blaine managed to read half of one of them before Nick demanded a reply.

*Kurt Hummel's new and unknown beau*

*With this young designer having publically announced that he hasn't found his soul mate as of yet, it is always a joy to see Kurt out and about the city. Especially with a man on his arm.*

*He was spotted last week out late at a creperie in Greenwich Village enjoying a crepe with someone. Someone we can only assume took Kurt out for a picnic in Central Park yesterday.*

*There have been no statements from hummels, no declarations of Kurt having found his soul mate. So we can only watch him be happy with his new beau while we eagerly await news from the designer as to whether he has finally connected or not.*

*If anyone can identify Kurt's new boyfriend, then they are a lucky person indeed. We'd love to hear the story of how these two met- it'll give for an interesting and no doubt romantic tale.*

*Kurt is known for-*

“Well?” Nick covered the phone with his hand to stop Blaine reading the article anymore. “Do you want to change your story from Sunday?”

Blaine looked up at his friend. They’d been close for three years now, having met at an LGBTQ freshman orientation event in the first month of college. They’d actually been living one storey apart from each other in halls but had never known. Blaine counted Nick amongst his best friends, that title only preceded by Wes and David back in Ohio.

He shrugged. “We were trying to keep it a secret.”

Nick’s first reaction was to roll his eyes dramatically. “You did a great job there.” He tapped the cell again and then took it out of Blaine’s hand.

They turned their attention to the lecturer, focused on the very small page number in the bottom of the projection screen then found the corresponding slide in their lecture notes. Blaine clicked his pen open and circled two points on the slide they were on but Nick stretched his hand out to write a note on Blaine’s paper.

*I’m so happy you found your soul mate Blaine! I’m just going to rip it into you that it was Kurt Hummel, designer, all along and you didn’t believe me.*

Blaine could only chuckle. He’d expected that reaction from his friends. There was a part of him that was cringing in guilt. He and Kurt had agreed to keep it a secret and here he was, sitting in the lecture theatre after just having stayed the night at Kurt’s, telling his best friend.

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Kurt punched the familiar number into his phone as soon as he’d dealt with any urgent messages waiting for him when he arrived at his shop. He tapped his finger nails against the wooden desk, listening to the dial tone, and had just reached down to take his sketchbook out of the drawer when a voice came on the other end of the line.

“Hello?”

Kurt immediately perked up. “Hi Carole!”

“Oh Kurt,” She sounded delighted to hear his voice and Kurt heard her put something down on a table that she must have been standing by, “How has it been in New York? I’m so glad your opening last week went well.”

“Thank you.” They spoke for a while, talking about nothing in particular and everything that Kurt missed about his family. Not at one point in their conversation did Carole mention the pictures of him and Blaine that were circling the internet and for that, Kurt was grateful. He didn’t know if Carole had just diplomatically chosen not to say anything if Kurt wasn’t saying something first or if they had just not seen them yet.

“When are you next in Ohio, honey?” She asked. “I know you’re busy but your father and I miss you. Finn isn’t that far away but one of our boys is.”

“I’m hoping to visit soon.” Kurt had planned a long weekend trip home, just without finalising the dates. Now he might be bringing along a companion passenger. “You don’t have anything that takes you out of Lima then?”

“Not for a while. We wanted to come to New York in June but if you could get out here then I know we’ll all appreciate it. Especially your dad.”

“Is he awake?” Kurt glanced at the clock, the one that also showed today’s date. He knew it was his father’s day off today: a mandatory practice started by Kurt and enforced by Carole years ago and now that Finn was working at the garage, Burt could afford a few more days rest.

“He should be.” Kurt heard shuffling and assumed Carole was standing up and walking to find his father. “I’ll just find him for you.”

Through the phone, he heard her footsteps as she first pushed the door and checked what Kurt assumed was the kitchen then climbed the stairs to check their bedroom. Muffled voices sounded through the speaker and Kurt took that moment of silence to finish taking out his sketchbook.

“Hey kiddo.” Burt’s voice sounded in Kurt’s ear and he immediately smiled. There was just something about hearing his dad’s voice, so strong and so comforting, that made Kurt feel home even thousands of miles away.

“Hi Dad.”

“What’s wrong? Is everything ok? You’d normally be telling me that I should be asleep at this point on my day off.”

“And you should be. But I needed to talk to you about something.”

Kurt heard rustling and he was relieved that his father was still in bed at least. “What’s wrong?” Burt asked again.

“I found Blaine Dad.”

There was a pause and then a delighted shout sounded through the phone. “You found him? Oh Kurt that’s wonderful! Carole! Carole!” Kurt held the phone away from his ear as his father shouted for Carole. Their voices were muffled as if Burt had pressed his hand against the speaker but Kurt heard Carole’s glee at the news too. He knew he’d hear from her about why he hadn’t mentioned it earlier when they spoke.

“Kurt when you next come home,” Burt’s voice was still filled with happiness when he finally returned to the conversation with his son, “You have to bring Blaine too. I want to meet my son’s soul mate.”

“I will.” Kurt promised. “But Dad, I’m so happy I finally met him too but I’m also really scared about that.”

“About me meeting him?”

“No.” Kurt sighed. “We were out together yesterday and now the pictures of us are online. There are all these rumours about who he is and what relationship we’re in.”

“And you’re afraid of that happening too much?”

Kurt nodded like he was talking to his father face to face. “Happening too much and scaring him away. Dad, Blaine is a college student. He’s never had this before. I got used to it because I had to. But he’s being thrown in and I don’t want to make him do anything that he doesn’t want to do.”

The phone was silent and Kurt waited with anxiety to hear what Burt had to say.

“You remind me so much of your mother you know.” Was the reply and the warmth that spread through Kurt whenever he heard about his mother filled his heart again. “She was as empathetic and

compassionate as you are, Kurt. Blaine is your soul mate. I know how long you dreamed about him and I doubt he's dreamt about you any less.

"You are a wonderful person, Kurt, and I don't think too many cameras being shoved in your face is going to scare him away. Now, when are you and Blaine coming to Ohio? You can't leave your old man waiting too long."

Kurt loved his dad for so many reasons. Knowing exactly what to say and knowing when to change the topic of conversation, like what just happened, was just a small fraction of them. He had been away from home for too long. He missed the familiarity of his house, his large bed, his mother's dresser. He missed his Dad too. Burt and Carole visited New York whenever they could, but it was a long journey just to visit for a weekend.

Still, he wanted Blaine to meet his family. Before Blaine, Burt and when they'd married, Carole and Finn were the most important people in Kurt's life. He wanted nothing more than his soul mate to be a part of his family.

A knock on his office door made Kurt look up and return to the present after being lost in the sound of his father's voice telling him about Ohio.

"Dad," Kurt said, interrupting Burt while he was telling Kurt about an odd customer who'd come in to get their tyres rotated and hadn't moved the whole day, "I have to go. Someone's here to see me."

"Of course. Go, do your job and come visit us with Blaine soon."

They put the phone down at the same time. Before Kurt called out to let the person outside in, he glanced at the note that was still stuck to his computer screen. Just seeing Blaine's handwriting made him smile and sent warm shivers down his spine. They'd deal with the press. Hopefully last night's pictures would be forgotten about soon.

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"Ok. You have to tell me everything." Nick demanded. He dragged Blaine into the Starbucks that was near the lecture theatre. It was just to two of them: Jennifer had been deterred from joining them by Nick claiming it was guys stuff and she wouldn't want to know anyway. They stood in the short queue to buy overpriced coffees but Nick didn't wait for them to sit down at a table before speaking.

Blaine shook his head and twisted the backpack strap in his hand.

“What do you want me to tell?” He shrugged. “He is my soul mate and we’ve been dating. And you can’t tell anyone because we are still trying to keep it a secret.”

Nick rolled his eyes like he had when Blaine had first mentioned that. “You aren’t doing a good job of it then, as your date was splashed all over the internet! You went to the park for privacy?”

“Yeah, that probably wasn’t the best of plans.” They were at the front of the queue and Blaine hurriedly ordered his drip and Nick’s latte to hopefully distract her from overhearing the conversation.

“I knew it would be your fantastic idea to have a date with someone famous in the park.” Nick shoved the money for the latte into the barista’s hand and Blaine followed with the rest of the cost. They moved down the counter to wait at the end.

“I didn’t think we’d be surrounded by people with camera phones!” Blaine argued.

“Wait,” Nick frowned and then laughed, “those pictures were taken by normal people? Not the paparazzi? Just wait until you’re followed round by a hundred people, professional cameras shoved right in your face.”

They collected their respective coffees and headed for a two person’s table by the wide window. Only when they had settled in their chairs, dropped their bags to the floor and removed their coats did Blaine reply.

“Well as I’ll either be with you or with Kurt when that happens, you’ll be the one saving me from getting knocked out by a camera.”

Nick rolled his eyes again and took a sip of his coffee. Then he sat upright in his chair and said: “That date you had the other night, the one Sugar was going on about. That was with him?” Blaine nodded, Nick repeating the gesture before speaking again: “I want to meet him. I’m your best friend – and don’t give me anything about how Wes and David are your best friends and they don’t know-” Nick added, taking the words right out of Blaine’s mouth, “so I want to meet him.”

“Nick, *no one* knows.” Blaine leaned forward to try and get his point across to eager friend. “Only Kurt’s assistant and now you. I can’t just invite him for dinner in the cafeteria to introduce him to you.”



“So find a way.” Nick argued. “I want to meet my best friend’s soul mate. There’s nothing wrong with that!”

Blaine rubbed his eyes with his hands and sat up straight in his chair. Only two dates with his soul mate, not counting their first meeting over coffee, and he already had overeager friends wanting to meet Kurt. He couldn’t imagine what Cooper would be like.

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It took three weeks before Blaine plucked up the courage to actually tell Kurt about Nick’s desire to meet him. He’d told Kurt that Nick had worked out that they were each other’s soul mates but as Kurt admitted that he’d told his father and step-mother at the same time, Blaine wasn’t too worried about the circle of people who knew the truth widening.

Nick had pestered time and time again but Blaine hadn’t even known how to ask Kurt to let Nick come along to meet him. They’d seen each other in the three weeks, on all weekends and on work days when Kurt didn’t have to be in early or Blaine’s lectures were later in the day. He always made sure that he carried a supply of gel with him when he stayed at Kurt’s apartment: he’d been reliably informed by everyone in his lectures that the biggest indicator of his ‘walk of shame’ was his curly hair.

“Listen, um, Nick wants to meet you.” He finally blurted out mid conversation on a night that he wasn’t having dinner expertly cooked by Kurt. They were talking on the phone, Blaine having taken the cowardly route. He hadn’t wanted Kurt to be upset that someone else knew: someone who Kurt didn’t know himself or trust to keep it a secret, even though Blaine did.

“Oh.” Blaine held his breath. “Ok.”

That was it? Blaine had worked himself up for nothing? The rational voice in the back of his mind said that obviously Kurt wouldn’t have been upset that Blaine’s friend wanted to meet him. It wasn’t like he was unreasonable or an unpredictable hellcat. Kurt talked about his friend Rachel who had demanded to meet Blaine a thousand times over. Kurt assured him that he was lucky Rachel was busy at an audition every time they’d made provisional arrangements to meet.

“I actually wanted to invite you to a fashion show I’ve been asked to attend.” Kurt was saying, bringing Blaine out of his musings, “And as our last trip in public ended up all over the internet, maybe you

bringing Nick wouldn't be such a bad idea. They couldn't claim it was obviously a romantic date if there were three of us. Five with Tina and Mike."

"Ok." Blaine nodded to himself, already thinking of things to wear and the ways he could tell Nick that he was meeting Kurt at a fashion show. "Do I need to wear anything specific?"

Kurt had laughed and practically instructed what Blaine should wear, guessing at some pieces in his wardrobe and getting Blaine to describe others. They'd said their goodbyes and Blaine had walked down the hall to Nick's door, knocking and then closing it again when he'd been invited inside.

"Friday night," Blaine said to Nick as he looked up from where he was frantically rewriting the conclusion of his essay, "you're coming with me to a fashion show. Coming with me and Kurt."

Nick's reaction had been to scream like a girl, clap his hand over his mouth while Blaine laughed and then run to his closet and throw it open to look for something to wear for three night's time.

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The first thing that Blaine and Nick saw was a thousand white bulbs flashing. Both were blinded and held up their arms to shield their eyes from the cameras. Blaine checked the text from Tina on his phone and grabbed Nick's arm to pull him away from the photographers taking photos of the celebrities and towards one of the entrances.

"We're under the party for hummels?" He asked the bored bouncer on the door to the show. Nick was bouncing on his toes behind him and Blaine blinked owlishly at the man while he perused a list.

"Names?" He even sounded bored.

"Blaine Anderson and Nick Duval." Blaine supplied. He clutched his phone tighter in his hand. Wouldn't it be completely embarrassing if they'd gone to the wrong door, or if their lack of tickets meant that even having their names on a guest list wouldn't grant them access?

"IDs?" The bouncers had his pen hovering over two names on the list and he waited until checking both Blaine's and Nick's ID cards before crossing them off the list and admitting them entrance.

Inside, the runway was set up in the middle of the room and fabric covered wicker chairs took up the rest of the available space. Some room was kept free at the near end of the hall but that was filled with people who'd made it through the crowd of photographers outside.

Kurt and Blaine had talked about it and had not wanted to aggravate the rumours still simmering about their relationship. After a month of being with each other, neither was ready to have question after question shot their way. Kurt had had a few questions asked about his relationship status but his replies had been vague. That had started another bout of rumours, especially with the fans who correctly deduced the differences between Kurt saying "I haven't found my soul mate yet" and "I am just enjoying life at the moment."

Arriving together and taking pictures together on the front door outside, even if Nick was with them, would add a tank of gasoline to the fire.

Nick lifted two glasses of sparkling wine off a tray carried by a waiter, who sent them a judgemental stare but didn't take the drinks back. They sipped their alcohol slowly and gazed at all the famous people around them. They recognised a few faces of fashion designers, famous models and fashion journalists for Vogue and InStyle.

Blaine's cell vibrated in his hand and he read the text Tina had just sent him.

**We're outside now, getting through the photographers. We'll find you in the building.**

"They're nearly here." Blaine muttered to Nick and pocketed his phone. He swiftly drank the rest of his wine and left the glass on a half empty tray nearby. Nick copied his friend's actions and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Crap, Blaine," He said, grabbing Blaine's arm as more people entered the main room, Kurt, Tina and Mike no doubt amongst them, "What if he doesn't like me?"

Blaine looked at his friend with an incredulous expression on his face. "Are you nervous?"

Nick banged his shoulder against Blaine's but before he could reply, three people weaved their way through a group of tall models and made their way over to them. Blaine's face lit up when he saw Kurt and his breath was caught in his throat.

He had a beautiful soul mate, and no amount of seeing Kurt would ever get him used to that. Kurt wore long white skin tight jeans and black knee high boots that just made his legs go on for miles, a white shirt, grey blazer and a small black scarf tied around his neck. Blaine barely registered Tina and Mike, who he had yet to meet but had heard so much about from Tina, as he only had eyes for his soul mate.

Being in public and their relationship still somewhat successfully under wraps, they linked hands and grasped tightly rather than throwing their arms around each other in a kiss.

“You look great.” Kurt said when they finally broke gazes.

Blaine gave a small embarrassed laughed and swept his hand down the black and grey striped cardigan. “Thanks to you.” He looked back up at Kurt. “You look wonderful too, as usual.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Blaine caught Nick staring at Kurt with his eyes wide and his mouth slightly open. He looked like Blaine must’ve done when he’d first seen Kurt face to face but after weeks of anticipating meeting the famous designer, Blaine had thought Nick wouldn’t freeze.

He slapped Nick in the bicep which did jerk his friend out of his stupor. “This is Nick.” He introduced, looking from Nick to Kurt and then back to Nick. “And Nick, this is Kurt. My soul mate.”

Kurt held out his hand which Nick took with a slight tremble in his own. “It’s a pleasure.” He said, his voice light and friendly. “Blaine’s told me lots about you.”

Nick could only nod and shake Kurt’s hand until the moment had passed from introductory to awkward. Then he blinked and let Kurt’s hand go, covering his mouth while he turned completely red.

“Um, I’m sorry.” He stuttered, “Yes, hi. It’s great to meet you too, Kurt.”

“May I offer you any drinks?” A waiter held out a tray of glasses of sparkling wine and punch and Tina immediately offered round some glasses. Nick sent a look of sheer mortification to Blaine, who could only laugh and shake his head with fondness at his friend. He was imagining Sugar’s reaction to meeting Kurt: that would be much louder and involve screaming at a high pitch, he knew it.

Once the waiter had gone, Tina turned to Mike. “Mike, this is Blaine. It’s high time you two met.”

Mike, of Asian descent like Tina and by far the tallest one in their group, held out his hand to Blaine who took it with a smile. They shook hands and greeted each other quickly before talk turned to the fashion show, Nick, with his face red like a lobster, and Blaine standing back while those who worked in fashion talked.

It was a good half an hour before the guests filtered into the rows around the runway in preparation for the show to begin. The noise was still raucous but it was more orderly now that people were seated with no access to alcohol for the duration of the show.

Blaine sat in between Kurt and Nick, who was twisting the programme left on the seats into a tight tube. Blaine frowned and leant over their shared armrest to mutter in Nick's ear.

"Why are you so nervous?"

Nick shrugged. "I actually don't know. I already made a fool out of myself in front of Kurt so there's nothing for me to really be nervous about."

Blaine opened his mouth to reply but the lights dimmed so fast that someone may have cut the power. The only lights remaining were the ones illuminating the white runway and temporary wall erected to hide the backstage from the runway. The occasional flash from a photographer's camera lit up a small section of the room but otherwise the runway was the only thing spectators were watching.

Music started playing, loud rock music that dropped in volume after the wall of sound that was the intro played. Blaine was looking around the hall to try and spot the speakers while they waited for the models to grace the runway. His hand was resting near Kurt's and he felt Kurt curl his fingers around Blaine's, taking advantage of the dark.

A male model strode out confidently onto the runway, the collar on his jacket upturned and his pants cropped at the knee. He walked down to the end of the runway and when he was halfway back up the side nearer to Blaine, a female model walked out from behind the backstage wall to strut the runway herself.

Maybe he was biased but these clothes were nothing like Kurt's. Kurt's designs were far more fashionable and far more accessible than these ones. It was a new designer by the name of Jeremy Jacob (two designers owned the company, named Jeremy and Jacob) and the clothes were a couture version of clothes that wouldn't be out of place at a rock or metal concert. That explained the loud rock music

introducing the show and the quieter rock music that was playing while the models walked up and down the runway.

A blonde model stepped out, his hair styled high in the air and as he passed Blaine's eye line on his way down the runway, Nick grabbed Blaine's arm in a tight grip. Turning to stare at his friend, Blaine saw that Nick's mouth was open and he was staring up at the blonde model (who had paused at the end of the runway for photographs like the others had done) like he couldn't believe what he was seeing.

"What?" Blaine muttered. He wasn't sure they were supposed to talk during the runway show. Nick didn't react so Blaine repeated his question, keeping his voice low but with more force. "What?"

"Oh my g-d," Was Nick's reply. Blaine continued to watch his friend stare at the model, who had made his way up the runway on the side closest to them. Only when the next model had walked onto the runway and the blonde had disappeared inside did Nick blink and turn to Blaine. "Do you know that guy's name?"

Blaine shook his head and a pleading look from Nick had him turning around to mutter the same question in Kurt's ear. The message went from Kurt, who looked as confused about the question as Blaine felt, to Tina. Tina did know the model's name and when it reached Blaine, he was now staring at Kurt with his mouth open.

Nick tapped him on the shoulder and muttered: "It's him, isn't it."

Blaine only nodded and the smile that broke out on Nick's face could have rivalled many of the smiles Blaine had directed towards Kurt over the past month.

Kurt tugged on their interlinked hands and Blaine looked back at him. He was asking with his eyes why they had wanted to know the model's name and Blaine answered by grabbing Nick's left hand and thrusting it towards Kurt. When Nick uncurled his fingers to reveal the name written in cursive handwriting on the heart line of his palm, Kurt's face filled with understanding.

*Jeff Sterling.*

Nick reclaimed his arm and ran his thumb over his palm. He was muttering something under his breath and when Blaine nudged him, curiosity filling his eyes, Nick leant closer to tell Blaine what he'd been saying.

“My soul mate’s a model. My soul mate is a model.”

Blaine snorted and then covered his mouth to keep the sound quiet. The models were showing off their second outfits now but Jeff hadn’t come back out onto the runway yet. Nick was staring at the entrance to the backstage and Blaine knew he was willing Jeff to come out again.

“Get your mind out of the gutter: you know you’ll connect tonight.” Blaine murmured in Nick’s ear just as Jeff stepped onto the runway and Nick’s eyes widened again. He was staring up at Jeff like he was the most amazing thing on earth. Did Blaine look at Kurt that way? Probably: he did think Kurt was the most amazing thing on earth.

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“Calm down,” Blaine said as he pushed on Nick’s shoulder to stop him from bouncing up and down. They were stood at the busy after party with only Mike for company. Kurt and Tina had been dragged away by important journalists who wanted an interview about the fashion show and the future of hummels.

Kurt had left with the promise of finding Jeff for Nick, making sure the model didn’t leave before they met to find out if this Jeff had Nick Duval written in Nick’s untidy scrawl across the palm of his hand.

Nick was a nervous wreck. He kept tugging at his shirt and running his hands through his hair, making it messier each time. Blaine and Mike kept shooting glances at each other, amused by the other boy’s antics but also trying to figure out a way to keep Nick from exploding with nervous tension.

“There’s Tina.” Mike said abruptly pointing to where his soul mate was winding through the crowd. She didn’t have Kurt or Jeff with her and Nick started bouncing on his toes again. Tina stepped up to Mike and stood on tiptoes in her heels to press a kiss to his lips.

“I think Kurt’s gone to look for Jeff, Nick.” She said to placate the nervous boy.

“Was I this bad when I was meeting Kurt?” Blaine asked. He was trying to start a conversation and hopefully help his friend. Thinking back to how he was when he took the subway to hummels and walked through the store to wait for Tina to take him to meet Kurt, Blaine doubted he was much better.

That idea was proven when Tina laughed and nodded. She described what Blaine had been like which left Blaine blushing, Mike chuckling and Tina smiling widely at the memory. Nick hadn't even heard but all four of their attention turned sharply to the left when Kurt's voice was heard through the crowd.

"I just wanted to introduce you to a few people who I'm here with." Kurt was talking to someone else. "Including Tina who most of the time you'll be dealing with rather than me."

Kurt emerged from the crowd of celebrities and models and walked towards them, Jeff right at his heels. He introduced Tina first, followed by Mike. The two from hummels talked with Jeff for a moment, Mike hovering in the background while he tried not to overhear business talk. Then Kurt led Jeff around Tina to where Blaine and Nick were standing.

"This is Blaine, and his friend Nick." Kurt didn't elaborate on his relationship with Blaine but neither of them batted an eyelash. "And this is Jeff."

Kurt looked like he had planned to say more but Jeff and Nick were looking intently at each other. Nick's eyes were wide again and it was Jeff who held out a hand.

"It's nice to meet you, Nick-" he paused after saying Nick's name, waiting for something. Waiting for Nick's surname.

Kurt stepped around the couple and slipped an arm around Blaine's shoulders. He rested his other hand against the shoulder nearest to him and Blaine ran his hand up and down Kurt's back once, finding a spot just about the small of his back to rest his hand. They watched the exchange, Mike and Tina also holding each other while they watched.

"Duval." Nick's voice was far higher than normal. "It's Nick Duval."

Now Jeff's mouth opened in shock and he frantically scrubbed at the palm of his left hand. He was muttering under his breath about how they had to cover up their names for shows and then when all the makeup was wiped away, he held up his palm to show Nick his own name in his own handwriting.

Nick followed suit and held his palm out so that their hands were touching and both their names were seen. The newly connected soul mates then looked down at their names on each other's palms and back up at each other.



“That’s the third connection I’ve seen,” Kurt commented quietly, speaking right into Blaine’s ear, “obviously not including ours.”

“Are they all like that then?” Blaine asked. He didn’t turn his head away from Nick and Jeff, who had just linked their hands, stepped closer to each other and were completely ignoring their audience.

“Yes. That’s love at first sight.” Kurt sighed and tipped his head to rest it against Blaine’s. “Tina and Mike’s was the most original one though: Tina was actually dating someone else and she connected with Mike in the choir room when he joined Glee. That was romance tipped with heartbreak for Artie.”

“I was glad you weren’t dating anyone when I met you,” Blaine admitted. He didn’t admit that he’d been afraid of Kurt dating Chandler Kiehl. Rumours about their relationship were still flying over the internet even though they hadn’t been seen together for a while now.

“Me too. About you, I mean.”

They stood still, wrapped in each other’s arms, while the after party carried on in full swing around them. Cameras flashed from every angle and the photographers took note of everything. A waiter carrying a tray of punch passed the couple and Blaine reached out to grab two, offering one to Kurt who disentangled himself from Blaine to accept the cup gratefully.

“Oh I forgot,” Kurt said after he’d gulped a large bit of the drink, “My dad wanted me home next weekend. He said that it had been far too long since I’ve been home and I had planned to go back to Lima for a few days.” He looked at Blaine from under his lashes, no mean feat from the taller Kurt’s point of view. “Did you want to come to Ohio with me?”

Blaine blinked and licked his lips, mulling the thoughts in his mind. Of course the answer would be yes. His lectures were the last thing on his mind and a chance to spend days with Kurt was always a chance he would jump at. However, he’d be meeting Kurt’s family: more specifically Kurt’s father, who was clearly so important to him. Blaine knew that he’d be meeting Burt Hummel eventually, but it didn’t stop his nerves.

Still he smiled and said: “I’d love to.”

## Chapter Nine

As Blaine stared out of the small window, watching the tarmac runway get closer and closer, he couldn't believe the spots on his eyes were still there. When he and Kurt had arrived at the airport back in New York, a gaggle of photographers had been waiting and had snapped picture after picture, flashes and the glare from camera lenses making Blaine go blind for a few seconds. Kurt had passed him sunglasses but it hadn't worked well enough.

He had seen the photographers from inside the car as they'd driven up and parked at the loading zone. He had immediately looked around to someone famous walking through the departures gate: maybe a football player or a movie star. But the flashes had started up once he and Kurt had left the car and Blaine's mouth dropped open for a second when he realised these photographers were at the airport for *them*.

Well, for Kurt but they were all taking pictures of Blaine too, simply by proximity.

They hadn't held hands while walking through the airport and Kurt hadn't acknowledged the paparazzi more than was necessary but they had still crowded round them to take a thousand pictures as they crossed the entrance to the departures gate and walked inside.

At least the photographers hadn't been waiting at the gate when they'd boarded the plane but Kurt had had his fair share of stares and whispers from people in the airport itself. Looking back, Blaine couldn't remember having ever travelled on a plane with someone famous and if he had, he really hoped he hadn't stared with eyes wide and mouth open like two fashionista girls had done when Kurt walked passed them out of Starbucks.

Blaine lifted a hand, placed his elbow on the armrest and rested his chin on his palm, staring at the oncoming ground. The prospect of meeting Kurt's family, meeting his soul mate's family, only really hit him as he boarded the plane. When he visited home, Blaine would take the train. It was a longer journey but cheaper and he preferred the train to flying. So when they'd taken off and the pilot had announced the destination, Blaine had felt the difference. He wasn't going to Ohio to visit his family: he was going to visit Kurt's.

Kurt's step-brother was picking them up from the airport. Kurt had said that his dad couldn't take the day off work but hadn't wanted a driver to pick them up so had given Finn the time and specific instructions to

pick them up. That would be just shy of two hours' drive from Columbus to Lima with Kurt and one member of his family.

Blaine jumped in his seat as he felt the wheels touchdown. Feeling returned to his hand. Looking down, he saw Kurt uncurl his fingers from where he'd been gripping Blaine's hand tightly. He hadn't even noticed.

"G-d, that was an awful landing." Kurt muttered under his breath. He looked at the ceiling and then at Blaine. "I never really flew anywhere before I was a teenager so I'm not the greatest fan now. It's just the fastest way to get home."

Blaine squeezed Kurt's hand as he felt the drag of the airplane as it slowed down. Eventually they pulled into the gate and the doors to the plane opened. Kurt wasn't the first one off but he was one of the first ones, Blaine following behind as soon as he could once he'd grabbed their carry-on luggage.

Kurt had warned Blaine about the photographers when they made it passed the first group in New York. He'd said that they'd probably be in Ohio too and when Blaine asked how they even knew they were flying there, he'd replied with: "I don't want to think about how they know."

So Blaine wasn't completely shocked when cameras started going off again, even though he was stunned into silence and stillness for a moment. Then he remembered the white spots on his vision lasting for a good hour or so and hurriedly took the sunglasses from his pocket to put them on.

Kurt walked out through the arrivals gate like he was oblivious to the invasive actions of the paparazzi. He held his head high, his suitcases loaded onto a trolley that Blaine had offered to push, dragging their carry-on luggage behind him. Some people milling around the airport pointed and stared as he walked by: some with recognition and others with confusion. Blaine walked by his side, trying to keep his face up.

This was his life now. No matter that the press, general public and Kurt's fans didn't know who he was. They would eventually. Neither Kurt nor Blaine wanted to keep their relationship and, more importantly, that they were soul mates a secret forever. But whenever the truth came out, Blaine's life would involve cameras documenting his every move. He might never be famous himself – he had no aspirations for a job that resulted in fame – but he'd be famous by proxy.

Kurt was heading straight towards someone leaning against the metal barrier between the arrivals hall and the entrance into the baggage reclaim. They were a few steps away when the man, who could only be Finn, noticed Kurt and a smile crossed his face in greeting.

Finn stood up straight and Blaine looked up and up. He only came up to this man's shoulder: not even that if he was being honest. Finn looked like someone he would have turned and run from in high school. Kurt had said that Finn was nothing like how he looked: Kurt had described his brother as earnest, well-meaning but completely thoughtless.

"Hey!" He said brightly. "How was the trip?"

"Long enough," Kurt said, settling his sunglasses more comfortably on his nose, "Glad I'm back though. Finn, this is Blaine," He turned from Finn to look at Blaine and reached out to squeeze his wrist in a comforting gesture, "Blaine, my brother Finn."

"Nice to meet you dude." Finn stuck out a large hand for Blaine to shake. As they shook hands, Blaine was immediately happy that Finn hadn't tried to crush his hand.

"You too." He replied. They let go and Blaine carried on pushing the luggage as they walked out of the airport to the gate.

It took them no time at all to find the car, load the suitcases and then drop the trolley off for someone else to use. Photographers documented every step, both Finn and Blaine staring at them confusedly while Kurt ignored their presence.

"I don't know how you last with them." Finn commented. They'd pulled out of the airport car park and had begun the journey to Lima. Kurt had finally taken off his sunglasses and Blaine did the same, slipping them into an outside pocket of his bag. The paparazzi had stopped taking pictures when the car doors had closed: almost like that was the signal to stop.

"I actually can't stand it." Kurt admitted. He was sat in the front but was holding his hand behind his seat for Blaine. He was rubbing his thumb over Kurt's knuckles. They could be affectionate here without worry of rumours or pictures documenting every movement of his thumb. *Within reason*, Blaine kept saying to himself. They were going to be staying with Kurt's dad. No funny business there.

Finn and Kurt talked periodically about life in Lima as the scenery flew passed. Blaine had taken to staring out the window. Westerville was close to Columbus so it was rare that he would travel in this direction in Ohio. He couldn't recognise anything, of course, but it was nice seeing the buildings and trees rushing passed as they sped closer and closer to Lima.

"Has Rachel said anything about me?" Finn asked. His voice sounded more nervous as he spoke. Kurt had mentioned the epic saga that was his step-brother's relationship with his best friend. They weren't each other's soul mates but they acted as if they were, Kurt had said as he shook his head with the memories.

"No." Kurt sighed, "Not for a little while."

"How's she doing?" Kurt must have sent a raised eyebrow, unimpressed look at his brother because Finn immediately said: "Come on dude! I may never even meet Laura; I just want to know if she's ok?"

"She's fine. Auditioning for musicals all over New York."

"Oh." Finn took his eyes off the road and stared at Kurt while he said, his eyes wide and filled with sincerity, "Maybe I could come back with you guys and visit? See her and maybe I could stay in New York."

"Finn-"

"I could stay with you!" He said, eyes flicking to the road then back to Kurt, "Or- um-" He looked at Blaine, silently watching the exchange, "are you two in the same apartment so I can't stay because - um - you know,"

"Finn," Kurt pointed to the road and Finn set his eyes forward again, "Blaine and I aren't living together. And while you're more than welcome to come visit, you know you'd hate it there."

Finn didn't reply and Blaine assumed his silence as agreement. Kurt turned in his seat to look at Blaine, sending him a pleading look where Finn couldn't see it.

Taking the hint, Blaine licked his lips and said: "Kurt told me you were on the football team in high school?" He phrased it as a question and at the mention of sports, Finn jumped into the conversation.

"You like football dude?" Blaine nodded, Finn seeing him nod in the rear view mirror. "Wow, I thought 'cause you're like Kurt that you wouldn't."

Blaine couldn't help but laugh. Earnest, well-meaning but completely thoughtless Finn. Kurt had absolutely nailed the description of his brother. "No, I love football."

"Did you ever play? You're just a little dude."

Conversation flowed after the talk about Rachel, even though Kurt barely contributed to the talk on football. Once Finn got going, he and Blaine were talking all about the last season and the Super Bowl that had been played a few weeks ago. It made Blaine's nerves go from boiling to a small simmer and the grateful looks Kurt kept shooting Blaine showed his appreciation. Talking about Rachel with Finn was obviously a sore topic.

After what seemed like an age of rushing trees and grey tarmac, Finn pulled into a residential street and onto a driveway bordered by flowerbeds and blossoms just starting to bloom on the tree nearby. The door to the house opened and Kurt flew out of the car and into his father's arms. Blaine exited more slowly, swallowing his nerves by slowly closing his door then Kurt's.

This was probably the most important person he had to impress. He and Kurt were soul mates, yes, and the more he learnt about Kurt the more he was grateful that he had the chance to know him. But if Burt didn't like him, that would put a dampener on the whole relationship right there.

Burt was smiling widely over his son's shoulder. Blaine watched them while he lingered by the bonnet of the car, hearing the bangs of the suitcases as Finn took them out of the boot and left them on the driveway.

"I've missed you kid." Blaine heard Burt say, but Kurt's response was muffled by his father's shirt. They pulled away, Burt clapping his hands on Kurt's shoulders for a brief moment, and Kurt held out his hand to Blaine. He looked at his soul mate, eyes shining with happiness and smile wide on his face, and the breath caught in Blaine's throat. Something he was getting used to when Kurt looked at him with his breathtaking eyes and a smile on his face.

"Dad," He said, wiggling his fingers to beckon Blaine closer, "This is Blaine. Blaine Anderson," he added for extra effect, as if saying Blaine's full name would emphasise the fact that they were soul mates and not just boyfriends, "And Blaine, this is my father Burt Hummel."

Blaine didn't take Kurt's hand in front of Burt and held out a hand for him to shake. Dalton had instilled manners into their pupils and Blaine internally thanked them for that right now.

"It's nice to meet you sir." He said, offering a small smile.

Burt took Blaine's hand, shook it firmly and then grasped their hands in his other one. "None of that 'sir' business," He smiled widely, "It's Burt. You're my son's soul mate and all he talks about so..."

"Oh my g-d, Dad," Kurt muttered, turning his face away from the exchange for a moment.

"He talks about you a lot too, sir, Burt." Blaine said. He grew a little more comfortable as the breath he'd been holding was released. *So far so good*, he thought.

"Only good things I hope!" Burt laughed and finally let go of Blaine's hand to clap a hand to his son's shoulder again. "Why don't you help Finn with the bags?" He asked Kurt and slung an arm around Blaine's shoulder to lead him in.

"I can help." Blaine weakly protested but Kurt waved him inside with his father.

Stepping over the threshold into the Hummels' home, Blaine saw a house that had the overwhelming feel of a family home. His childhood home, the same house where his parents lived now, had always felt far too formal for Blaine to have such fond memories of the warmth he was hit with when Burt led him through the lobby. Family pictures in the Anderson home were professional; whether they were candid or posed they were all taken by someone who knew what they were doing with a camera. The photos everywhere in the lobby and on the mantelpiece in the living room of the Hummels' house were filled with life.

Two pictures stood out from the rest: one with a man in army colours cradling a baby and one with a woman with Kurt's eyes hugging a young boy who could only be Kurt as he blew out candles on a birthday cake.

A woman's voice called out from somewhere further in the house when Blaine and Burt walked out of the lobby and passed the living room.

"Are they here?"

"Yeah mum!" Finn called out. Blaine jumped and spun around; he hadn't heard Finn come into the house.

Carole walked out from either the dining room or the kitchen (the door swung shut too quickly for Blaine to see more than white walls) and beamed at Blaine. He felt the weight of Burt's arm lift off his shoulder and stuck out a hand for Kurt's step-mother.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, ma'am."

Carole ignored his hand completely. Instead she gathered him up in a hug and said "And you, Blaine. We've heard so much about you." She drew away and looked him over in such a motherly fashion that any lasting nerves melted away like snow in the sun.

Another noise behind the three of them made them turn around and Carole walked in between Burt and Blaine to greet her step-son, sweeping him into a hug like she'd done with Blaine.

"I set up the guest room," Burt said, both eyes fixed on Kurt as he spoke. Kurt all but rolled his eyes when he let go of his step-mother.

"Dad-"

"Why don't you show Blaine around?" Carole suggested, looking from one Hummel to the other. She hustled between her husband and sons, making her way back to the room she came out of. Kurt could only agree, sending his father a look that Blaine couldn't interpret and then took Blaine's hand as he passed him.

They left the bags downstairs and Kurt pointed out each of the rooms they passed as they made their way along the upstairs hall. Blaine had stuck his head momentarily inside Kurt's bedroom before they'd wandered right passed it but from a brief look, Blaine saw no difference between the bedroom here and the apartment in New York. This bedroom was far less up-to-date fashion wise but having not lived in Ohio for years, Blaine wasn't at all surprised that Kurt spent more attention on his New York place.

"And, this is the guest room." Kurt pushed open the last door, the room on the opposite side of the hallway to Kurt's room. Blaine guessed Burt wasn't too upset with that arrangement.

The guest room was smaller than Kurt's but it still held something that spoke of his soul mate. White walls, wooden floors, a dark brown bedframe and bedding in all shades of brown and beige. It was so perfectly coordinated that when Kurt's voice cut through Blaine's musings, he wasn't at all surprised by what was said.



"My dad let me decorate most of the house when we moved in." Kurt was saying. He tugged sharply on the duvet to straighten a wrinkle and then took a seat on the bed. "It's not as nice as my room, of course, but I spent enough time on this room to know that you won't be sleeping somewhere that there's no décor at all..."

As Kurt trailed off, Blaine took a seat on the bed next to him. He twisted his torso so he could look at Kurt directly and Kurt slid his fingers under Blaine's, leaving his thumb on top to brush gently against Blaine's knuckles.

"It's perfect." He said sincerely.

"It would be more perfect in my room." Kurt replied, a smile gracing his lips that shone of cheekiness. "But it's my dad."

That was something Blaine understood completely so he nodded and looked around again. It wasn't like this room was a box room with no room to move around. Besides, he would take a box room if it meant staying here with Kurt for the next few days.

As a response when Blaine told him that, Kurt leant forward to press his lips against Blaine's. Blaine's eyes immediately slip shut and he lifted a hand to cup the back of Kurt's neck, fingers threading into the very bottom of his hair but not sliding them higher as his hairstyle would be ruined. G-d he could keep kissing Kurt forever.

A bang in the hallway made them break their kiss and Blaine moved a little further from Kurt on the bed, keeping their hands linked. Finn stuck his head round the doorframe and breathed a small sigh when he saw they weren't preoccupied.

"You're lucky I like you man." He said to Kurt and he dropped Blaine's bag onto a chair near the doorway. "Mum asked me to move the bags upstairs so here you go."

Kurt nodded his thanks and before he turned to leave, Finn added: "Don't take too long. Dinner's on the table in a few minutes and I had to drive you guys from the airport so I haven't eaten in a while."

As in on cue, Carole's voice called from downstairs and Finn practically bounded from the room, Kurt and Blaine following at a more dignified pace. Blaine let Kurt take the lead but he paused right before the half

open door into the dining room. Kurt reached out, took hold of Blaine's hand and almost pulled him into the room so that they entered together.

Carole had cooked chicken that evening and when Blaine took the first bite of it, he guessed that it was a recipe perfected by Kurt. Over the nights that he'd stayed in Kurt's apartment and all the meals he'd eaten, he knew Kurt was the chef in the family.

Conversation flowed easily between the four members of the Hummel-Hudson family. Kurt asked all about how Burt's garage was going, diving into the conversation with a passion that Blaine had seen on Kurt's face when they'd spoken about Broadway or when Kurt was talking about his clothes. His passion stretched to cars as well? At that point in the conversation, Blaine doubted that there would be a time when his soul mate didn't surprise him.

"Burt, Blaine likes football too." Finn's voice cut through Blaine's musings. He'd been sipping the glass of lemon water while gazing unblinkingly at Kurt. At the sound of his name, Blaine shook his head and looked at the table around him. Carole was smiling down at her plate, cutting up some beans, but Burt and Finn were still arguing over something that was rumoured to be happening for the next season.

"Yeah?" Burt looked over at Blaine, who nodded, and he started to ask Blaine what he thought about the previous season and some of the rumours circling the draft pick for next season. Kurt was sat next to Carole on one side of Blaine and he could hear them muttering together, talking about something in the upcoming line Kurt was producing. Burt's opinions on the Buckeyes' previous season kept him, Finn and Blaine occupied in a conversation for a while, only breaking the flow for the occasional bite of the food or sip of the drink.

It was a dinner unlike any Blaine had ever been to before now. The casual manner of both Burt and Carole's interactions with Kurt's boyfriend astonished him. The fact that Blaine was Kurt's soul mate didn't change the fact that this was ultimately Kurt's parents meeting the boyfriend. He'd been shocked but pleasantly surprised by the sheer warmth handed out in bucket loads by Kurt's parents when they'd arrived at the Hummel-Hudson home. And here at the table, Blaine was included in the family meal like he was part of the family.

At one point in the conversation, Finn was boasting about the prowess of the football team he'd been on in school. Talk in the car had been about the NFL and college football but now that he was at home and comfortable, Finn was on a roll about some games he'd played over his high school career.

“-only won that one game in my sophomore year though. That totally sucked. Worst season ever. If it hadn’t been for Kurt we wouldn’t have even won that game. That’s a game I’ll skip right over if you-”

Blaine looked at Kurt, who was staring down at the leftover gravy on his plate and deliberately avoiding Blaine’s gaze. “You won your team a football game in high school?”

After licking his lips and delicately rearranging his knife and fork on the plate, Kurt looked up and shrugged one shoulder. “I was the kicker and scored the winning-” he paused, seeking the correct terminology “-kick.”

Blaine could only stare and marvel his soul mate. “You won your school a football game, know how to fix a car, are a famous designer and sing like a dream. Is there anything you can’t do?”

Heat immediately rose to Blaine’s cheeks when all four Hummel-Hudsons laughed. Kurt had replied with a smirk and had changed the topic of conversation once more. He turned to his Dad and filled him in on some of the information he’d been sharing with Carole, talking about his upcoming designs with a look of pure rapture on his face.

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Dinner had finished and Blaine had jumped up immediately to help clear the table, only to be shooed out of the kitchen when he offered to help with the washing up. He and Kurt had been told to go upstairs as they’d flown today; Finn was roped into helping clear up before he loudly left the house after calling up the stairs that he’d see Kurt and Blaine soon.

Blaine was sat on top of the bed after the family had gone to bed, flicking through the contacts on his phone until he found Nick. Opening up Nick’s name, he selected to text his friend and began typing, shifting so that he was sitting against the wooden headboard behind him.

*I wasn’t shot by Kurt’s dad!*

He sent it, put his phone on the bed and closed his eyes. It wasn’t too late and if he knew Nick, his friend would be up anyway. As Blaine waited for a reply, he thought over the night he’d had and the family he’d been so quickly accepted into.

It wasn't that his own family was cold or like four strangers living in the same house. But there was something about the Hummel-Hudson family that made Blaine feel warm and welcome: the same something that he knew was missing in the Anderson home. Whenever Kurt met his parents, Blaine doubted that his mother would throw his arms around Kurt in a greeting hug the way that Carole had done with him. And Burt's insistence at calling him by his first name, comfortable talk throughout the meal and how he acted with his son in front of Blaine would never happen with Blaine and his father.

The way Kurt talked about his dad, Blaine had had an image in his mind that couldn't have been farther from the truth. Burt Hummel looked like he would be anything but supportive of a son who was a fashion designer and had a boy's name written on his palm. But the pride in his eyes when Kurt talked about the different fabrics that he was looking at for his new line had been clear enough to see for miles and their relationship was obvious for all to see. A small part of Blaine had wondered if Kurt was exaggerating when he talked about his father: but having witnessed the relationship between father and son first hand, Blaine was blown away.

He'd never have a relationship with his dad like that. Even if he became a respected academic, or a lawyer or a doctor like his dad had originally wanted.

Blaine's phone beeped and he slowly opened his eyes to glance at his illuminated phone.

**I'm glad. I'd hate for you to come back from Ohio in pieces. I doubt Jeff's mum will like me very much: you'll have to lend me your bullet-proof armour before I fly to LA.**

Blaine chuckled and turned his phone landscape to reply when the door creaked open. He watched Kurt stick his head round the door, smile widely when he saw Blaine was still awake and creep inside.

Blaine reached over and threw his sweater off the bed to make room for Kurt to sit. He slid across the covers until he was perched right next to Blaine. With a smile he took Blaine's hand in his own.

"I know we're still in my dad's," he said, looking at where their hands were linked rather than at Blaine, "but I'm not staying in my room when you're in here." He looked up at Blaine now. "Even if my dad continues to use the wrong thread-count sheets on this bed and mine is far more comfortable."

"But-"

"It's fine." Kurt insisted. "If you're that worried, I'll go back to my room before Dad or Carole wake up tomorrow. Now put your phone down; Nick can wait."

Blaine laughed and did just that, locking his phone and resting it on the small side table next to him. "Do I really text Nick that often?"

"Yes."

Blaine hopped off the bed to tug the curtains closed and turn the light off while Kurt pulled back the covers and slid underneath them, throwing one side of them open as an invitation for Blaine. He got into bed next to Kurt, pausing in the middle of getting comfortable to look Kurt dead in the eye.

"Your dad better not shoot me for this."

Kurt laughed, light and musical as always, and replied with: "I've hidden his shot-gun." Blaine's eyes widened to the point that he was staring unblinkingly at Kurt like he'd just admitted to murder.

Kurt leaned forward and kissed him briefly. "I'm kidding." Blaine released the breath he hadn't realised he'd been holding. "My dad doesn't own a shot-gun."

"Good." Blaine finished getting into bed, fluffing up the pillow and tucking his feet into the covers. With the curtains mostly closed and the light off, he could see Kurt illuminated only by the lasting backlight from his phone and the sliver of light let into the room from the streetlamp outside Kurt's house. Kurt was lying with one hand on top of the covers and the other curled underneath the pillow, gazing at Blaine with the same fond look that he was no doubt looking at Kurt with.

"You're different here." He said, out of the blue when they'd been silent for a few moments.

Kurt's eyebrows snapped together in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"You're more relaxed here." Blaine wriggled closer to Kurt and then fluffed the new part of the pillow he was now lying on. "More... you."

Kurt sighed, one side of his lips turning up in a hint of a smile. "I definitely don't have to worry that whatever I'll say to someone is going to end up on the front cover of a tabloid the next day."

“It’s nice. Seeing you in your natural habitat I guess.”

“Oh my natural habitat is New York.” Kurt hurriedly assured him, looking earnest as he did so. “It’s just that I’ve got a hundred eyes watching what I do so some of the things I’d like to say, I can’t.” Blaine opened his mouth to ask for an example but Kurt pre-empted the question. “Like I’d love to tell some of those tabloid journalists that if they are going to try and claim they have a quote from me that they should actually print what I say, sarcasm included. And rather than follow me to sneak a story, ask me to my face so I can tell them no.”

Kurt had twisted onto his back, one arm still curled underneath the pillow, while he spoke. Blaine’s eyes traced over his profile in the sliver of light coming through the gap in the curtains. The curve of his nose, his soft pink lips still curved at the corners even while he spoke. Blaine was listening to what Kurt was saying but his attention was fixed solely on what lay before him.

He shuffled closer again, resting his head in the gap between Kurt’s shoulder and his jaw. He felt Kurt’s chest moving as he draw breath, felt his chuckle as he was interrupted in his talk about the paparazzi and how they just printed whatever they wanted Kurt to say rather than what he really said. Blaine slung one arm over Kurt’s chest, rubbing his thumb lightly over the silky soft pyjamas and he closed his eyes, content to listen to Kurt’s musical voice talk about anything while he drifted into sleep.

One final thought went through his mind as he settled into falling asleep to Kurt’s words. That he hoped Kurt hadn’t been joking about Burt not owning a shot-gun.

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Burt had to work the next day, going in for a few hours on the weekend, and Kurt cooked a grilled chicken salad for him, Blaine and Carole for lunch. Blaine had insisted on cleaning up after they’d eaten, citing that both of them had cooked for him so he wasn’t going to let either of them clean up this time.

He had his hands deep in the bowl of soapy water as he scrubbed the salad dressing off a plate when his ringtone rang out shrilly from where he’d left his phone on the table. All three in the kitchen jumped and started at the phone for a second. Blaine let the plate sink to the bottom of the washing-up bowl and reached for a towel to wipe the soap off his hands as Kurt leant over to the other side of the table to fetch his phone.

“It’s Cooper.” He said, holding out the phone for Blaine. Blaine frowned: why would his brother be calling? The last time he’d spoken to Cooper had been a few weeks ago, where he’d proudly informed Blaine that he had five auditions for guest parts in TV shows lined up and he’d let him know when he was awarded a part.

Blaine looked at Kurt and Carole apologetically and then accepted the call. “Hi Coop-”

“Hi Blainey,” His brother’s voice sounded loudly through the phone, interrupting his greeting in Cooper’s usual fashion. He slipped out of the kitchen and let the door close quietly: Blaine knew his brother well and he was unlikely to get a word into this conversation, “Heather woke me up this morning with something I thought you might like to know.”

Blaine started to ask if she was pregnant – while he’d be overjoyed to be an uncle and happy for his brother, a mini-Cooper running around LA would be disastrous – but Cooper didn’t give him a moment to speak.

“She always checks some of the websites for gossip, like TMZ and E! Knowing what’s going on in the world is incredibly important just in case I get asked to comment on a scandal or something another actor has done in an audition so I get her to tell me what she’s read.”

Blaine’s tapped his fingertips against the back of the couch as he held the phone against his ear. A well placed “yes” and the occasional “hmm” would always convince Cooper that he was listening and hanging onto every word he was saying.

“I think I’ve actually impressed a few directors in the past with some of the things Heather has told me, you know. So she always goes straight to her laptop when she wakes up to check what’s going on and if there’s anything new. Today though, rather than just telling me what’s happened over breakfast, she dragged me over to the laptop to show me some photos of celebrities caught unawares by the paparazzi. And some of the photos were really interesting.”

Blaine’s expression dropped from his face, his fingers now gripping the back of the couch and his phone tightly. “Cooper-”

“Some of those photos were of that new designer who’s been selling clothes from New York over the past few years. He’s pretty famous now, you know. Famous enough to be caught at the airport.”

“Coop-” Blaine tried to interrupt again, for all the good it did.

“But it wasn’t him that Heather was overjoyed about seeing a photo of. And it wasn’t him that I was curious about either.” He heard a female chuckle from behind Cooper and Blaine knew that Heather was hanging onto every word Cooper was saying. “You want to tell me why you were caught in the same pictures as Kurt Hummel, little brother?”

“Um,” Blaine licked his lips. Now Cooper was silent, two sets of breathing being heard through the faintly crackling phone line. “No.”

“Blaine!” Copper laughed once and Blaine heard Heather laughing away. He could only imagine the look that his brother was giving his soul mate; filled with amusement that he’d caught out his brother and that Blaine was trying to deny it. “You can’t lie with the photos. I’m still looking at them on the screen right now. They haven’t caught your best side though: you should use what I told you about headshots for them to get a good photo.”

Blaine rubbed his temples with his free hand. The kitchen door swung open and Kurt stood in the doorway, a bottle of water open in his hands. He tipped his head to the side to watch the conversation.

“Coop, you can’t tell anyone.” Blaine insisted, cutting off Cooper as he talked about what he would do if he was caught by paparazzi going into the airport.

“What? Why?”

Blaine sighed. “We haven’t told anyone yet. You’re like the-” he counted the number of people in his head “-eighth person to know personally.”

The line went quiet for a moment and then Cooper’s voice sounded again, without the teasing tone it had held for most of the beginning of the conversation. “Blaine, what’s your soul mate’s name again?”

“Um,”

Cooper gasped. “Wow. Oh wow. Blaine why didn’t you tell me you found your soul mate!” Blaine heard Heather’s loud gasp and then joyous laugh through the phone. “And a designer too! He’s probably been helping you dress right? What’s he like? I need to meet him: I need to make sure he’s good enough for my little brother.”



“Coop, of course he is.” Blaine looked up and caught Kurt’s very blue eyes. “He’s perfect.”

“If you got on the plane with him, where are you now?”

“With his family,” Blaine broke his gaze with Kurt, who had smiled broadly at the compliment, and rolled his eyes up to the ceiling. He knew what would come next: “in Ohio.”

A second gasp came from LA and now his brother’s voice was filled with excitement. “You’re in Ohio? He’s from Ohio too? You really are soul mates. Like I knew I’d find Heather here in LA. This is just the place for me so of course fate knew that too.” Cooper paused and Blaine held up three fingers, lowering one down every second his brother was silent. Right after he dropped the last finger, Cooper spoke again.

“Mum and Dad will meet him first though. Of course you’ll see them while you’re back in Ohio.” Blaine started to reply that he hadn’t actually told their parents that he was back in his home state but Cooper was still talking. “I can’t believe I’m not going to meet my baby brother’s soul mate before our parents do. And I can’t get there soon: I’ve got an audition next week. It’s for a brand new show, top secret so I can’t tell you much about it. The part’s a regular though and I know I’ve got it in the bag.”

“It’s fine: we’re leaving in a few days anyway. After your audition you can come to New York and meet Kurt then.”

“I can’t believe I wasn’t the first person you rang when you found him though.”

“We’re keeping it a secret, Coop.” Blaine tapped his fingers against the couch again. He really wanted Cooper to hear that and remember it. His brother wasn’t one to betray a secret but he did like to name drop when he had legitimate links to people. “For as long as we can.”

“Ok.” The sincerity in Cooper’s voice made Blaine relax. “I know how important personal lives are to celebrities. But Blainey, if you every have trouble with the press then ring me. I know I haven’t exactly had an entourage of paparazzi but I can talk to someone who does: get them to help give you tips on what to do on camera.”

“Thanks Coop.”

“And tell Kurt he’d better be good to you.”

Blaine laughed. "I will."

They said their goodbyes, Blaine wishing Cooper luck on his audition and telling him that Heather needed to keep her brother-in-law's soul mate a secret too. With a last splurge of excitement that both of them had found their soul mates and a final promise to keep Blaine's secret, Cooper bid his brother farewell and hung up the phone before Blaine could echo the goodbye.

Blaine lowered his phone slowly and then rubbed his temple again.

"So that was your brother?" Kurt's voice was laced with amusement and when Blaine looked up, he saw mirth-filled eyes fixed on him. Blaine shook his head and rolled his eyes. That was the fire-cracker that was Cooper alright.

And pictures of him and Kurt going into the airport only yesterday had made into onto the internet and were a new source of gossip all the way across the country.

## Chapter Ten

The original plan for Kurt to be introduced to Blaine's parents was for both of them to drive to Westerville for the afternoon, stay the night in the Andersons' house and then drive back to Lima the following morning. Kurt had insisted that he meet Blaine's parents when he brought up that Cooper wasn't impressed that they'd meet Blaine's soul mate before he did, so Blaine grudgingly sat down on the couch to discuss the abrupt change to their plans.

However, when Burt had overheard them trying to determine which of the next three days would be good for them to make the trip to Westerville, he'd changed their plans in one sentence. He wanted to meet Blaine's parents too: saying that it would be perfect for both sets of families to meet up while the boys were still in Ohio.

So Blaine sat with his knee bouncing up and down as he held the phone up to his ear, listening to the ringing tone as he waited for his mother or father to pick up.

"Hello?"

"Hi Mum," Blaine said, genuine brightness in his voice. His relationship with his parents was strained because of the ten letters that had scarred his hand since he was fourteen but they were still his parents. "It's me."

"Oh Blaine, it's so lovely to hear from you." He heard his mother put something down on what he knew was the black counter tops in their kitchen. "Are you studying for your finals now?"

Blaine grimaced. He'd been purposely not thinking about his studies or the final exams that were coming up far more quickly than he admitted. "Just starting to mum," he settled for saying. It was the truth, in some ways. "But I'm in Ohio right now."

"Ohio? Why? Who are you staying with?"

Taking a deep breath, Blaine took the plunge. "My soul mate's family." His mother didn't say anything and Blaine only knew that she'd heard by the small, sharp inhale he heard. "I met him, Mum, in New York. Just a few weeks ago. His family is from here too and he invited me to come home with him when he came for a visit."

"That's wonderful darling." Blaine couldn't fathom the emotion he heard in his mother's voice. She had always held out for a girl's name developing on his hand, like his dad, but she had never openly disapproved of his being gay. Just wanted him to keep it quiet. So now that he'd actually met Kurt and connected with him; was she upset that there was no way of Blaine finding a girl to settle down with (not that there was any chance for that scenario even if Blaine hadn't met Kurt.)

"I'm so happy to hear that for you. I'll tell your father if you like: he's at work right now."

"Actually," Blaine said, holding the phone closer to his ear, "Kurt's father wanted to invite you to dinner. Kurt's from Lima and there's a restaurant here that we can all go to. So you can meet Kurt and he and his family can meet you and Dad. If you'd like."

Blaine heard nothing through the phone for a few seconds. He waited impatiently; fiddling with the grey sweater he was wearing and pushing the gravel around in circles with one foot.

"Of course we'll come." She eventually said. She didn't sound exasperated, which was always a good sign. "When would you like to go out?"

"Kurt and I fly back to New York on Tuesday evening, so is Monday ok?"

"Of course darling. Your father and I will see you then."

They hung up the phone at the same time. Blaine cradled the cell in his hands for a moment, staring at it with unblinking eyes. He had absolutely no idea how the evening would go. When he had had his crush on Jeremiah and his brief but memorable relationship with Sebastian, he had been boarding at Dalton. He'd never introduced his parents to any boyfriends.

The only time they had had to deal first hand with a date who was a boy was the Sadie Hawkins dance: and the aftermath had outweighed any parental reactions to Blaine dating another boy.

Confronted with Kurt and with Burt and Carole along for the evening, Blaine couldn't picture what would happen. He didn't like that. Going into the evening completely blind wasn't something he was looking forward to. It was clear that Burt accepted all aspects of Kurt, as did Carole, including Kurt's very male soul mate. If Blaine's mum and dad didn't: it would be painfully obvious.

An entire evening sat like that was not one to look forward too.

One Christmas before Blaine had left for New York, the entire Anderson clan had had Christmas dinner at Blaine's house. The year had been particularly memorable because one of Blaine's cousins, only two years older than him, had gotten pregnant by her boyfriend (not her soul mate) and had decided to keep the baby. It was a scandal of moderate proportions but Blaine could never forget the prolonged silences and the furtive glances at his aunt and uncle as they sat staring at the plates of turkey and stuffing. Diana hadn't even been there for the meal but the second-hand embarrassment had made Blaine disappear to his room rather than sit around for the carol singing his grandfather always liked to start after the Christmas pudding.

If Monday's dinner would be like that, filled with silences Blaine would fill by blurting out random facts and dates of events in history and punctuated by awkward exchanged glances, it would be unbearable to endure. For a brief moment, Blaine wished Cooper would be there too: at least with his brother around, the focus could always be drawn back to him.

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"You should wear this."

Kurt threw the white V-necked sweater onto the bed where Blaine was sitting dressed only his smart pants and socks. Kurt had taken full responsibility for what Blaine would wear that evening when he had come back inside after inviting his parents to dinner and had confessed his nerves.

"At least you can look fabulous." Kurt had said when Blaine had tried to protest. Kurt did know what he was talking about with clothes (he was a fashion designer after all) and Blaine hadn't minded taking Kurt's direction with what to wear for the fashion show they'd gone to, or after nights were Blaine had stayed at Kurt's apartment with no overnight bag.

"Just this?" Blaine picked up his sweater that he'd thrown into his bag as an extra item that he hadn't even been sure he'd need.

"Don't be silly." Kurt stood up and crossed the room in two strides. "You need to wear a bow tie tonight so put on one of the white shirts you brought. I've got a red bow tie that will go perfectly with those red shoes you have. Thank g-d you brought them with."

Kurt hustled out of the room and Blaine took the opportunity to slip into a white shirt that he hadn't worn while they'd been here. Even from nothing, Kurt had managed to make an outfit that would look great. It was an impressive talent, although not surprising from someone who had been an aspiring designer while he'd been a teenager. Blaine reckoned that Kurt would be able to rustle up an outfit from scraps of clothes that would be rejected from thrift stores and it would grace the runways from New York to Milan.

"Here." Kurt returned holding an open bowtie in his hands. Blaine turned and lifted his chin to bare the buttoned but raised collar. Kurt looped the red fabric round Blaine's neck and tied the tie with deft fingers, folding the collar down once he was finished. Blaine then pulled the sweater over the shirt and Kurt immediately dove back in to fix both bowtie and collar.

"Perfect." He declared after looking Blaine over. "With a jacket."

They had left Blaine's room, Blaine carrying a jacket borrowed from Kurt's closet, when Carole intercepted them. She was wearing a light cream dress to her knees, one red shoe and one black shoe.

"Kurt, which shoe?" She asked and pointed unnecessarily to the shoes. Immediately Kurt pointed to the red ones. Carole thanked him and walked around the boys towards the master bedroom in the mismatched shoes.

"And gold jewellery." Kurt called out behind her. "Not silver."

It took another ten minutes before the two Hummels, one Hudson and one Anderson poured into Kurt's Navigator and backed out of the drive. Finn had conveniently had plans that night but had confessed to Blaine when he'd been round watching a baseball game that if Cooper had been going, he would have come too but he'd rather avoid a night where parents would be quizzing each other to potential disaster.

Blaine gnawed at his bottom lip as Kurt sped down the roads of Lima, suburban houses flashing past the car becoming blurs to Blaine's eyes. He had started as simply chewing at the corner of his lip but as they drew ever closer to the restaurant, the chewing moved to a larger surface area and increased in ferocity. At one point, Kurt reached over, wound his hand between Blaine's fingers and where they'd been gripping his thigh tightly and rubbed the back of his hand to try and calm him down. It worked for a few minutes.

Apparently the place to go in Lima was Breadstix but according to Kurt it was an Italian restaurant if Italians didn't know how to cook. Kurt had even go so far to say that he could cook better when he'd been

eight years old than some of the cooking in Breadstix. Instead they were going to a restaurant further into the centre of Lima, Amoretto's, which was less frequented and a higher quality of food.

Blaine spotted his parents' BMW as soon as Kurt pulled into a parking spot just behind the restaurant. His eyes closed and he took a deep breath, feeling the engine turn off beneath him. Burt and Carole got out of the car first, still talking about something Carole had witnessed today in the hospital, but Blaine could feel Kurt next to him and knew that he was waiting for Blaine to make the first move to step out of the car.

After a few more seconds, Blaine opened his eyes and looked at Kurt.

"It'll be ok Blaine." He said, keeping his voice low so that Burt and Carole, who were standing just outside the car and didn't know about Blaine's fears for the evening, "you'll see."

The walk from the car to the restaurant seemed to take years, the distance to the front door growing with each step. Blaine was holding onto Kurt's hand, not even thinking that they were in public and probably should still be walking a little way apart. This restaurant wasn't equipped with a room for celebrities to hide from prying eyes or eager ears.

There was soft music playing in the air and the loud chatter of people sitting at the tables. Booths were set up around the walls of the room and there were tables in the middle for extra patrons to sit and eat at. Blaine looked around, ignoring Kurt telling the maître d' that they were looking for the rest of their party, and spotted his mum and dad in one of the booths on the far side of the room.

Blaine nodded in their direction and led the way across the restaurant. As he passed a table occupied by a family, both daughters twisted bodily in their chairs to stare wide-eyed at him and especially at Kurt. Neither boy took any notice. Blaine's grip on Kurt's hand tightened as they broke free of the middle tables and walked directly towards the table.

Blaine's mother, Lea Anderson, spotted them first. She was sitting away from the edge of the circular booth and had to tap Blaine's father on the shoulder to get him to move off the seat and let her free. James Anderson looked startled at his wife's prodding but gave a wide smile when he looked over and saw his younger son almost upon them.

“Blaine, sweetheart,” Lea held out her arms and wrapped Blaine in a tight but brief hug. She was small, only reaching Blaine’s shoulder, with the same curly black hair and tanned skin as her son. Blaine’s eyes were inherited from his father.

“Hi Mum.” He replied as he returned her hug. Once she had let him go, he briefly hugged his father and then turned back to where Kurt was standing. He, and Burt and Carole, were stood a polite distance from the three Andersons, giving them time and space to greet each other.

Holding out his hand for Kurt to take once more, Blaine turned to look at his parents. “Mum, Dad,” he said, pride laced through his voice, “this is Kurt. My soul mate.”

“It’s a pleasure, Mr and Mrs Anderson.” Kurt said. His voice seemed unnaturally forced, in a slightly lower register than normal and too monotonous. He was nervous.

“The pleasure is ours, Kurt.” Lea replied. She sent a momentary look to her husband and then stepped forward to give Kurt a brief hug in greeting. Then James held out a hand for Kurt to shake, smiling widely and shaking his son’s soul mate’s hand with enthusiasm.

It was just that small look his mother had sent his father that had Blaine’s nerves on edge.

“I’m Burt Hummel, Kurt’s father.” Burt’s voice cut through the second of awkward silence that had crept up out of nowhere after the initial introductions, “And my wife, Carole.”

The four parents shook hands, acknowledged each other’s names and identities then slid into the booth. Kurt and Blaine sat in the middle, fenced in by the table in front of them, Carole and Burt to the right and Lea and James to the left. Nerves had returned in full for Blaine: not that they’d left. He still wasn’t sure where he stood with his parents. They had been polite and seemed genuinely happy to meet Kurt. Which was all a good start but it was more likely than not too good to be true.

Orders were collected by the waitress, who stared unabashed at Kurt for a good few minutes before remembering the five other people at the table. Small talk was passed around while the waitress stumbled through taking their order, having to come back a second time to double check that Carole really had ordered the lamb and mushroom risotto.

“So Kurt,” Lea said after the moment’s silence of no one being sure how to start a conversation, “Tell me more about you. Blaine’s been very secretive about you.”



Kurt nudged Blaine with his elbow, a wry smile on his face. Blaine could only shrug in reply: he hadn't told his parents much about Kurt because he wouldn't know if they really wanted to know. He rationalised that way of thinking by adding that they were keeping it a secret for everyone.

Not that Blaine thought it would stay a secret for much longer.

"Well, I'm 22, I live in New York like Blaine but I'm originally from here." Kurt flicked his eyes to where Burt and Carole were sitting and then turned back to Lea and James. "I'm a fashion designer and-

"A fashion designer? That's so interesting. I've never met anyone who designs clothes before." Lea's voice was bright and Blaine knew his mother well enough that he recognised her excitement at that. It was his father's silence that had Blaine nervously gnawing at his bottom lip again.

"It's a lot of fun. I've been designing clothes for most of my teenage years." Kurt took a sip of the water in front of him. "I was a very fashion-conscious kid."

"So are you any good?"

Now Blaine stared wide eyed at his mother and the silence around the table lasted far too long. Carole rested her hand on Burt's forearm and out of the corner of his eye, Blaine saw the incredulous look the Hummel-Hudsons shared. James bit his lip to hide a smile and then covered his mouth with his hand when that didn't help. To her credit, Lea blushed and stuttered: "I didn't mean that – I just, well, I was wondering-

"It's ok Mrs Anderson." Kurt held out his hand to take hers. She'd actually wrung her hands before Kurt had spoken but latched onto him as soon as she could. "I understood. And yes I am: I've got two stores open in New York and I sell my clothes online as well."

Lea nodded at the table but she still held Kurt's hand in a vice grip. Blaine had dropped his head into his hands. This evening was really not turning out well. They hadn't even got their starters yet and his mother had stuck her foot in her mouth royally, his father hadn't said two words and Burt looked like he would have throttled someone at the suggestion that his son wasn't any good at what he did.

A hand gripped Blaine's thigh in a tight grip but the thumb that was gently rubbing against the side of his leg was soothing. Blaine lifted his head and saw that Kurt had finally extracted his hand from Lea's and while his face was looking forward, he was watching Blaine out of the corner of his eyes. G-d did Blaine

love his soul mate at that moment: just letting him know he was there and happy to end the awkwardness, at least for the time being.

“So Mr Hummel-” James said. The silence had lasted too long for comfort but the astonishment that flowed through Blaine at hearing his father speak could have knocked him to the ground.

“Burt, please.” Burt immediately dismissed the formality and while James’ eyebrow did twitch up for a millisecond, he nodded.

“Then do call me James.” Burt nodded too. “If your son’s a designer, does that mean you are also in the business.”

Burt laughed at the notion and shook his head. Both Kurt and Carole smiled at that as well. “No, I own a garage. Here in Lima. Kurt’s the adventurous one, going off to New York and starting his business there. I couldn’t be more proud of him for that.”

Conversation flowed a little easier from then but Blaine wasn’t comfortable the entire evening. When the waitress had come round for their order, he’d chosen the first thing on the menu that caught his eye but when the entrée was served, he stared at the lasagne with little appetite. Kurt was failing to eat his chicken parmesan with one hand as the other was stuck to Blaine’s leg to keep him grounded and from crying into his plate with nerves.

The one thing that Blaine could take from tonight is that once conversation turned away from jobs (which took too long but at least it had broken the ice), it was more relaxed. At least between Burt, Carole and James. Lea kept silent after her faux pas and Kurt contributed to the conversations sporadically. Blaine barely said two words that weren’t to Kurt. He was surprised but very glad that his father was talking. He had been so worried that James would be so disapproving that he would sit at the table like a living statue and barely speak to anyone. The thought that his father might be treating the evening like he was meeting Blaine’s girlfriend’s parents for the first time as opposed to the real situation kept running through Blaine’s mind: but when Kurt joined in the conversation about cars, hitting Blaine playfully on the shoulder at his annoyance that he hadn’t been told about the Chevy they’d rebuilt, James didn’t look shocked that Kurt was knowledgeable about cars. He didn’t appear to pander to the stereotype that because Kurt produced his own fashion line, he wouldn’t know anything about cars, a ‘manly’ hobby.

It didn't cross Blaine's mind that his father had no problem with who Kurt was or the fact that he was Blaine's soul mate.

Conversation eventually exhausted itself after a forced discussion about sports that only Burt and Blaine were knowledgeable about and had, in fact, discussed this topic at length the previous night when they'd had dinner together.

"Breath, honey," Kurt whispered in Blaine's ear while James and Burt fought over who would pay the check. "It wasn't that bad. And it's nearly over anyway."

He pressed a small kiss right next to Blaine's ear and Blaine couldn't hide the small smile that grew on his face. Finally James relented to paying for half of the check and all six stood up to begin edging their way out of the booth.

"It was lovely to meet you." Lea said to Kurt, keeping her voice warm and friendly. She held out her arms and Kurt accepted the hug with a brief laugh. James had shaken hands with Burt and Carole and was waiting for Lea to let her son's soul mate go free.

"And you, Lea." Kurt replied, having been reliably informed to call Blaine's parents by their first names during the meal. When Lea eventually let him go, he held out a hand to James which was taken but he was swept up into a small hug that shocked Blaine once again. He'd never seen a side of his father like this before.

"Um, excuse me? Mr Hummel? Kurt?"

A very quiet female voice interrupted the farewells they were giving by their table. All six adults turned to look at the young girl, standing with her older sister who was staring at Kurt with eyes wide and mouth tightly closed. They were clutching Sharpie pens, one notebook and one magazine tightly to their chests.

Kurt let go of James' hand and turned to look at the girls. "Yes?"

The younger girl visibly relaxed at Kurt's acknowledgement and said: "Can we have your autograph?" She moved her pen and notebook away from her chest only by a fraction.

"Of course." Kurt bent down until he was crouched on the floor. He wasn't kneeling on the ground in these jeans. He held out his hands for the pen and paper but it took a moment for the girl to release them. "What's your name?"

"Olivia."

With a snap of the pen lid, Kurt pulled it off and started writing away on the notebook page. He spoke out loud to her as he wrote, dictating what he was writing. "Dear Olivia, may you always have exquisite taste in anything you do." He finished the autograph with a flourished signature and handed it back to Olivia.

Then he turned to her still silent sister. "Would you like one too?" She nodded so Kurt held out his hands for the pen and magazine. "What's your name, sweetheart?"

"Ha-Hannah." She replied in a voice that was so quiet Blaine barely heard it and she was trembling like a frightened rabbit.

The magazine was opened to a page where there was a picture of Kurt and Blaine coming out of the airport in Columbus. Kurt smiled and signed a message similar to Olivia's on Hannah's magazine.

Blaine felt a tug on his sleeve and saw his mother leaning very close to his ear to whisper: "He doesn't just have a few stores and a website to sell clothes, does he."

She'd understood what was happening in a heartbeat. A quick glance at his father showed that James also clocked that Kurt wasn't just a business man in the fashion industry. Blaine turned back to his mother and shook his head. She covered her mouth again, no doubt remembering her slip-up earlier that suggested Kurt wasn't any good at designing. No one would be a famous designer unless they were very good at what they did.

Once she'd received her magazine from Kurt, complete with message about showing her colours without worry, Hannah looked down at it with a huge grin. Then held out her magazine and Sharpie pen to Blaine.

Blaine could only stare with very wide eyes at the girl, who couldn't be older than thirteen and apparently wanted *his* autograph. Kurt stood up and was watching the silent interaction with a look on his face that told Blaine he was incredibly amused and not about to help out whatsoever.

"You want *my* autograph?" Blaine asked. Hannah nodded and this time Olivia was hiding behind her sister but gazing up at Blaine as much in awe of him as she'd been of Kurt.

"Um," Blaine risked a look at Kurt. Who simply raised a single well-plucked eyebrow and then looked down at the magazine again. "Ok."

He didn't write a message but hastily scrawled his name over the glossy picture of himself in the magazine. Once he finished, Hannah tore the pen and magazine out of his hands and closed it gently before clutching it to her chest with such reverence she could have been a priest holding a bible. And, in fairness, for a young teenager who was invested in fashion and fame, the magazine was probably her bible. And the most precious thing now that it contained the autograph of her hero and his soul mate.

"Thank you Mr Hummel, Kurt, sir." Olivia said, faltering a moment as she spoke. The sisters turned on their heels and practically fled back to their parents' table.

"Shall we?" Burt gestured to the door, one hand behind Carole's back. He was looking at Kurt with such pride in his eyes that couldn't be measured. Carole led the procession through the restaurant and Blaine and Kurt brought up the rear. Everyone had seen the exchange between Kurt and the two girls and were now staring at the two men. Many were wondering who Kurt was to be asked for an autograph but others had their camera phones out and were snapping away.

"Why did she want my autograph?" Blaine asked Kurt once they were safely inside Kurt's car. They'd said their final goodbyes to Blaine's parents where Blaine had got an earful of words from his mother and father about not warning them that Kurt was not only a fashion designer but a famous one too. Blaine knew that as soon as they got back to Westerville, they would look Kurt up on the Internet and discover just how famous their son's soul mate really was.

What that girl Hannah had done asking Blaine for an autograph completely confused him. He wasn't famous. He wasn't well known. Other than speculation about who he was and a good few pictures capturing moments between him and Kurt, no one would look twice at him. The press didn't even know his name. What would his autograph be worth alongside Kurt's for a young girl who met her hero?

"She wanted it because of me." Kurt said. He was twisted round in his seat and slowly backing out of the parking space as he spoke but once they'd cleared the car next to them he put his feet on the brake and clutch to stop the car. Kurt reached over the centre console and pulled down the palm of the woollen red

glove he'd been wearing all night, hiding Blaine's name from public gaze. He tapped the pink scars with his finger. "She wanted the name that was on my hand. Having my signature and that of my soul mate will be valuable one day."

"But I thought no one really knew still?"

Kurt put the car into gear and turned onto the main road before he answered. "She's not stupid. No one is, really. Just because we haven't announced that we're soul mates doesn't mean that people don't realise. Anyway," Kurt turned away from the road and fixed Blaine with a level stare. "It won't last much longer you know; us keeping it a secret."

Blaine sighed, leant back in his seat and rested his chin on his elbow, pressed against the window. "I know."

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Burt wasn't working the next day so he happily told Kurt that he'd be driving them to the airport. Carole gave Blaine a large hug goodbye and Finn, who'd taken his lunch break late so that he could see his brother off, shook his hand for a moment before yanking Blaine into a bone-crushing hug. Burt and Kurt had loaded the suitcases into the back of Kurt's Navigator by the time Finn let Blaine go and then Kurt was given the same treatment from his much taller brother.

On this journey, Burt insisted that Blaine sit up front with him so they could talk for the two hour drive without having to lean over the central console. Kurt was tapping at his phone for the majority of the drive, answering email after email for Tina and the other members of his team for his third line. He was also scribbling away on a notepad, making a list of everything he had to do over the next few days to catch up.

Blaine wasn't at all surprised when they arrived at the airport in Columbus and they had an audience waiting for them. Photographers were lounging on the glass doors and the benches outside with their cameras around their neck and cigarettes in their hands. Cigarettes that were hurriedly put out when Kurt, Blaine and Burt made their way through their midst to the inside of the terminal. Once again, Blaine was eternally grateful for the ban on photography inside the terminal building: he doubted that he would last very long with constant flashes of bulbs and the click click click of cameras.

“Have a safe flight, kiddo.” Burt was saying to Kurt, holding his son in a tight hug.

“I’m going to miss you Dad.” Kurt said in a small voice, muffled by the shirt his father was wearing. A shirt made by Kurt but still plaid, on Burt’s request.

They separated and Burt turned to Blaine. He gathered his son’s soul mate up in a hug and muttered in his ear: “You’re a good kid, Blaine. I’m glad Kurt’s got you out there.”

“Thank you sir.” Blaine said. He was touched by the affection he’d been shown over the past few days. He hadn’t expected Burt Hummel to be really different from his warm and loving son but the sheer amount of warmth and welcoming he’d gotten was surprising to the boy whose parents would sniff with vague disinterest if Blaine brought a new friend round.

Not any more though, it seemed. The dinner with Blaine’s parents had been as awkward as predicted but had shaken the image Blaine had of his parents to the core. Maybe they were finally becoming comfortable with the fact that their younger son had a male soul mate. Blaine could only hope.

Burt let Blaine go, clapping him on the shoulder once before stepping away. “You boys have a safe flight.” He instructed. As Kurt and Blaine walked into the terminal building towards security, they looked over their shoulders to see Burt watching them go and waving when they looked back at him.

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On the plane, Kurt sat at the window seat and stared with wondrous eyes at the skyline of New York when they neared the city before landing. It was night and so the skyline was lit up spectacularly. It was a view Blaine could never get used to and neither, it seemed, would Kurt.

His eyes were fixed on the lit buildings, his chin supported by the elbow resting on the armrest, a very small smile gracing his lips. Every so often, Blaine heard a sigh of contentment. Kurt looked perfect like that and Blaine couldn’t keep his eyes off his soul mate. He was beyond lucky: he’d gotten a soul mate with a personality that could knock everyone else’s to the floor and was beautiful to boot.

“I love seeing New York like this.” Kurt said in a small voice meant for Blaine’s ears only. “I wanted to come here for so long so know that I see that skyline and I’m almost home means so much. It’s so beautiful.”

"Yeah, beautiful." Blaine said, not taking his eyes off Kurt. He leant across the armrest separating their seats and pressed his lips to Kurt's, finally drawing his soul mate's eyes away from the view from the window. They kissed with their lips closed for a few seconds but Blaine opened his and massaged first Kurt's top lip, then his bottom lip. Carefully, he licked at where Kurt's lips were slightly parted, seeking entrance that was granted immediately.

They kissed for a minute or so more, Kurt's arms snaking round Blaine's neck to hold them together, when Kurt broke away abruptly. "We can't do this here. We're on a plane."

"So?" Blaine leant back in for another kiss but Kurt moved his head back just a fraction. "No one's looking."

That wasn't strictly true as the air stewardess had noticed and walked away abruptly to give them privacy and a curious toddler was peering at them from his seat in the row in front of them.

"Later." Kurt insisted. Then he frowned and asked: "Do you want to stay at mine tonight?"

Blaine nodded and whispered: "Of course." He leant forward for another kiss. This time he caught Kurt's lips and sucked lightly at his bottom lip before diving in to massage Kurt's tongue with his own.

It took a minute more, the seat belt sign to ping and the captain's voice informing the passengers that they were minutes away from landing and thank you very much for flying with them today before Kurt jerked his head away once more.

"Later, I promise." He muttered, unable to resist giving Blaine a last peck on the lips. Blaine flopped back into his seat once Kurt had unwound his arms from his neck and buckled his seatbelt. As the plane landed, they held hands across the seat, gazes fixed on each other and the promise of later.

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Kurt's apartment was dark. Suitcases had been dumped unceremoniously in the hallway and both their jackets were thrown over the bags. The door to the bedroom was open and the room was lit by the streetlamps glaringly bright outside the window. It illuminated the large vanity, the door to the bathroom, the entrance to the closet and the two boys lying on Kurt's bed wearing nothing but their underwear.

They had arrived at Kurt's apartment after being picked up by Kurt's diver Edward, waiting for them outside the terminal with an expressionless look on his face. They had been predictably ambushed by the



paparazzi when they walked out of the terminal building and now Blaine was waiting for a text from Cooper the following morning with more advice on how to look fantastic on camera when he's just come off a plane.

They'd wasted no time with putting clothes away and had torn their jackets off before coming together with a clash of lips. Kurt had cupped Blaine's face, angling it whichever way he wanted so they could kiss deeper than before. Blaine had gone straight for Kurt's ass, cupping one cheek and slipping his hand into the back pocket of Kurt's jeans to squeeze roughly. They stood for a mere moment, kissing deeply and throaty moans filling the room before Blaine tore his lips from Kurt's and latched on his neck.

"Blaine- bedroom." Kurt's voice was deep and filled with lust and arousal. He stepped forward, aligning their hips and rubbing his hard cock against Blaine's. Even through their pants the friction was amazing and both of them let out a moan. Then Kurt stepped forward again, forcing Blaine to move back with him.

By the time they had stumbled to Kurt's bedroom, they'd lost Blaine's shirt and Kurt's shirt and waistcoat. When they'd lost their tops, Kurt had practically climbed up Blaine's body, wrapping arms around his neck and long legs around his waist. Blaine's hands had flown to Kurt's ass again like it was a magnet and stumbled to Kurt's door. All the while he was moving Kurt up and down slightly, rubbing their cocks together to recreate that delicious friction.

They'd crashed onto the bed, Kurt's legs falling open to accommodate Blaine's hips and his lips firmly sucking a hickey onto Blaine's collarbone. Blaine had scrambled to undo the button of Kurt's pants and lowered the zip with shaking fingers. They'd broken apart only to take off each other's pants once and for all, Blaine hurrying over to place them on the chair by the door so that Kurt's clothes weren't on the floor. Their shirts had been purposefully left on the couch for that exact reason.

When Blaine settled on the bed again, Kurt reversed their positions and straddled Blaine's hips, grinding down so that their cocks rubbed together with only their thin underwear as a barrier.

"Oh, Kurt." Blaine groaned, his voice cracking on Kurt's name, and threw his head back into the pillows. His exposed neck was an invitation and Kurt dove straight there again, sucking a mark on the other side now, just under Blaine jawbone.

Blaine ran his hands down Kurt's back, feeling soft skin and the heat on his fingertips. He reached Kurt's underwear and slipped under the elastic to keep in contact with Kurt's bare flesh. The movement of Kurt's

hips, the kissed he was pressing into his neck, the feel of his too-hot skin under his hands: all made Blaine slip further into a cloud of lust and arousal, where his only anchor to the world was Kurt. Blaine gripped Kurt's ass and moaned loudly as a flawlessly aimed thrust had their cocks rubbed together perfectly.

"Take them off." Kurt muttered into Blaine's ear, the low register and the heat from his breath giving Blaine a shiver that ran down his spine and straight to his cock. He hurried to comply, yanking Kurt's underwear over his ass but carefully lifting the front over his rock hard prick. Then Kurt took over and kicked them off his lips. These landed on the floor and while Kurt had lifted himself away from Blaine, he'd taken the opportunity to tear away the final cloth barrier that would separate their naked bodies.

Skin met skin as Kurt settled himself on top of Blaine once more. On cue they moaned again, soft skin sliding together helped by their frantic attempts to gain the friction they had before they stopped. Blaine's fingers traced up and down Kurt, never settling in one place, wanting to map out the image before him. Kurt had twined his hand into Blaine's curly hair, breaking the gel up and using a forceful grip to keep their lips together.

Kurt's other hand, however, was following Blaine's example and tracing down Blaine's side. He lifted his hips slightly to create space and then wrapped his long fingers around Blaine's cock, giving it a sharp tug.

Blaine bucked into Kurt's hand, skin sliding against skin, and he moaned into their kiss. Kurt took a moment to wrap his hand around his own cock as well, holding them looser now but the friction of Kurt's hand moving up and down and their thrusts that rubbed their cocks together soon had both of them panting for air, mouths pressed together but not kissing.

"How do you want me?" Blaine muttered into Kurt's ear when they broke apart for air.

Kurt moaned, Blaine feeling the vibrations from where Kurt's mouth was pressed against the skin of his cheek. When he lifted his head and caught Blaine's eyes, he murmured: "Not just yet. Roll over."

Kurt braced himself on his hands and lifted away, giving Blaine space to turn onto his stomach, face pressed into the pillow below him and covers giving delightful friction. He felt cold after the intense heat he couldn't get enough of coming from Kurt; he would lie like that underneath Kurt, completely naked, for as long as he could.

"You ok, honey?" Kurt's voice was still deep and the arousal Blaine could hear clearly ran down his spine again. He whined against the pillow, then turned his head and kissed Kurt roughly over his shoulder. He felt Kurt's hand skim down his sides, his back, landing on his waist and gripping. Each touch felt like fireworks and sparks against his skin and only made him feel more flushed, more hot, wanting more and more.

Kurt's tongue ran down the length of Blaine's spine. Blaine could only run his hands up the bed to grip the pillow and groan loudly into the bed. He felt Kurt's hands running over his cheeks, one thumb slipping down the crack but stopped before it reached the one place Blaine wanted it the most.

He was floating, grounded to earth only by Kurt's hands on his skin and the feel of the friction from the covers on his cock. He felt Kurt part his cheeks and gave a shout when he felt the pad of Kurt's tongue start at his hole and run up the length of his crack, like Blaine was an ice cream he could get enough of the taste. He licked down again and circled the puckered hole with the tip of his tongue, making a spiral that grew smaller and smaller each time.

Blaine was still for a moment, panting into the pillow, and then moved. He bucked into Kurt's tongue, trying to get more of that incredible sensation but lost the friction he'd had on his cock from his movements on the bed. Kurt's hands gripped his cheeks tighter, holding them open and he teased Blaine's hole until he was mumbling gibberish into the bedding.

Kurt's tongue, the thing doing wonders to Blaine's mind and making the tension in his lower abdomen grow tighter and tighter with each lick, left his crack. Blaine lifted his head to protest but dropped it once more as Kurt licked down the length of his perineum and took one of his balls into his mouth.

"Oh my g-d, Kurt." Blaine whined into the pillow again and turned his face to look over his shoulder at the light brown hair of his soul mate. "*Fuck, yes.*"

Kurt lifted his head and pressed a kiss to one of Blaine's cheeks. "Lube and condoms, top drawer."

Blaine didn't move, his eyes glassy as he looked down the length of his own body to where Kurt was knelt between his wide spread legs. He watched Kurt move up toward him and press a light kiss to his jaw right under his ear. A sweet kiss so out of character after the rimming he'd had.

"Lube and condoms, top drawer." He repeated.

This time Blaine pushed himself away from the bed on shaking arms and reached out to the top drawer, roughly tugging it open and rummaging around. He felt Kurt slide down to where he'd been and gave a cry that morphed into a moan when he felt Kurt lick right over his hole again.

"G-d, Kurt." He said, turning to look over his shoulder with one arm still in the drawer of the side table.

"You're complaining?" Kurt asked, lifting his head and resting his chin on one of the cheeks still held apart with his hands. Blaine shook his head emphatically and Kurt looked pointedly at the top drawer.

"I'm getting there." Blaine turned back to the drawer and rummaged around a little more. "You're distracting me."

Just as Kurt turned back to continue teasing Blaine's hole, his fingers closed around a bottle of lube. Blaine pulled it from the drawer and dropped it onto the bed, sticking his arm back in a similar part of the drawer to find the condom box. As he continued to search, he heard the click of the bottle of lube and a finger pressed against his hole, slipping in easily from the lube and the wetness from the rimming.

Blaine rested his head against his outstretched arm, hearing both him and Kurt groaning at the feel of his snug hole around Kurt's finger. He finally found the box of condoms, took them out of the drawer and flopped back on the bed, letting go of the box to curl both hands into the covers. He felt Kurt's lips against his cheek again and Blaine turned his head to peer over his shoulder.

As the finger inside him moved slowly in and out, Kurt pressed kiss after kiss to Blaine's cheek, forehead and lips. Each kiss left behind tingling sparks that shot straight down to Blaine's cock. The blunt feel of Kurt's finger first breaching his hole had stopped the growing tension in his abdomen: any longer with the rimming and Blaine would have come, and it would have taken longer for him to have Kurt's fingers inside him.

A second finger was pressed in and finally Kurt caught Blaine's lips in a kiss. It was sloppy; Blaine completely drowning in the sensation coming from Kurt's fingers inside him, the feel of his body on top of his and Kurt's lips moving against his own. Kurt moved his fingers in and curled them up, seeking and not quite finding on the first go. He scissored his fingers open and Blaine's legs fell further apart. He moved his hips to try and bear down on the fingers inside him. Kurt curled them once more and this time-

"Oh g-d Kurt. Oh my g-d Kurt."

Blaine felt Kurt's lips curl up into a satisfied smile and he pressed a third fingers inside, moving all three a little faster now, coating the inside with lube and stretching him more.

"Please." Blaine muttered into the pillow. "Pleaseplease – so good – Kurt."

Kurt pulled his fingers out of Blaine completely and reached over to the condom box, hurriedly opening it and tearing one open without even removing it from the strip. Blaine lay still on the bed, gasping for breath into the covers. He felt empty without Kurt, like something so important was missing and he'd never get it back. Even as he heard Kurt lubbing up his cock and a small part of Blaine's brain wanted to turn around and watch his soul mate jerking off, he whined for more of the feeling of Kurt around him, inside him, making him completely Kurt's.

"Turn over baby." Kurt said but Blaine shook his head. He looked over his shoulder and where Kurt was kneeling, one hand still moving up and down his cock in slow but deliberate strokes. For a second, Blaine's eyes fixed on that but then his glazed eyes blinked and he got onto his hands and knees.

"Like this." He said, still looking at Kurt over his shoulder. "Please- like this."

Without responding, Kurt settled his hands onto Blaine's hips. His tight grip broke through the haze of arousal and Blaine shifted once more, opening his legs wider to accommodate Kurt's body. Then he felt the blunt pressure and the push of something larger than three fingers pressing into his hole.

Once again both Kurt and Blaine groaned, the feel of Blaine's tight ass making Kurt stop to let both of them adjust once he'd bottomed out. He paused for longer than necessary and the babbling reached Kurt's ears.

"Move-please g-d- move. Kurt. Oh my g-d. Pleaseplease move."

So he moved. Kurt started thrusting gently first, the bed barely creaking with their combined movements. The gentle thrusts didn't last long: a combination of the tightness around Kurt's cock and the feel of Kurt moving inside him had both men moaning. Blaine started to thrust back against Kurt, desperate for more, for harder and the grip on his hips tightened and Kurt began to thrust harder and faster.

A change in angle had Kurt's cock brushing passed his prostate and Blaine's arms, which had been shaky from the stimulation before, collapsed. He was moaning constantly now, babbling nonsensical words as every thrust brushed over his prostate.

"Touch yourself for me Blaine." Kurt said. He slowed down his thrusts, making them far deeper and he moaned at the sensation. One of Blaine's hands reached down and as his fist closed over the base of his cock, Kurt sped up his thrusts again.

"Oh g-d Kurt, right there. Harder."

Blaine sunk his teeth in his lip as he roughly jerked his hand up and down his cock. Kurt was still hitting his prostate with every thrust, every thrust that seemed to get harder each time. He knew he was talking, begging Kurt for something but neither of them knew quite what he was saying.

"G-d Blaine," Kurt's voice was thick and heavy and it sent a shiver down Blaine's spine, making him speed up his hand on his cock, "You feel *so good*."

"Kurt- please. *Fuck*."

Kurt fucked hard and fast, driving into Blaine's body. His hand twisted under the head of his cock, Kurt's thrust hit his prostate dead on, the sound of Kurt's voice saying "Come on Blaine, come for me" and Blaine was gone.

He whined into his arm, white streaks of come landing on the bedding below him and over his hand. His ass tightened and the sight of Blaine coming, the feel of Blaine coming around him, sent Kurt over the edge.

"*Ah*, Blaine." He cried, trusting one last time and tightening his grip on Blaine's hips. The air was filled with the sound of panting, both of them taking deep breaths, and the smell of sex, sweat and come. After a moment's pause, Kurt reached down to hold the condom in place and slowly pulled out of Blaine. He moaned at the feel, his thigh jerking from the overstimulation and once Kurt was all the way out, practically collapsed onto the bed, rolling away from the spot where some of his come had landed on the bed.

Blaine watched Kurt bustled into the bathroom, heard the lid on the metal bin slam closed and the sound of water running. Then he was back and ran a cloth over Blaine's face, smiling down at his soul mate whose eyes can barely stay open. Blaine couldn't remember the last time he came that hard, the last time he was so lost in the sensations that he didn't want to move. Sex with Kurt had always been amazing: this was the first time they'd had penetrative sex but every time Blaine stayed round at the apartment that was

becoming so familiar, they had some form of sex. Every orgasm had been fantastic: but this one won first prize.

“I don’t want to move.” Blaine whined when Kurt pulled at his hand to get him off the bed. Kurt had gently cleaned them both up, just like him to want them to as pristine as possible before bed. He tugged again, this time making Blaine sit up and slide off the bed.

“Because that was amazing,” He said, pressing a firm kiss to Blaine’s lips and then turning to tug the top cover off his bed and bundling it up into a ball, “you can sleep. We’ll shower in the morning.”

He left the room with the come stained bedding but returned quickly. All Blaine had done was throw the second covers back and slid into bed, punching the flattened pillow to fluff it up again. Kurt joined him, kneeling on top of the covers while they kissed. Kissing slower and far more gently, massaging each other’s lips as they slanted their heads this way and that.

Kurt stood up once more to tug the curtains closed and threw the room into darkness. He closed the top drawer of his side table, contents in disarray after Blaine had rummaged around for the lube and condoms. Lube and condoms that were lying on the floor, forgotten by both boys.

Finally ready, Kurt joined Blaine in the bed, settling comfortably as he curled into Blaine’s open arms. His soul mate was dozing, his eyes closed but not properly asleep just yet. Kurt pressed his lips to the underside of Blaine’s jaw and then tucked his head into the space between Blaine’s jaw and his shoulder. His eyes fell on the hickey he’d sucked into Blaine’s collarbone, red and bright against Blaine’s skin.

The gentle rise and fall of Blaine’s chest, his body heat and the feeling of being surrounded by someone he loved soon sent Kurt off to sleep.

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Elsewhere a man was sitting at an interview table, his leg bouncing up and down and his hands wringing together. It was an official tabloid but the room was dark, compact and claustrophobic. Pictures of any and every celebrity adorned the walls and three camera cases were stacked on the floor next to a huge pile of loose papers.

The man who owned the office, sitting behind the desk, was smoking a cigar and the sickly smell washed over his companion, making him cringe. He wrung his hands again.

“You’re sure?” The journalist asked. His voice was low and seedy and for a moment, the first man felt like lying just to get out of there. But then he looked at the name scarred onto the palm of his hand and nodded.

“Well if your name is the same as his then we can run the story.” The journalist said. “Of course, you’ll be compensated for stepping up and revealing the name of your soul mate to us. First thing’s first though,” he tapped a photograph that was lying on the dark and messy desk with the unlit end of his cigar, “we need to find out for sure who Kurt Hummel’s new friend is.”



## Chapter Eleven

Blaine and Nick were spread out over a patch of grass in Central Park, books surrounding them and bottles of water holding down loose papers that were fluttering in the breeze. The park was full at the moment, children running around enjoying the weekend, mothers pushing their prams and chatting loudly, a group of teenage boys throwing a football between them and wolf-whistling at girls who were wandering passed.

It was high time that Blaine was doing some work. Finals were a few weeks away and his motivation had taken a nose dive after meeting Kurt. At least Nick was now in the same boat as he was. His friend could barely go a minute without talking about Jeff: but as Blaine had been the same way once Nick had known the truth, he could hardly complain.

So every time he read something about the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace or something about Victoria and Albert's influence on the Industrial Revolution, he was interrupted by Nick.

"He's amazing, Blaine. Absolutely amazing. When we went out on the river into the bay," Nick sighed and shook his head. "Indescribable."

"You said you went on the boat after-"

"He can sing too, you know? He was singing along with the radio when he picked me up the other day. He's got a beautiful voice."

"Kurt's got a beautiful voice too but he-"

"But his car... I could probably fall in love with his car. It's a Lamborghini, orange but a classy orange. I mean, he's a model right so everything has to be classy. And I know I drooled a little when I first saw him roll up in that car, then step out and smile at me. Having him as my soul mate is everything that I could have imagined and so much more."

Blaine had to stop himself laughing. So what that his friend was acting like a teenage girl with her first crush, or more like Sugar would. He knew exactly what Nick was feeling. And that was the best part. When Wes and David connected back in high school, Blaine watched his friends and their soul mates and wondered what feeling like that really was like. Of course he'd been more than happy for them and had

endured their talk about their soul mates much like he was enduring Nick's. But he could never empathise with them, could never really understand what connecting to your soul mate was really like.

Now he could. When Nick spoke about how right it felt with Jeff, how holding his hand made him feel warm and how just being with Jeff made him feel like he was home, Blaine knew exactly what he meant. Because he had the same things with Kurt.

"Nick." Blaine said after a few more moments during which Nick had covered Jeff's amazing apartment that was shared with a female model, his scary mother in LA (who Nick was terrified to meet after hearing one story about how she pushed Jeff into modelling) and had spoken at length about the dates he wanted to organise for Jeff. When Nick blinked and looked confused, Blaine leant over and tapped the empty lined paper right in front of his friend. "Come on. Industrial Revolution."

Nick groaned, his lips curling into a scowl. "I don't care what happened a hundred or so years ago across the sea in Britain. It happened and we're better off because of it. Can we move on?"

"I bet a question like that will come up on the exam actually." Blaine flicked the page in one text book, then reached out and checked a reference in a second. "*The Industrial Revolution was the turning point for the world. Compare and contrast different opinions stating that it was a beneficial move at the time.*"

"I hope not." Nick finally turned to his books. They scribbled away, listening to the laughter of children and the wind rustling through the trees. A hard gust of wind had both of them falling flat over their notepads to stop anything flying away and they straightened with a laugh when the wind calmed down.

"Jeff told me something the other day." Nick said out of the blue a little while later. They'd been silent for so long that Blaine jumped a little in surprise. He looked up at Nick, who was chewing the end of his pencil thoughtfully.

"He said that you and Kurt probably shouldn't have kept your relationship to each other a secret."

"Yeah?" Blaine capped his pen and let it roll on the paper until it hit his knee. "Why's that?"

"He said it'll make it worse when you do tell people you're soul mates. He did say that he understood why you did it, and for g-d sakes I am fed up of the stares we get when Jeff and I go out for a coffee or lunch, but the fallout might not be worth the secrecy."

Blaine sighed. "We knew that before we decided to keep it a secret."

"I just want to make sure you're going to be ok when the truth does come out." Nick's eyes were earnest as he looked over his friend.

"Oh I didn't know you were such an expert Mr-I've-had-an-interview-with-my-soul-mate-already." Blaine said with a laugh, nudging Nick's arm playfully.

Nick blushed and deliberately looked at the ground. "I haven't had an interview with Jeff. It was his interview. I was just there for it."

Blaine cocked one eyebrow, then pushed himself up onto his knees and leaned over Nick to grab at his rucksack. Ignoring his friend's protests, he pulled a thick glossy magazine out of the bag then settled on his bum to find the page he needed.

Clearly his throat with an exaggerated cough, Blaine started to read from half way down the page. A large photo of Jeff graced the page opposite, taken at the fashion that he'd met Nick at.

*Closer: I also hear you've recently connected with your soul mate. Congratulations.*

*JS: Thanks. Thanks a lot.*

*Closer: Do you want to tell us about it?*

*JS: Sure. Well I met Nick [Nick Duval] at the Jeremy Jacob fashion show that we were just talking about. [Laughing] That's probably what made it so memorable for me! He was there with a friend and had been invited to the after party so that's where we connected.*

*[He looks over at Nick, who's here with us today, and they share a smile.]*

*Closer: [To Nick] A friend? That's a pretty good friend to get you into a fashion show and the after party. Luckily for you. [He nods] We're quite curious about your friend actually, especially as he always seems to be in the company of one Kurt Hummel [fashion designer who's just booked Jeff for his upcoming third line].*

*ND: [Laughing]. He's a good friend of mine.*

*Closer: Anything else you want to share about the friend who found you your soul mate?*

*ND: [Shaking his head]. Nope. Their business is theirs. I'm just happy I went with him to the fashion show so I could meet Jeff.*

*JS: I couldn't believe it when Kurt came up to me, asked if he could talk business and then introduced me to Nick. Best night of my life so far, I'd say.*

*Closer: Even better than the night you first modelled for Keanan Duffty in his revolutionary fashion show?*

*JS: [Laughing] That was probably the second best.*

Blaine closed the magazine with a small smile gracing his lips. He'd seen the article when Nick had burst into his room the previous day, almost throwing the thick magazine at Blaine's head in his eagerness for his friend to see. Apparently the magazine had interviewed Jeff weeks ago but had asked for a second interview to include how Jeff had just recently connected to Nick. The interview had been rushed to print and now Nick had it pinned to the wall in his dorm and had forced all his friends to read it.

Upon seeing the dismissal of his relationship with Kurt, Blaine hadn't said anything to his friend. He'd simply dumped the magazine on his bed and gathered Nick into a hug, trying to convey all the gratitude he felt for Nick through the embrace. Nick had dodged the question and kept their relationship a secret without even thinking twice: that was the mark of a true friend.

He and Kurt were playing on borrowed time. More and more pictures had emerged from their trip to Ohio and more and more articles were written that were centred on who Blaine was. Now that Nick and Jeff had connected, they had a legitimate link and eager new journalists were trying to connect the dots. Kurt had told Blaine that his fans would do the same, trying to find catch the inside of either his or Blaine's palm to prove that they were soul mates.

It was only a matter of time.

--

"I reckon I'm being followed." Blaine said into his cell as he lay on his bed speaking to Kurt but wishing he was there. Kurt was still at the shop, having just finished a long meeting about how to proceed with

advertising for him third line. It was still far from complete: he was just looking at fabric patches now but his entire focus was on the line, when it wasn't on Blaine.

"Followed?" Kurt sounded worried and he started speaking faster. "By who? Have you gone to the police? My g-d, Blaine-"

"By paparazzi."

"Oh." Kurt's voice stopped for a second. Instinctively Blaine knew what was running through his soul mate's mind. Kurt was worried about what was happening and the blow up that was due any day now. He was worried that it was his fault. His fame was the cause of all this interest and so if Blaine was being followed and harassed by the paparazzi, then it was Kurt's fault.

"Don't think it's your fault Kurt." He said, halting Kurt's thoughts in their tracks. He heard Kurt take a breath to start to rebuff what he was saying, so he spoke right over him: "I wouldn't give anything we have up for obscurity. So what that people know what I wear when I go to my classes? I'd rather have that and have you."

Blaine could hear the smile in Kurt's voice. "Thank you. How do you know you're being followed?"

"There are pictures of me and Nick in Central Park revising." Blaine turned the page of the tabloid he'd bought when he'd seen a couple of his fellow students reading it and then looking pointedly his way.

"I'm sorry Blaine."

"Don't be." Blaine pressed the cell closer to his ear. Maybe if he did that, he could be closer to Kurt. "It's not like you're the one taking the photos. And maybe I'll take a leaf out of your book and just go up to one of them someday and tell them that if they point their camera at me again the only thing they'll have photographs of is the bottom of the river."

"I never actually said that."

"You thought it. And then told me afterwards."

Kurt's musical laugh sounded through the phone and Blaine couldn't help but smile. Even though the line went silence, Blaine was completely comfortable. Knowing Kurt was on the other end and hearing him

breath, not saying a word, was enough. Of course it would be made much better if he was with Kurt, but for now it would do.

“Rachel is still texting me daily asking when she can meet you.” Kurt sounded completely exasperated now. “I told her that I’d try and organise a lunch for us. At least that way we can have the afternoon to recover.”

“Recover? Is she really that bad?”

The answer was immediate: “Yes. If she doesn’t talk at a thousand miles an hour about herself then simply what she’ll wear will be enough. Rachel Berry is as annoying as she is enthusiastic.”

Blaine chuckled. “I’m used to listening to people talk about themselves.” He stretched over and dumped the magazine on the table near his bed, rolling onto his side and cradling the cell between his ear and the pillow. “Cooper’s like that.”

They talked for over an hour more, ranging from topics of great importance to nothing in particular. Blaine was growing to love these moments, when they could simply be with each other, no worries of keeping their words private or peering around for staring fans. Moments when Kurt could talk about people, specifically industry people, in the way that he wanted to rather than the diplomatic way of talking when in public. Moments when Blaine would just complain about the little amount of teaching he’d been given for one of the American history modules as opposed to the sheer amount of facts he had to learn for the module on British history.

A muffled voice came through the phone on Kurt’s side. Blaine heard Kurt talking to someone away from the phone and then he returned to the conversation.

“I’m sorry, I have to go.” He said, sounding genuinely upset that he had to leave the conversation. “Apparently someone is here to talk to me about my new line.”

Blaine checked his watch. “At ten thirty at night?”

“Fashion never sleeps Blaine, you should know that.” Kurt sighed. “It also doesn’t let me sleep either.”

“Good luck.” After hearing Kurt’s echoing goodbye, Blaine ended the call and threw the phone onto his pillow next to him. He tipped his head back, slipping both arms underneath the pillow to hug it around his

head. He wasn't in the least bit tired but he could stay like that, his phone next to him, for a long time: totally content after a conversation with his soul mate.

--

"Hey Sugar," Blaine leant on the door frame leading into Sugar's room and watched his friend type frantically at a computer. They hadn't spoken for a while, not since before Blaine had left for Ohio and definitely not since the pictures of him and Kurt had sprung up everywhere without avoidance. "How's your design project going?"

The only indication that she heard him was her nose turning up and a little "humph" she gave once he'd finished speaking. She continued to type away and Blaine moved further into her room, clutching his rucksack over his shoulder. He, Nick and Jennifer were headed to a lecture but having not spoken to his other friend for a while, Blaine had seized the time that he had free for being ready to leave first.

"Sugar? Are you ok?"

"I am not speaking to you, Blaine Anderson." If her use of his full name didn't give it away – she mainly used Blainey, which took a long time for Blaine not to cringe at – her unhappy tone of voice made it clear she was being serious.

"What? Why?"

Sugar finally stopped her typing but kept her hands firmly on the keyboard. She gave him a look like he was an annoyance she wished she could remove and suddenly he felt very sorry for all the people who crossed an affronted Sugar Motta.

"You know why."

Blaine cast his eyes around the room while he ran over a hundred things in his mind. Then he shook his head. "Not really n-"

"Kurt Hummel." Sugar interrupted. The penny dropped. "You want to tell me about Kurt Hummel, Blainey?"

*At least she's calling me Blainey* Blaine thought. He never realised he'd relish the moment that Sugar called him by that nickname. He should have expected this though. Nick had known for weeks now and Sugar wasn't the most subtle person in the world. She was a good friend but not at all a secret keeper. And now there was unequivocal proof that Blaine knew the very same Kurt Hummel she'd been saying was his soul mate, it was no surprise that she was upset Blaine hadn't told her first.

"Listen Sugar-"

"The next words better be: 'I'm sorry Sugar, you were right all along and I'll invite you to meet Kurt as soon as possible'." She looked him right in the eye, the large pink bow on her head bobbing slowly. He said nothing but his guilt read in his expression.

After a moment's silence, she huffed again and turned back to her computer. "Then I'm still not talking to you. You are this close to being uninvited to my post-final party that my daddy is throwing for me soon. Now, I have to finish my designs."

It was a dismissal that Blaine knew well. He paused at the doorway and looked over his shoulder back at Sugar. "Sugar-" She shook her head and Blaine finally left the room, joining Nick and Jennifer outside.

His other friend had not been impressed but had understood their desire for secrecy. She too had laughed at their attempts at secrecy though, agreeing with Nick that going to a park on a date and then leaving for Ohio together weren't conducive to a secret relationship. Jennifer was also amongst the camp, along with Cooper, who wanted to meet Kurt although Blaine knew that her reason of 'making sure he's good enough for my friend' was a guise, hiding that she just wanted to meet someone famous.

They stopped by a coffee shop that was on the way to the lecture hall, Jennifer bounding in to check if the barista she'd had her eye on was there that day.

"She'll come around." Nick was saying. He had slung an arm over Blaine's shoulders and they had hung back a little while Jennifer dove through the glass door. Blaine had told both friends what Sugar had said and both of them had looked incredibly guilty: they'd obviously known Sugar wasn't happy about being kept in the dark.

"She just needs to calm down. Or find another project to set her sights on."



Blaine shrugged one shoulder, the strap of his bag slipping off it from the movement and he took the time to steady it before slinging it on again. "I didn't expect her to stop talking to me though. Just bring it up at random times in conversations and hold it over me for a while."

"Sugar likes to be unpredictable." They reached the front of the queue. "One latte and a medium drip please. At least, she likes to think she's unpredictable."

The barista, not the cute one Jennifer was looking for, held out his hand to their cash and expertly opened the cash register with a flourish and then handed the boys their change. Jennifer was waiting for them with her own hot chocolate and they walked together out of the coffee shop, looking at each other and laughing at the change of conversation to some gossip that Blaine had missed while he was in Ohio.

"Blaine! Blaine!"

Blaine's head snapped up and he looked around for the unknown caller shouting his name. He flicked his eyes from left to right along the street and was then blinded by a flash of the camera. He raised the arm holding his coffee to shield his eyes from the bright light.

"Nick! Blaine!"

Jennifer was staring with her mouth wide open and her eyes staring at the crowd of photographers who had sprung up out of nowhere. Her facial expression was caught in every picture of the two boys, who were staring at each other in confusion. All Nick was thinking was how the photographers had known to be at this coffee shop at this particular time. He hadn't realised their routine was so regular.

All Blaine was thinking was how they knew his name.

He turned to Nick, away from the flashing bulbs. "How do they know my name?"

Nick's reply was only a shrug and then he too cringed when a camera flashed right in his eyes. Blaine looked around the crowd of paparazzi, all of them shouting, all of them shoving cameras in every possible angle.

"Blaine, can you tell us how you and Kurt met?"

"Blaine, are you planning on following Kurt into fashion?"

“Blaine, can you confirm that you are Kurt’s soul mate?”

“Blaine-”

He shook his head. What should he say? What was he going to do to get rid of these people? Kurt would know. Kurt would know exactly what to say to satisfy them without giving them any information and probably throw in a disparaging comment about many of the double denim the photographers were wearing with the jeans and denim shirts.

Nick was staring at the cameras with his lips shut tightly. He had only been in the public eye for two weeks and that was because of a few pictures taken at the fashion show and then what he’d said in the interview with Closer. Blaine knew that Nick had no clue how to deal with this. Nor did Jennifer for that matter, who had just come to a coffee shop with her friends and was now caught in the cross-fire of photographs.

One question seemed to be prevalent and was shouted a hundred times over in different variations of the same question.

“Blaine, are you Kurt’s soul mate?”

“Can you confirm that you’re Kurt’s soul mate?”

“How did you and Kurt connect?”

His coffee cup was already being held in his left hand but Blaine still twisted it around in his hand to make sure his mark was covered up. He turned to face the majority of the reporters and took a deep breath. Was this the right thing to do? Put on the spot like this, it was the only thing that he could think *to* do.

“Um-” The questions fell silent immediately but the cameras flashed. Out of the corner of his eyes, Blaine saw Nick and Jennifer step closer together, watching and wondering what Blaine was going to say.

“Um, no. Kur-Kurt and I are just friends. Really. Just spending time with each other. As friends.” He looked over the crowd, some scribbling down what he was saying. He would put money on every single person knowing that what he was saying was complete rubbish. He wasn’t even sure if he was saying it convincingly. He doubted it.

"Can you tell us how you two met?" One woman asked, her camera slung around her neck and a notebook open in her hands.

"What about where you two went on your trip last week?" A man queried. He had raised his pen in the air like he was asking permission to speak, like they always did at those official press conferences shown on TV.

Blaine floundered with these two questions. Of course he could tell them how he and Kurt met: by admitting they were soul mates. And of course he could tell them that they went to Ohio but why would a seemingly random friend of a fashion designer accompany him to visit his family? He turned around to send a pleading look towards Nick.

"We have to go to our lecture." He said in a very fast voice and then reached out with his hand to grab the upper part of Blaine's arm. Jennifer wound her hand through the curve of Nick's other arm and he towed both girl and boy away from the crowd of reporters, who started snapping pictures furiously as they went.

"Oh my g-d," Blaine muttered to his friends when they'd turned the corner and the last of the flashing cameras stopped. Nick dropped his arm and pulled out his phone, typing frantically on the buttons with one thumb.

"Are you texting Jeff?" Jennifer's voice was very quiet and she looked white.

Nick nodded. "You should tell Kurt." He didn't look up at Blaine as he spoke. His voice was also trembling. "That's probably going to end up in magazine tomorrow and online any time soon."

--

"Whether his claim that he's simply a friend of Kurt Hummel's is true or false, we can run your story without contradicting any official statements, Mr Phillips." The journalist's office was brighter in the middle of the afternoon, sunlight streaming through the windows in clear beams formed by the thick panes. The smell of cigar smoke still made Mr Phillips cringe but he kept the outward expressions of disgust to a minimum now that he was getting what he wanted.

"If you'd like," The journalist continued without even looking at the man on the other side of the desk, "We can conduct the majority of the interview now. If we do that, only editing and pictures and we're looking at... publishing in two days' time."

“That’s online right?” Mr Phillips asked. His voice was croaky after his attempt to barely breathe to keep the cigar smoke from entering his lungs.

The journalist nodded and took a deep drag of his cigar before answering. “Online in two days, print in next week’s edition.”

Liam Phillips nodded. He looked down at the name scarred to his palm. He was a young man, mid-twenties with thin brown hair that flopped over his brown eyes and his short round nose. He had yet to meet his soul mate in person. He had tried to get in contact before now; visiting his store, trying to make enquiries on the website, but he’d had no real luck.

He really hadn’t wanted it to end up this way. He had always sneered at the people who sold their stories to the tabloids but now here he was, sitting in the cluttered office of a journalist who would know his story soon enough. And he would be paid for his story too.

After a moment’s pause where Liam had stared unblinkingly at the name on his hand, he looked up at the journalist. “I’d like to be interviewed now, if possible.”

“Very well.” The journalist stubbed out his cigar (Liam breathed a sigh of relief) and then reached into a drawer of his desk to pull out a tape recorder, a pad of paper and a pen. “Let’s get started.”

--

Nick had been spot on with his timing. By the time they had left their double lecture nearly two hours later, Blaine and Nick were pointed at by members of their class while they held their phones in their hands. Jennifer had taken the hint and checked the internet herself and then breathed a great sigh of relief that she’d been cut out of every photo that had been taken of her with her mouth open.

The articles had been centred on what Blaine had said about how he and Kurt were just friends and not soul mates. Most included the quote that was word for word what Blaine had stumbled over to tell the reporters.

“Why is it such big news?” He’d grumbled while on the phone to Kurt after they’d arrived back in the dorms, people staring at him and Nick from their half-open doors. Blaine had gone straight into his room and closed the door with a loud bang which clearly told people he did not want to be disturbed. “What’s so impressive about someone like me?”

"The public are just really nosy and they want to know everything." Blaine had texted Kurt to warn him what would be appearing in the gossip columns and to Kurt's credit, he didn't say anything about making a statement to the press that could be ripped apart by any journalist and eager fans.

"How did they even know my name?" Blaine flopped back against the pillows and hid his eyes underneath his free hand. "Actually, I know exactly how. They know Nick's name so all one person had to do was check some Facebook pictures and see who I was tagged as."

"Facebook?"

"Maybe not just Facebook. I mean my NYU ID has my name and picture on it: someone just needed to check a list of students."

"Listen," Kurt's voice was serious but not hard, "if that happens again, just walk away. It'll be easier to walk away when it happens all the time but if they ask questions, ignore them."

"Ok." Blaine mumbled in a voice muffled by his hand.

"On the bright side, I was with Jeff today. We were planning the pictures for the third line. We're going very 50s chic with the pictures, like the old pictures of Paul Newman or Marlon Brando. Jeff mentioned-"

"50s?" Blaine was glad for the change in topic. His mind was constantly ticking the event over and over and a distraction was exactly what was needed. "Why the 50s?"

"Because you dress like you're a 50s heartthrob Blaine." There was no teasing in Kurt's voice: he was a hundred percent serious. "So most of my line looks like it will fit in the 50s. I think I'm going to call it something like 'prep-chic' or I'll coin a new term for what you wear and my new line. But, Jeff and I were talking over the ideas and he mentioned that he wanted the four of us to go out. For lunch, or for a coffee or something. I mean, you and Nick are best friends so it makes sense right?"

Blaine hummed a noise of agreement, wondering if Nick knew anything about this. It *was* a good idea. After having heard so much about his soul mate from Nick, he should probably meet Jeff so that he can have an image of his best friend's soul mate that wasn't just a model on a catwalk.

"So is lunch the day after tomorrow good for you?"

Blaine took a deep breath and pushed himself upright. "Of course."

--

It was said that soul mates complimented each other in every way but Blaine hadn't believed it fully until he was Nick and Jeff act around each other. Jeff was quite quiet in comparison to Nick but he carried himself with so much confidence that no one could mistake it for shyness. Nick could talk the hind legs off a donkey when he got going but he was more likely to walk into a room with his hands in his pockets and talking to someone so not to make too much of a scene. They would know where each other was at all times and would gravitate unconsciously towards each other. Blaine knew that's what he and Kurt would do – having been reliably told many times by Finn over the few days they'd spent in Ohio – but he'd never seen it right in front of his eyes before.

"Nick talks about you all the time." Jeff said to Blaine once they'd sat down and placed their order. Perhaps the waiters and restaurant employees were used to patrons being celebrities as they hadn't even flinched when a famous designer and a famous model sat at a table. It was a welcome change for Blaine and Nick. Neither was used to the attention that came hand in hand with fame and ever since their ambush by paparazzi together, they had barely gone a moment without being stared at by their peers.

Blaine had laughed and said: "He doesn't stop talking about you either."

The small smile Nick and Jeff had shared once the teasing had simmered out gave Blaine a warm feeling inside. They looked perfect together, in sync after so few weeks. Then he turned his head and gazed at his own soul mate.

Kurt had been looking down at his glass filled to the brim with soda. His long fingers were resting on the arm of his chair and he had one leg cross over the other, his foot so near Blaine's leg that he felt it occasionally brush passed when Kurt shifted in some way.

Were he and Kurt like Nick and Jeff were? So tuned to each other, so in step with everything they did.

When the waiter arrived with their entrées, Blaine turned his head and saw Nick looking at him with a very similar expression on his face that Blaine had had when watching Nick and Jeff. If that look was any indication, the answer was yes. Soul mates were soul mates for a reason.

"Are you planning on travelling to Europe for the fashion weeks?" Kurt asked. He took a sip of the soda.

“Not Europe,” Jeff rubbed away something on the handle of his silver-plated knife then picked up a small roll to butter, “I’ve been booked for a line in New York. Are you not showcasing your line?”

Kurt shook his head. “Not in this year’s. I think they’ll get me for next September as the line will be newly released. I doubt they’ll want me to showcase my old collections this year if my new one is due out in a few months.”

“If you do happen to go to Europe...” Nick left his question open ended and sent a smile to Kurt and Jeff that shone with cheeky intent. Even Blaine had to smile at his friend trying to get an invitation to a trip to Europe, that might not take place as nothing was concrete at the moment.

“Of course you can come too babe.” Jeff laid a hand on Nick’s and leant over to press a kiss to the corner of his lips. Lips that curled up into a small smile at the sheer affection shown.

Long fingers wound their way through the gaps between Blaine’s and he immediately reacted by curling his fingers round Kurt’s. Their hands were hanging in between their chairs and he felt Kurt’s thumb stroke the back of his hand delicately.

“I mean, Blaine and I will be finished college by next September and we’ll both probably be officially unemployed as well.” Nick cut up a little more of his meal. “So we can carry the bags or help sort out hotels if you need to find us a jobs to do.”

“Offer your services, Nick, not mine.” Blaine pointed at his friend with the fork that held a piece of fish speared on the tines. “I’m quite happy to bask in the good things that come with being the soul mate of a designer.”

A smile crept onto Jeff’s face and was echoed on Kurt’s. Nick floundered for a moment before he said: “Not if you two are still in the dark about your relationship. Then you’ll need a reason to be there.”

Although Blaine sincerely hoped that in a year and a half he could go out to a restaurant and kiss his soul mate without worrying about a thousand pictures being taken of them, the elephant in the room had reared its unwelcome head. They were sitting at the table with soul mates, one famous one not, who had revealed their relationship to the public and the biggest problem so far had been an ambush that was probably just unlucky timing for Nick and lucky timing for the photographers. All the questions thrown

their way really proved that they were there to finally corner Blaine and quiz him about who he was to Kurt.

“We should probably think about that.” Kurt was saying, watching Blaine’s face fall from the teasing smile to a far more serious expression at Nick’s words. “Even though you said that we were just friends, they probably know already. At least an official statement from us, coming from my company, will take the heat off you.”

“And put it onto you instead.” Kurt made no reply except for a small shrug of one shoulder. It was clear that he wanted to shoulder the responsibility as he’d dealt with the press before. And as in tune they were as soul mates, that wasn’t something Blaine would let Kurt do alone.

A shrill ring tone rang out of the pocket of Kurt’s pants. He put down his knife and fork and looked confused when he saw the name of the person who was ringing.

“Tina?” He muttered to himself. He looked up at his three companions, a guilty look on his face. “I’m sorry but I should probably get this.”

He walked away from the table, heading towards the door, as he answered the call. Blaine, Nick and Jeff turned back to their meals.

“What’s it like to live in LA?” Blaine asked Jeff a moment later. He’d glanced back to check Kurt: who had taken to pacing up and down the street in small oval shapes. The look on his face was one of mixed shock and anger. Something was wrong. But Kurt would tell him when he came back inside.

Kurt’s phone call took a little while, and all throughout his heated conversation on the phone Blaine was turning around and checking to see if he was alright. Blaine watched as Kurt’s facial expressions changed from the shocked anger mixture to pure anger very soon into the conversation. Blaine also kept one ear on what Jeff was saying and, when the conversation about growing up in LA versus growing up in Ohio ran dry, what Nick was saying about some of the films he was looking forward to seeing once finals were over.

After what seemed like an age, Kurt returned to the table. He placed a hand on Blaine’s shoulder and ran it down his arm while he retook his seat, seeking comfort. Diplomatically, Jeff and Nick turned to each other to debate which would be the better film to see first and Blaine leant closer to Kurt.

“Is everything ok?”



Kurt shook his head. "Not really." He was staring at the cell in his hand with anger still the dominant emotion in his eyes. "Um, Tina called to tell me that an article was just released about me and my soul mate."

Kurt took a moment's pause to lick his lips and gather his thoughts, Blaine internally panicking that someone had talked and had made up some false rumour about the two of them.

"That someone I've never heard of before and had absolutely no intention of hearing about has gone to the press and claimed to be my soul mate."

## Chapter Twelve

Jeff had offered to leave the two of them alone to see what was going on with the article and the loud, public false claim of a soul mate but Nick had refused to leave. Luckily for the four of them, they left the restaurant with relative anonymity and made their way back to hummels in Jeff's car. Which was as wonderful as Nick had described but Blaine was barely appreciating it at that moment.

Instead, he had his eyes fixed on Kurt, who didn't look up from his phone. He was tapping away at the screen, sending email after email to Tina, his PR team, the employees who were working hard to put together the final sketches on his line, any shareholders who contacted him and wanted to stick their noses in business that wasn't their own. Occasionally he put the phone to his ear but the phone line was nearly always engaged and he returned to sending emails.

Jeff didn't even ask if he could park in the last space in the car park behind hummels: whoever's space it belonged to hadn't claimed it for the day and, as he muttered to Nick when they left the car, it was fair game. Kurt didn't even look away from his phone to step out of the low sports car. He did, however, anticipate Blaine's helping hand. Blaine held it out and Kurt took it without looking, using the younger man to lever himself out of the car. He didn't let go afterwards either, like the contact with Blaine was helping him with whatever he was reading at the time.

Tina had been waiting for them and she too was busy tapping away at the iPad in her hands. When four people walked into the backroom of hummels, she spared a nod for Jeff and Nick and then thrust the iPad into Blaine's hands.

Nick peered over Blaine's shoulder as the two of them looked down at what Tina had been loading onto the screen. It was the webpage of a gossip website that both of them knew didn't have the greatest reputation. This was the type of website that would highlight people's roots and circle the blackheads or changes to their complexion rather than compliment their outfit for the red carpet event or praise them on their actual work.

The main article on the website was the one about Kurt. A large picture of him walking through the airport from their recent flight from Ohio drew Blaine's eyes and he tapped the link to read the article itself.

*'The name on my hand is someone too famous for me to meet: but I just want him to know I'm here'*

"I hate the titles they put on these things." Jeff muttered, his voice carrying to Nick and Blaine only. Kurt and Tina were in hushed but frantic conversation and everyone working in the back of the store was simultaneously avoiding looking in their direction and staring unabashed.

Blaine scrolled down until he got to the body of the article, seeing it written in one line paragraphs and pictures of Kurt interspersing the words to make it seem longer.

*'Like everyone, I've known the name of my soul mate since I was going through puberty. After looking for years, I've finally found him.*

*But I found him too late for me to meet him in a bar or at work. He's already famous so I can't just walk up to him and say hi.*

*Not that I haven't tried.'*

*Those were the words Liam Phillips said when asked if he'd met his soul mate yet. The name on his hand reads 'Kurt Hummel' and Liam knows that the fashion designer in New York is his soul mate.*

*He's just never been able to meet him.*

*'I've tried to find out where he's going to be so I can go up to him and tell him who I am', Liam said earnestly, 'But of course that's hard enough.'*

*'The people who worked at his stores weren't helpful either; turning me away without even seeing the proof I've got scarred onto my hand.'*

*'I know who my soul mate is and I know it's him. I just want him to know that I'm here and he doesn't need to look anymore.'*

*Kurt and his fashion house hummels have declined to comment.*

The iPad was being steadied on one hand as Blaine's other hand was covering his mouth. Next to him, Jeff was also in shock and Nick was being decidedly unhelpful and sniggering to himself.

Deep down, Blaine knew that the way the article was written was down to the website and the journalist who conducted the interview. But the sheer thought that someone was trying to contact Kurt and find out where he was to claim he was his soul mate...? The idea sent a shiver down his spine.

*"I've tried to find out where he's going to be so I can go up to him and tell him who I am,"* he whispered. That may have been the wording of the writer and not the wording of this Liam Phillips but the sentiment would have been a hundred percent true.

Tina's voice carried down the short distance between where she was still stood with Kurt and where Blaine was motionless. "The worst thing about this all is that it's true. I recognise him from the store. He's been here a few times and while I haven't spoken to him, I'm sure other people have."

"But they know-?" There was only outrage in Kurt's voice, no nerves and no shock.

Tina nodded. "They know to turn people away if they claim they are your soul mate. Even those who've got a genuine scar with your name on it."

"How many Kurt Hummels are there in the world?" Nick asked, his voice loud in the silence of the backroom.

Tina was silent and Kurt just shook his head, turning back to his phone to type another email. It was Blaine who answered, having known the answer since the moment Facebook got so popular that you weren't a person if you didn't have a profile page.

"There were fourteen in the US." His voice was devoid of emotion. If he was honest, he didn't know of another time that he felt this blank, this numb. "I checked a few years ago because I was curious."

"So that's thirteen other people who his soul mate could be." Kurt said, "And that's if his mark is genuine at all."

But Blaine was shaking his head. "It's more than thirteen others." Four blank looks were his only reply. "There were fourteen people named Kurt Hummel on Facebook. That doesn't include other Kurt Hummels who aren't on there."

"We know why he's chosen you," Tina said to Kurt as the phone in her hand started to ring. She ignored the call. "You're you. And-" she briefly flicked her eyes to Blaine "-you haven't told anyone out of your trusted circle that you've found your soul mate."

"So instead of giving me the decency of privacy, I get some obnoxious, ambitious little..." He looked down at the article that was loaded onto a second iPad he'd taken from Tina, "I mean look at him! His hair looks like it hasn't know that shampoo is a good thing and you can't even tell if he's got a nose. He'd be my soul mate when the kazoo is added to the symphony orchestra."

"What do you want to do about it?" Tina's voice was low and the people in the room, even those eavesdropping while pretending to work or look for extra stock, waited on bated breath to hear what Kurt was going to say.

"I don't want people to look at me and think that my soul mate is someone who looks like he couldn't get dressed in proper clothes if he had a map to navigate the closet." Nick gave a quiet snort at Kurt's words and Blaine bit his lip to hide a smile.

Kurt walked a little further down the hall towards his office but only took a few steps before turning around and facing Tina once more.

"When did Jane say she was calling?" He asked, one hand on his hip and his outraged expression turned to determination.

Tina flicked through the calendar on her phone. "Actually tomorrow morning."

"I'll talk to her then. She still likes me and hopefully I can persuade her to change the piece from an article to an interview instead." Kurt brandished the iPad he still held. "And Marie Claire has a far better reputation than this place does."

He stormed down the hall. Blaine hurried after him, clapping Nick on the shoulder in farewell and pushing the iPad into Tina's hands. She had turned to Jeff to talk about something but Blaine didn't stay to pay attention to whether it was about this or about the upcoming job.

The office door was ajar and Kurt was standing up behind his chair, gripping the back of it with both hands in a tight hold that turned his knuckles white. He was staring at the wooden desk without blinking and Blaine pushed the door closed gently so he wasn't startled.

“Are you ok?” He asked in a quiet voice. The answer was obviously no but how do you approach your soul mate who’s just had a rumour of this magnitude started about him.

Kurt shook his head and then ran his hand through his hair. He stopped half way through and untangled his hand carefully, pushing pieces that had fallen out of place back to where they should be. Before he replied to Blaine, Kurt opened one of the drawers of his rarely used computer desk and pulled out a can of hairspray. On cue, Blaine and Kurt held their breaths for the time it took Kurt to pray his hair back into place.

“I’m just so fed up that people are more concerned with whose name is written on the palm of my hand than the clothes I make.” Kurt was still standing but Blaine pulled one of the rolling chairs out from under the desk and took a seat. He’d stay for as long as he had to so that he knew Kurt felt better about this.

“It’s like what happened to Patti LuPone. Before she married Matthew Johnston, that’s all she was asked. No one cared about her going to London and playing Fantine in the original cast.” Kurt grasped the back of his chair again and then forcefully pushed away from it, making the plastic rattle.

“Soul mates are supposed to be each other’s perfect match.” Kurt gestured to the iPad. “He’s beyond not my perfect match and I pity the real Kurt who’s his soul mate. If you had ever done something like this to gain my attention, I don’t...”

He licked his lips, shook his head and then caught Blaine’s never-moving gaze. “I’m sorry. I don’t want to blame you for something you haven’t even done.”

Kurt moved round the desk and perched on the edge of it, crossing his ankles. He reached out and took hold of Blaine’s hands. “I’m glad I found you. Especially before something like this happened, which I’m sorry to say was bound to happen at some point.”

Blaine gave no reply but stroking his thumbs over Kurt’s little fingers, the only part of his hands that his thumb could reach. He was thinking exactly what Kurt was thinking: if Blaine hadn’t come to the store and showed his mark to Tina, who knew what name was scarred on Kurt’s hand, then Blaine would have been in this very position. And worse: if this article had been written before Blaine had stepped into the store to ask, then the likelihood of Blaine even being taken seriously would have been less than zero.

"It's not your fault, Kurt. You know that right?" He said. He tugged on their joined hands to try and get Kurt to look up from where he'd been focusing on a point on Blaine's cardigan and hadn't stopped staring.

The only response was a very small nod. "Anyone with a name vaguely similar to yours will want you to be theirs. Who wouldn't want the great Kurt Hummel to be their soul mate?"

That got a small smile appearing on Kurt's lips. "That's true." He said in a whisper.

Blaine leant in closer and squeezed both of Kurt's hands. "I'm certainly not complaining that you're mine." That got another smile out of Kurt, bigger this time. "What are you going to do?"

"First of all, not reply to any rumours or random questions shouted out by the paparazzi that are bound to be outside my apartment and my store tomorrow. I might even go to work at my first store as they might not go there. And then, I'm going to do a real interview and casually slip into conversation that I've found my soul mate and he isn't someone who had to go to the media just to let me know who he was."

"A real interview with ... Jane?" Blaine hadn't heard Kurt talk about anyone named Jane before but from the way Kurt had asked about her and Tina's immediate response, she was important and she could help.

"If I was Dorothy when she just arrived in Oz," Kurt's voice was lighter now, lighter than it had been since they left the restaurant only an hour ago, "then Jane Goodman would be my Glinda." He paused, seemingly giving Jane Goodman that respectful silence she seemingly deserved. A magical saviour of someone new to a strange land was someone who deserved that silence.

"I worked for her at Marie Claire for six months on a paid internship." Now Blaine knew exactly who she was and why she was a bit like a magical saviour for a floundering Kurt nearly three years ago. "And she agreed to write a piece about hummels for me when I mentioned that I designed clothes."

"So she's like your fairy godmother."

Kurt's smile was blinding and it lifted Blaine's spirits to see his soul mate smiling like that after scowling for a while. "Exactly! She wanted to write a follow-up piece anyway, talking about my store and the line that'll come out next year and I can ask her to slip in an interview or a statement where I say that no, this man who decided that wearing stripes in red and that shade of orange on a sweater to an interview shoot where he was claiming to be my soul mate is in fact *not* my soul mate."

“And Marie Claire is believable.” Blaine repeated what Kurt had said from outside the office, understanding why he had mentioned the magazine before now. Kurt nodded his agreement.

“Everything will be fine.” Blaine tugged on their hands again and this time Kurt looked right at him, blue eyes boring into amber. “You’ll see.”

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Realising that he had a final in a few days’ time, Blaine had rushed into his room and closed the door on the hundred curious faces who peered at him once he had left Kurt at hummels an hour or two later. He’d come out of the office when Kurt had to make a phone call to someone in his PR department who had wanted to make a statement immediately but he’d found that Jeff and Nick had left. So Blaine had taken the subway home and had tried to keep his thoughts wandering to the article. Tried and failed.

He couldn’t help thinking of the flip side of this whole mess. The name on Kurt’s hand read Blaine Anderson so there was no possibility of Kurt or anyone in hummels taking this article seriously. But if Blaine had walked away from the store that fateful Tuesday morning like a part of him had wanted to do, then he might not be sitting on the train having left his soul mate after a date. He might still be twiddling his thumbs in the common room of their dorms while arguing with Nick, Sugar and Jennifer that *the* Kurt Hummel wasn’t *his* Kurt Hummel.

And certainly this article would have stopped any chance of him walking into Kurt’s store and talking to one of the only people who could have helped him find Kurt.

Blaine had spread out his notes and books, sat cross-legged on his bed and taken off his bow tie. But the work remained untouched and the pens remained capped and inside the closed pencil case.

Would he have ever done what this guy had done? Sold his story to the media just so he could get hold of someone famous and let them know he had their name on his hand? Blaine knew that he probably wouldn’t have but he’d done desperate things before. Singing to a boy at his workplace when neither he nor Jeremiah had each other’s names on their hands was not a quiet gesture of a crush. He had taken the diplomatic route and struck gold when he’d spoken to Tina but if Blaine was honest to himself, if he had truly believed Kurt to be his soul mate and had been turned away at the store, his next move would have been a loud song sung straight to the designer at some public event that would have embarrassed both Kurt and him.



Was this article any different? Apart from the fact that Blaine would have at least had the luck to have his name on Kurt's palm as opposed to this Liam Phillips who didn't.

And then, Blaine's mind jumped from one thought path to another, what about Liam's real Kurt Hummel? How would that Kurt, maybe a teacher or an accountant or a trucker, feel about seeing the man whose name was written on his hand being splashed around the gossip columns trying to get Kurt Hummel, designer, to admit to being his soul mate.

"Right that's it." Nick's voice broke right through Blaine's musings and he looked up at his friend in surprise. The shut door normally kept people out but Nick stood in the very much open doorway, clutching his laptop to his chest.

"What?" Still half thinking about what had happened that day, Blaine hadn't caught up to speed with what just happened before him.

"I called your name three times, offered you a free bow tie, told you that your gel had spontaneously caught on fire and then said Kurt was here doing a striptease in your old Dalton uniform." Nick said like he was listing off dates in an oral history exam. "You didn't even flinch. Put your work away – yes I know we have an exam in a few days – and watch this with me."

It took a few moments before Blaine conceded defeat and he bundled his papers and books onto the floor by his bed. His head wasn't in the Industrial Revolution anyway. He'd already decided on getting a taxi to Kurt's that evening, cost be damned, and staying with him to make sure he was ok. His finals could wait: Kurt was far more important.

Nick opened his laptop and a streamed episode of America's Next Top Model was the open tab in his internet. Blaine said nothing but raised a single eyebrow at his friend.

"Jeff's in this episode." Nick even sounded defensive. Sugar was the one who watched this programme like it was her lifeline and Blaine had watched it occasionally, mostly with her. But Nick loudly and proudly declared his dislike of the TV show, which had gone on for far too many season before admitting defeat.

"How do you even know that?" Blaine still pulled one of his pillows up and rested it between his back and the wooden headboard. The other he offered to Nick who copied Blaine's action between his back and the white wall.

"Sugar told me she saw him when she'd been watching reruns." Nick turned to look at Blaine before he pressed play. "She's nearly over ignoring you, by the way. She wanted to know when the next big event was so she could plan her outfit once you assured her a ticket."

Blaine gave a lopsided smile and settled into his pillow. Nick hit the space bar and the familiar voice of Tyra Banks filled the quiet room. Nick skipped through most of the episode as he didn't care about any of the girls competing the cycle while Blaine was ashamed to realise he recognised not only the cycle but the exact episode.

"Here." Nick pointed at the screen and, sure enough, Jeff was standing there with another male model, hands in his pockets and smiling at the contestants with a nervous grin. Nick laughed as his soul mate was introduced by Mr Jay (not that Blaine would admit to knowing who each person was on this programme, especially not to Nick) and then watched him pose with the wannabe models.

Doing nothing but spending time with his friend and watching trivial television actually steadied Blaine's mind. It wasn't whirling at a hundred miles an hour anymore and only the occasional thought of *'that could have been me'* and *'I hope Kurt really is ok about all this'* ran through his mind.

*"I was really impressed by some of the girls today."* Jeff on the computer was saying. Nick tipped his head to the side and smiled wistfully. Blaine was like that too when listening to Kurt's voice except he was listening to Kurt's voice talk to him rather than to an interviewer on a programme filmed years ago. *"I think they'll make good models. Chantal especially as she worked well with what she was given and she had the hardest scenario to work with."*

As soon as the scenery of LA flashed by on the computer, Nick hit the space bar and turned to Blaine. That was all Jeff's involvement so that was all Nick wanted to watch. Blaine looked confusedly from the laptop now stuck on a blurred shot of the lights of LA to Nick, who had twisted on the bed to face him.

"What are you going to do once Kurt tells everyone he's found his soul mate?" he asked. His face was devoid of smiles and his eyes showed how serious he was being. "Jeff is hardly as famous as Kurt, Blaine, but even I've been getting looks and those pictures of us in the park had both our names in the caption."

Sitting up straight, Blaine nodded. "I know. It's hardly going to be easy going through my last year with photographers taking pictures of me leaving my classes but I'll deal with it when it comes." He shrugged. "Cooper can make good on his word and give me some real tips on how to deal with the press."

Now Nick's serious expression cracked into a lopsided smile. "Would he give you tips from his own experience or is this advice given from others?"

"I hope others." Blaine went to move off the bed, already mentally ticking off everything he had to stuff into his bag before leaving for Kurt's. Unfortunately, that included the work he'd easily given up on when Nick had turned up at his door.

Nick stopped him with a hand on his arm. "I just want to make sure you'll be ok. We've all seen what happens when celebrities admit they are together or not."

"Like the speculation about Katy Perry and Russell Brand? I know."

"It'll probably be a huge fallout." Nick's hand tightened. "Just be aware of that."

When Nick took his hand away, Blaine stood and dumped all of his papers into his rucksack. "Since when did you become an expert on what happens when gossip-worthy stories break into the media?" The teasing tone was evident and the two shared a smile while Blaine hurried to his closet and pulled out some clothes. Clothes that would probably not be worn as Kurt would find something else for Blaine to wear.

"Just going on what we've seen and what Jeff told me." Nick shrugged. "It's probably a good thing that both of our soul mates are famous. We can navigate the shark infested waters over our last year together."

"And it'll be a good story to tell our grandchildren one day."

"Come on man! Neither of us is even living without our soul mates – can we wait before talking about grandchildren!" Nick laughed and threw the pillow that had been behind his back at Blaine's head. Blaine ducked and threw his arm up for protection and the pillow bounced off his bent elbow to land on the floor.

Nick gave Blaine a hand grabbing the essentials needed for one night and when he left the dorm, he walked down the hall to eyes staring through open rooms, occupants giving up revising for the moment that the person whose rumoured status of being Kurt Hummel's soul mate was in question.

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When he arrived at Kurt's apartment, Blaine literally took the cooking utensils out of Kurt's hand and directed him to sit at the tall chair by the counter. Kurt had obviously been cooking for a while as brownies sat on a cooling rack and a box of cookies filled with three different types of chocolate were stacked away in a box. The ingredients for a cheesecake were sitting on the counter and Kurt had been beating the eggs into the cheese mixture when Blaine had walked into the apartment.

"You just want dessert for dinner?" He asked, starting to beat the eggs instead, raising an eyebrow at Kurt.

He shrugged. "It seemed like a good idea at the time." He reached out, opened the box and pulled out a cookie. Kurt took a large bite and spoke around the chocolate: "I've been cooking since I got home. It was the only thing I could think of to take my mind off what happened."

Blaine eyed all the baked goods. "I can tell." He looked down at the bowl in his hands. He'd never made cheesecake like this before. "What happens to this now?"

Kurt stood, despite Blaine's previous warning not to get up and to let Blaine do the work, and pulled a cooking tin closer towards them. It had also been prepared and a crumbled biscuit base was inside, waiting for the cake mix to be poured on top.

"Pour the mix in that." He instructed. As Blaine did as he was told, Kurt bustled around the kitchen, pulling open the oven door and covering his hands in large oven gloves. "Then it cooks for half an hour, we turn off the oven and leave it for another hour and then we eat."

They spent that hour and a half lying on the couch together, watching old reruns of reality TV shows together. Blaine was sitting upright and Kurt had laid out on the couch, his head resting comfortably on Blaine's chest and Blaine's arm wrapped around his body. Kurt was playing absentmindedly with Blaine's fingers, running his fingertips up and down their lengths and then twining their hands together every so often.

Blaine was gazing down at his soul mate with a small smile on his face. Despite the upset and the rumours now flying frantically across the country, Kurt still managed to look composed and even serene here. His eyelashes were brushing his cheek whenever he blinked. A small smile was present on his lips even in the scenes that weren't particularly funny. When Blaine reached out and rubbed the top of his head, mussing up a few strands of hair, Kurt looked up at him with a raised eyebrow as if to say 'you know you shouldn't be messing up my hair'.

They ate the cheesecake also sitting on the couch, Blaine moaning at how good the recipe was. His stomach was protesting, asking why he was eating desert with no dinner, but Kurt had no desire to cook something substantial.

“Is cheesecake ok for dinner?” He even asked, tucking into his second piece, a guilty glint in his eyes that told Blaine that whatever the answer was, he was going to have cheesecake for dinner. So Blaine nodded and pressed a kiss to Kurt’s closed lips, feeling them curl into a smile before he pulled away.

A little while later, they had exhausted the reruns of reality TV and had settled down with the Sound of Music on. While Maria was dancing through the streets with Captain Von Trapp’s children singing Do-Re-Mi, Kurt turned to Blaine and spoke in a small voice.

“I’m glad you’re here tonight.” He said quietly, almost like he didn’t want to say the confession at all.

“There’s nowhere else I’d rather be.” Blaine tapped Kurt on the head once, twice and stared deep into his eyes when Kurt turned his face upwards to look. “I wanted to make sure you were ok with this whole mess, and I wasn’t going to do that from my dorm while you’re here.”

The only reply Kurt gave was to stretch up and give Blaine a kiss, then he settled back on Blaine’s lap and started singing along to the song. Blaine gave another small smile at his soul mate, so comfortable at the moment after a day and probably a good few weeks of turmoil and rumours, and then joined in with the singing.

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Kurt had a delegation of paparazzi waiting for him when he arrived at hummels the next day. He’d loitered at home, changing his outfit three times before finally settling on one: citing unconvincing reasons like the top was too short to go with these pants, and his scarf didn’t match the coat enough. Blaine had said nothing but his presence helped calm the nerves Kurt had racing through his body. Eventually, Blaine was dropped off at his dorm – Kurt wanted to drive him the whole way there and didn’t listen to a work of protest about it being in the opposite direction – and Kurt made his way into hummels.

The paparazzi started their clamouring as soon as they saw one long leg complete with black Doc Martens leave his car and Kurt took the last moment inside the comfort of the vehicle to slip sunglasses onto his nose. Carrying his sketch book in the crook of one arm and a bag held in the other, Kurt kept his head

down and walked determinedly across the car park until he reached the back entrance to his store. How he wished he could turn around and give them a piece of his mind, exclaiming loudly that his soul mate would *never* resort to going to the media just to find him and that if Kurt had had Liam Phillips written on his left palm, don't they think he'd have reached out when Liam first made enquiries?

He stopped at the entrance and turned on the spot. Sensing he was about to speak, the paparazzi stopped throwing questions in his direction, held out their microphones and their pens poised over their small notebooks to transcribe what he'd say.

"I'd like to say that I will not address the rumours surrounding the identity of my soul mate." Kurt kept his voice calm and forcefully polite. "The identity of my soul mate, of anybody's soul mate, is for that person alone and I ask that you respect that for me."

"Kurt, can you tell us how he's got your name on your hand if he isn't yours?"

Wow was that a real question? Kurt resisted the urge for sarcasm but couldn't help raising an eyebrow at the reporter who asked that. Did he really think that he was the only Kurt Hummel in the world?"

"I will not take questions at this time but I do wish this man all the luck in finding his soul mate. As I hope he'd wish me luck finding mine."

Kurt slipped in through the open door and then closed with the enough force that if it had been any lighter than the heavy fire doors, it would have slammed shut. He leant against the cold metal for a moment, head tipped back and brain working. Should he have even said that? They'll probably type it up and make out like he was loudly shooting down this man's hopes and dreams about finding a famous soul mate.

Dreams that should be shot down because he was not Kurt's. Blaine wouldn't do something like this and Kurt had hoped that public would know that Kurt's true soul mate wouldn't stoop that low.

"Mr Hummel?" A quiet voice of one of the secretaries sitting at the main desk in the backroom was holding the phone close to her chest, on hand covering the mouthpiece. "I've got Jane Goodman on the phone. She said she knows she's ringing early but she can't wait?"

Kurt nodded and said: "I'll take it in my office. Thank you."

He hurried down the corridor and unlocked his office door, balancing the sketchbook under his arm and hearing the phone ringing inside. He laid his sketchbook and bag on his computer desk, took off his jacket and sat down in the rolling chair all within a minute before picking up the phone and holding it to his ear.

“You’ve certainly had a traumatic few days, Kurt.” Jane’s cheerful voice sounded through the phone line and Kurt couldn’t help but smile. She didn’t even bother saying hello but waded straight into the conversation with that statement. “I was following. You need to teach that boy of yours how to make a statement to the press: or rather how not to make one. He brought this on you know. His statement saying you were ‘just friends’, if anyone believed that, meant there was no statement from you or hummels that the new article would have contradicted.”

“He’s had no contact with the press before,” Kurt tried to argue even though her words made perfect sense with the timing. He’d just never blame Blaine for a side effect of his fame. He reached out and pulled the sketchbook off the computer desk and moved it closer, not opening it just at the moment but getting it where it needed to be. “I’m not surprised his first statement was less than official sounding.”

“Besides, I’m sure you’ve come up with a brilliant plan to shoot those rumours down.” Jane laughed and interrupted herself. “Or if not, then I’ve thought of one myself. There’s an event in two weeks that I want to invite you to: a party hosted by me and my department. You should bring your boy to that and declare that you’re soul mates with one of the news crews outside.”

Kurt, who had been unwinding the scarf from around his neck to reposition it correctly, stopped. His eyes widened and a smile grew on his face. “That’s a great idea, Jane. Thank you.”

“You’re very welcome. So about this piece, I was thinking we started talking about your new store and how it’s changed the face of hummels. We cover the back story, including my involvement of course-”

“Jane?”

“Yes dear?”

“Um, I was also hoping to say something about the rumours in the article you wanted to write.” Kurt waited for a moment. He had worked for Jane for six months and had witnessed her shooting down an idea many a time. A small woman, she still commanded the same attention and fear that his old cheerleading coach had in high school. That’s probably why Kurt liked Jane so much: she reminded him of

home. She would immediately interrupt whoever was unlucky enough to have spoken. So the fact that her voice wasn't heard at the moment was a good sign.

"I don't want to tell the world that Blaine is my soul mate on the black and white pages in a magazine. But I really don't want the world thinking that my soul mate is someone who has gone to the press and claimed to be him." He threw his eyes up to the ceiling. While he knew a scandal would happen at some point in his career, why did it have to be this one? And why now, when he and Blaine were on the edge of a knife with the media already?

"So I write a statement you've given me into my article saying how you've found your soul mate and you're very happy," Jane correctly surmised, Kurt giving noises of agreement with every third word she said, "and then at the press event I'm hosting you introduce your mysterious soul mate. I like it."

"Great!"

"So Kurt," he heard her moving around in her chair and clicking a pen to open it and take notes. "What was your statement about your boy? Blaine, I think you said. What would you like people to know about Blaine before you finally introduce him?"

--

Blaine had taken to splitting his time between studying in his or Nick's room – the only two places where he would be safe from wide eyes similar to bush babies staring from behind trees – and studying on a free desk in the backroom of hummels. In the few days between the article about Liam Phillips was released and the next edition of Marie Claire was due to come out, Blaine was quickly known as more than 'the boy who is our boss' soul mate but we're not meant to know that'. Kurt would bustle out of his office, head buried in plans for his next line, staring at different fabric patterns or talking rapidly on his phone and would see Blaine sipping coffee and joining in with a conversation about the upcoming Olympic Games in Rio or about the old Lord of the Rings films.

They'd always manage to share a smile over the corridor before Kurt was pulled back to his work and one of Kurt's employees taking their break would tap Blaine on his arm and drew him back into the conversation.



But knowing that Blaine was there, taking time out when he should be studying, to make sure that Kurt was ok sent warm feelings running through Kurt's heart. He had the perfect soul mate and with the scandals running through the media about how Kurt still refused to directly address the topic of Liam Phillips, he truly appreciated the feel of Blaine at his back and his hand in Kurt's own.

Liam had turned up at the store twice in the short time between his interview and Kurt's article were released. The first time Kurt had legitimately been out of the building, at a large fabric company to find the perfect material for some of the bow ties he was making for the early showcase of his line to the shareholders. Kurt had come back with a bow tie in red and blue fabric especially for Blaine, who had shared the gossip about what had happened that day.

Liam had been turned away by the general store manager, standing firm when he asked to see Kurt and accurately saying that Kurt wasn't on the premises. All the employees had stared at Liam as he left, hands in pockets, and scowl on his face and paparazzi snapping photos to document the event. Everyone who had at job at hummels those few days knew what had transpired once the article had been released and had cottoned on pretty quickly that the bubbly boy in bow ties so like Kurt's new line was their boss' soul mate, rather than the surly man who'd sold his story to the press.

The second time, however, Kurt had been in the store and apparently Liam had waited outside until he knew his supposed soul mate was around. Again the general store manager had stood firm, arms folded and looking far more like a bouncer outside a heaving club than a manager of a store filled with designer clothes.

"His insane crusade is only going to turn out the worse for him, and that does not bother me in the slightest." Kurt's voice was very harsh in Blaine's ear but he kept his voice low. They were watching from the crack in a door to the backroom: not the main doors but a small one to the side of the store. Four other people were watching through the crack as well, two secretaries and two people who worked in stock control. They had jumped up guiltily when Kurt had come to watch at the door and had started to move away to get back to work but Kurt had shaken his head and when their boss started spying on the proceedings, they happily returned to their own espionage.

"He's like a terrier isn't he." Blaine whispered back. One of the secretaries nodded, eavesdropping without meaning to. Liam was throwing his hands up in despair and arguing with the manager, who was steadily shaking his head. "He just won't let go."

"I need to tell Tina to give Jonathan a raise." Kurt mumbled, partly to himself and partly to Blaine. Jonathan, the manager, finally rolled his eyes in such an exaggerated manner that they saw it clearly from the door on the side of the room and he took Liam's arm and led him from the store. The sight of a small, slight man with hair coiffed to perfect physically dragging another man, who was no more of a body builder than Jonathan but far taller, from the store brought a smile to both Kurt and Blaine's faces. When Jonathan finally threw Liam out, to the amusement of the press, the shoppers who'd been watching eagerly all cheered before returning to browsing the shelves.

"He definitely needs a raise." Kurt repeated. Now that the spectacle was over, the four employees slunk away and returned to their jobs but Kurt and Blaine hovered by the door in relative privacy in the big, bright backroom.

Without a word, Blaine held out his arms and Kurt immediately fell into them, wrapping his arms around Blaine's shoulders and burying his face in his neck. Blaine ran his hands up and down Kurt's sides, resting them on his hips.

"I can't wait for that article to come out." Kurt's voice was muffled by Blaine's neck and Blaine felt goose bumps rise from the air rushing against his skin. "Once people see I met my soul mate weeks ago and they see how perfect he is for me, then maybe this whole mess will end."

--

Tina was smiling as she carried the thick copy of the newest edition of Marie Claire into the large, bright meeting room. Kurt was looking at the formal sketches for his line with some of the people responsible for turning his sketches into these drawings but he beckoned to his friend when Tina knocked on the door.

"And here is your saviour." She said, handing him the magazine. Kurt took it with a grateful smile and immediately flicked through the pages to find what he was looking for.

The article itself was a long piece about hummels, the history, how the company has grown over the past few years. Pictures of Kurt at official events accompanied the text, along with the photos Jane had insisted be taken to go along with the piece. Kurt ran his finger down the blocks of text, barely reading any of the words written there until he reached the end.

A smile crept onto his face. Jane had done exactly what she'd said she'd do. After the major section of the article had finished with the upcoming new line, she'd added in a paragraph or two addressing the rumours. It wasn't a formal interview with him but the prose contained a statement that was so central, so important, that it could have been written in bolded font.

*'In this time of technology and fashion, it is easy to forget the simple things in life. Kurt has always told me that he tries not to: listening to music whenever he can, making his step-brother's suits whenever he tears the last and waiting impatiently for his soul mate. And we are delighted to announce that Kurt has indeed found his soul mate.*

*He told me they met a few months ago and have been dating ever since, getting to know each other the old fashioned way. Kurt reliably told me that his new line is dedicated to his soul mate, who is being kept a secret for the near future until Kurt can make a fabulous outfit for his partner to wear to an important event that's just a week or so away where he'll finally put a name to his soul mate.*

*The rumours of who is the lucky man whose name is scarred on Kurt's palm are about to come to an end. But rest assured, Kurt's dream romance was of his own making. He found his soul mate and he told me that he hasn't looked back since then. March 15th is going to be Kurt and his soul mate's anniversary. So send your gifts to hummels in the spring!'*

It wasn't perfect. It wasn't a clear sentence that said 'the rumours spread by the gossip tabloids of this country were hateful and utterly false: my soul mate found me and didn't use the media to do so' but it was as close as it could be.

"Did she write everything you wanted?" Tina was bouncing on her toes with excitement as she spoke. The other three people in the room, Susie, Matthew and Fran, were flicking their eyes between Tina and Kurt, unsure of whether the article contained good news or bad.

He nodded to Tina's question. "And I'm very glad she listened to me when I said not to put pictures of Blaine in this."

"She wanted to add photos of Blaine too?"

Kurt nodded again. "To add to the proof that the other article was false. But I don't want Blaine harassed any more than he already is just because of some pictures that could be avoided. He's got an exam tomorrow."

Kurt closed the magazine and held it to his chest. He knew this wasn't the end of the trouble caused by one ambitious man who wanted what wasn't his. He hadn't talked it over with Blaine at all, the event that Jane was putting on in the next week. He kept telling himself that Blaine's exams took precedence which is why he hadn't bothered him just yet.

Around him, Tina took a look at the official sketches, drawn on tablets and printed off on thick white paper to send to fabric companies. Susie started talking to her and she glanced back at Kurt occasionally, who should have been listening but was still holding the magazine to his chest and praying things turned out ok.

--

It was evening, street lamps turned on and car headlights burning into the retinas of the students slowly making their way out of the exam hall. It had been a hard exam for them and most were shaking out their sore wrists in exaggerated movements. Most were headed to the bar nearby for a pick-me-up drink before they returned to the books for the next exam but some were walking in the opposite direction to go to the coffee shop, grab some caffeine and stay awake for the next few days to cram.

"That was impossible." Nick moaned, rubbing his wrist rather than shaking his whole hand. He had his face turned up the sky but his eyes were kept shut.

Blaine didn't need to speak to agree. He was one of the students shaking his wrist but the fast movements did nothing to relieve the soreness. They had been writing for a good few hours, essays upon essays about different things that took place in Britain during the Industrial Revolution. Blaine's prediction that a question on whether or not the Revolution was a good thing hadn't come true, to both his and Nick's delight. But the essays they had had to write about were no less hard.

"Are you coming to the coffee shop with me or going to the bar with Jennifer?" Blaine asked his friend when they'd finally stepped out of the building.

"I was going with you to the coff--"

Nick fell silent and the flash of cameras blinded both boys for a second, as well as most of their fellow students who were still loitering near the entrance to the lecture theatre where they'd taken the exam.

"Blaine this way!"

"Blaine can you comment on what Kurt said about how you and he met?"

Blaine's head turned this way and that with his mouth wide open. The crowd of photographers who had clearly been waiting outside for this very moment was larger than the one that had ambushed him outside the coffee shop a week ago. Had they been waiting on the sidewalk for the two and a half hours Blaine had spent writing about the destruction of the countryside and the divide between the north and the south?

"How do you feel about the line being dedicated to you?"

"What event will you be going to with Kurt?"

"How did you two connect?"

"Blaine can you finally confirm that you are Kurt's soul mate?"

He stumbled back a few steps, hands open and rising slowly as if to put a barrier between him and the photographers. Nick had disappeared back inside the lecture theatre but everyone else around him was staring with mouths dropped and eyes wide.

Everywhere he turned there was another flash of a camera.

"Blaine-"

"Can you-"

"How-"

Timing extremely unlucky, Blaine turned his face to the left, directly into the line of a particularly bright flash. The man with the camera took picture after picture, camera flash blinding into Blaine's eyes. Eyes which were already sensitive from staring at white papers, blue lines and black pen for two and a half hours.

He raised his hand, palm out, to shield the flashes from his eyes, eyes which were squinted shut and face turned away slightly. The flashes only seemed to increase as he tried to hide his eyes and he stumbled back again, grasping behind him with his free hand to find the door into the lecture theatre.

“Blaine, show us-”

“Tell us how you found-”

“When did your mark-”

“Blaine!” Nick’s voice cut straight through the crowd of reporters and Blaine dropped his arm, turned around in a circle and was yanked inside the building. Nick dropped Blaine’s arm once the tinted glass doors had shut and Blaine watched, spots on his eyes and eyes watering slightly from the bright flashes, as two of the invigilators from their exam strode confidently out in front of the photographers and told them to leave.

“Are you ok?” Nick asked as he watched Blaine scrub at his watering eyes vigorously. Any lasting pain in his wrist had been forgotten about. “You looked like you needed some serious help out there.”

Blaine nodded and didn’t speak for a moment. He just rubbed at his eyes with his knuckles but the spots still remained when he stopped.

“What’s going on?” He asked, readjusting the twisted strap of his bag, “Did Kurt say something about us?”

Nick was as clueless as Blaine. They’d both been in the exam for the past few hours and had been deep in revision mode for the past few days. They knew that the article about Kurt in Marie Claire had come out the previous day but neither had read it just yet. They’d planned to find it in a shop and read the piece the very next day.

Both of their phones had been switched off for the exam but Nick’s turned on faster and Blaine peered over his shoulder to look at the screen as Nick typed ‘Kurt Hummel, Marie Claire, soul mate’ into the internet browser.

Nothing came up the pointed directly to unequivocal proof that Blaine was Kurt’s soul mate. All the article said was that Kurt had found his soul mate, in fact a few months ago (which explained the numerous

questions about how he and Kurt had met *a few months ago*) and that he would be introduced at an event in the next few days.

“Event?” Nick turned to look at Blaine with a slight raised eyebrow and Blaine only gave a confused shrug as a response. He trusted Kurt implicitly: even about an event which he knew nothing about where he would be introduced as Kurt’s soul mate.

“Blaine, I called you a taxi.” Dr Johnson’s voice broke through the musings of both boys and they turned to see their old professor had stuck his head round the glass door to talk to them. After all their complaining about his boring lectures, neither had been happier to see him than now. “The photographers have been told to leave but I recommend you leave now.”

Blaine hurried out of the building after Dr Johnson, Nick keeping close behind. The last stragglers of paparazzi started snapping widely to get a few pictures of the boys but Dr Johnson blocked their good views of Blaine and Nick stepping into a taxi and speeding away.

--

Every photographer who had caught Blaine coming out of his lecture waited with bated breath and impatient fidgeting for their editors to see the pictures gained from the evening’s endeavour. And every editor smiled widely when they saw the picture that would be headline gossip news for days to come.

The focus of the picture, taken a thousand times from every different angle, was of Blaine’s outstretched hand. The hand he’d used to shield his eyes from the bright lights of the camera flashes. Blaine was clear but shadowed in the background, his face turned away and his eyes tightly closed. But his hand was brightly lit and in perfect quality.

His left hand, stretched palm out towards the camera showing the answer to the question hundreds of people across the country had been asking and all those journalists had been shouting to the boy today. *Kurt Hummel* scrawled across the heart line on Blaine’s palm was captured on film and ready to be shown to the world.

## Chapter Thirteen

Kurt and Blaine woke up the next day without a care in the world. They weren't together but as each of them stretched in bed, rubbed sleep from their eyes and dragged themselves from the inviting warmth of the covers, they didn't think anything had happened.

Kurt worked through his morning routine systematically, filing his nails, cleansing his skin, working product through his hair until it was styled to perfection. For some reason, he felt good about today. The sun was shining through his open bedroom windows, he could hear birds chirping in a tree very near his apartment that weren't drowned out by car noises and this was to be the second day where there wasn't a mention about Liam Phillips.

He'd planned what to wear for the Marie Claire press event already and was thinking about what he'd get Blaine to wear. In his mind, Kurt could already see the outfit; beige suit pants, white shirt and black tie, but he had wanted to make a jacket with the tartan-like checked fabric he'd seen the other day. Although, the event was still a week away so he had plenty of time and the press were bound to slow down in their vendetta to discover what was the name on the palm of his hand know that he'd said, in polite but no uncertain terms, that Liam Phillips was not it.

He sent a quick text to Blaine before climbing into the car and speeding away to the factor that produced all the fabric he was using this time round. Kurt opened his sketchbook to a blank page and started to sketch the outline of the jacket he would have to make for Blaine, giving up when the car drove over a large manhole cover and jerked, making his pencil skid across the page to leave an unsightly line right across the face of the jacket.

Instead his mind turned to his upcoming line. It was months away from being released but one thing that was needed was the name. The whole line was based on the clothes that Blaine wore and dedicated to Blaine as well. After all, without his soul mate, the third line Kurt would be producing wouldn't contain the clothes that it did. So one thing was certain: it would be named after Blaine.

"Anderson by Kurt Hummel," Kurt said out loud, testing the potential name. He shook his head. "B. Anderson by Kurt Hummel." That didn't work either. Feeling the road and the drive was far smoother, Kurt rubbed out the errant pencil line and continued with drawing Blaine's outfit.



They pulled up outside the factory and the owner was standing outside, hands in his pockets and a -falsely happy smile on his face. They shook hands and immediately headed towards the large stock room, where any type of fabric was found. Kurt switched his phone onto silent as he wandered round the factory, pointing out rolls of fabric that he liked and would consider for his line.

“Do you have any thinner stripes?” He asked after he was shown the fourth sample piece of fabric with large stripes that you couldn’t pay Kurt to use on a piece of his clothes. Blaine owned a cardigan with black and grey stripes that looked good but those stripes were just a little thicker than pinstripes. If any clothes were going to contain stripes, they had to be stripes no thicker than the ones on Blaine’s cardigan.

Kurt’s phone vibrated on top of the sketchbook and pile of papers in his arm. He looked down, saw the number was unrecognised and ignored the call.

He was showed a few more patches where the stripes were thinner but not what he was looking for. Resisting the urge to roll his eyes, Kurt asked to see even thinner stripes. The owner’s false smile grew even more false and he trundled off to find more samples.

His phone buzzed again. This time Kurt frowned when he saw another unrecognised number but this was different to the first one. Again, this call was ignored and when the owner came back to Kurt carrying more patches, he forgot about the call.

“No I’m not using wool or a jersey knit for this cardigan. I wanted more of a cashmere feel.” Kurt said, a little while later. The owner was arguing one type of fabric over another and he and Kurt were sat on opposite sides of the table, elbows rested on the table top and were beginning to lean in towards each as the argument grew heated although not loud. The buzzing noise sounded again and Kurt looked at his phone for the sixth time. This call was from someone he recognised and he took great pleasure in excusing himself from the conversation with the fabric factory owner to answer the call.

“Hi Mercedes,” He said brightly, happy to take a break from his disagreement with the other man, “How is everything? When are you next coming to New York-”

“Kurt-”

“- because I want you to meet Blaine. I know that you are really busy with your music videos, which I saw by the way and you look fantastic-”

“Kurt-”

“- but I’d really like you to meet him. If you and Sam could come together then that would be even better! We could go out and it wouldn’t be a third wheel situation like it’s been for years because I’ve got my-”

“Kurt!”

Mercedes never raised her voice, especially not to her oldest friend. Kurt immediately stopped talking and he frowned, staring into space with a confused expression. He did, however, fall silent.

“You haven’t seen the internet this morning have you?” There was no anger in Mercedes’ voice, only worry.

“No. I’ve been looking at fabrics since I left my apartment this morning.” Kurt’s confused expression melted away and now he started to panic. “Why? What’s going on?”

“You need to check the gossip websites. E!, TMZ, Us Weekly. You need to see them.”

Keeping Mercedes on the phone line, Kurt walked back to where his pile of papers was left on the desk. Caught between an order for silk and an order for cotton, both for the bow ties, was Kurt’s iPad and he searched one of the gossip websites Mercedes had mentioned.

The page took its time loading up but when it did Kurt clapped a hand over his mouth and swallowed a shout of dismay. On the front page, clear as day, was a picture of Blaine, Blaine’s hand and his mark displayed for the world to see. The headline written over the picture read: ‘Confirmed: NYU student Blaine Anderson is Kurt Hummel’s soul mate’.

He quickly opened up a few more tabs and selected other gossip websites. The front page of all of them was the same picture, something from a different angle, and the main article was about him and Blaine.

“Oh my dear g-d.” He mumbled. He heard Mercedes sending words of encouragement from LA but he didn’t listen to anything she was really saying. His eyes were wide as they were fixed on the picture, on the proof that had been torn from his and Blaine’s private lives and spread across the gossip world like it was something a celebrity had worn on the red carpet.

“Mercedes, I need to go.” He said, cutting her off in her attempt to help, “I need to find Blaine.”

--

Blaine had finished gelling his hair down when his phone rang and Nick burst into the room, Jennifer and Sugar a pace behind him. They were all staring at him like he had stuck a dead animal to the top of his head in the gel and he turned around to check what was behind him just in case someone had stolen something in the night.

His bookshelf remained intact so he raised an eyebrow when he looked at his friends again. "What?"

Sugar burst to the front of the pack and passed him his computer. She seemed to have forgotten that she was meant to be ignoring him. "Google search your name, Blainey."

"Wait, what?"

"Just do it." Nick's voice was hard and left no option for arguing.

The time it took his computer to turn on and load up the internet was far too long. The hairs on the back of Blaine's neck were rising as his three closest friends crowded around his chair. Sugar was too impatient and she kept tapping her long nails on the back of Blaine's shoulder.

Eventually, he typed his own name into Google and waited for the page to load. Previously a few links to pages had been returned on a search for Blaine Anderson. He, Wes and David would search each other's names just for curiosity and the return search for the correct Blaine Anderson had only turned up after he'd signed up for Facebook. He hadn't Google searched himself recently but he guessed there were a few more articles because of all the links the press had put together between him and Kurt.

"That one. That one." Sugar pointed at the website for E! and Blaine dutifully clicked the link. He immediately frowned at the page while it was loading but Sugar took the mouse literally out of his hands and selected news. The front page looked like a picture of Kurt and a headline about his soul mate.

Then he gasped and understood the looks his friends had been giving him when they burst into the room. He also guessed why his phone hadn't stopped vibrating since they'd pushed their way into the room.

The top story was indeed about Kurt but the main picture on the article was of him. Or, more specifically, of his hand. Blaine remembered that moment when he turned his face into the camera flashes and had flinched, bringing his hand up to shield his eyes from the lights.

"Oh my g-d I used my left hand." He covered his mouth with his hand and the words came out muffled. He hadn't realised at the time, hadn't thought about which hand he was using to protect his eyes. He hadn't considered that by sticking his left hand into the path of the lights he would be showing the world his mark. Showing the world his mark while the world was equipped with cameras.

"Well your secret's out, Blaine." Nick said unnecessarily. He clapped a hand on Blaine's shoulder and squeezed in what he hoped was a reassuring way. "And not in the way Kurt wanted, with whatever that event was he mentioned in the article in Marie Claire."

"And I bet Kurt's way would have been far less explosive than this." Jennifer finished Nick's sentence, again speaking the unnecessary.

Blaine could barely breathe. This was it. He'd be known as the idiot who had his mark photographed by a hundred paparazzi. And before he stood with Kurt, arm in arm, and proudly declared that this man was his soul mate. He hadn't known what the event was or what the plan was to release that information to the public but it would be classy and special if he knew Kurt.

Not like this. This was more like the grand gestures Blaine could have used if he'd failed to have his mark taken seriously the first time. This was more like something Liam Phillips would have done if it had been planned.

And that classy and special way to announce to the world that Kurt Hummel had found his soul mate, and Blaine was that man? That plan had to be thrown into the bin now.

His phone hadn't stopped vibrating. Blindly, Blaine reached out and accepted the call without looking at the caller ID.

"Hello?" His voice was weak and shaking, his heart still pounding from shock and despair.

"Blaine, can we get a statement from you about your recent photos? We'd like an exclusive that tells us about how you and Kurt met and-"

Blaine cut the conversation off robotically. His phone immediately started vibrating in his hand but he didn't need to look at the screen this time. Sugar did it for him.

"Oh it's Cooper!" She sounded far too bright for the situation. "Say hi to him from me. I'm still waiting to hear from him about that commercial, you know."

"Priorities Sugar!" Nick snapped, sounding much more like what Blaine needed at that moment: worried and shocked.

Sugar regarded her friend with a raised eyebrow and a totally unimpressed look on her face. "That is a priority." She said, sounding more affronted this time, "And I was going to ask my daddy to buy all the websites and pay them not to write about Blaine. Maybe that will help make this go away."

Blaine missed Nick's answer to that by accepting Cooper's call. He had barely put the phone to his ear and hadn't greeted his brother when Cooper started talking.

"Blaine, what happened? Why are there pictures of your hand all over the internet and the gossip columns?" He was happy to hear that Cooper sounded as worried as Nick did.

"Um, I don't know what happened Coop. I was just leaving my exam and they ambushed me and I didn't know what to do-"

"So you let them photograph your hand! What were you thinking? The public like the guessing games: you should have kept your hand closed, or worn a glove, or something other than this."

"I didn't do on purpose, Coop." Blaine snapped. "They surprised me and the lights were really bright and I was just shielding my eyes from the flash."

Cooper was silent for a moment but when he spoke his voice was still worried but a little gentler. "That was an accident?" Blaine nodded and made sounds of agreement. "Oh, g-d. That's bad little brother."

"I know." He moaned and rested his head in his free hand. He could still hear his friends behind him, talking about some way to help Blaine with what was sure to be an interesting next few days.

"It was like you guys were on the edge of a cliff and this was the push to send you over. The fallout is huge, Blaine. I'm looking at all the comments on this site and I think Heather is out buying all the magazines she can. Most of the stores won't even be open yet but she's looking. Blaine, I wouldn't be surprised if there's paparazzi camped outside your dorm. No one's mark has ever been caught on film like that before, revealing who their soul mate is without a shadow of doubt."

"Camped outside?" Blaine sucked in a huge breath and sped out of the room in his socks, one hand still holding the phone close to his ear. He raced passed his peers, who had come out of their dorms and were pointing after him, talking loudly about what they'd heard or seen.

When Blaine reached the bottom floor and ran to the glass doors and pushed the inner one open. Cold concrete beneath his socks and a flush over his face, Blaine stared at the sea of photographers outside the main door. He had seen a crowd this large outside movie premiers and at the fashion show he and Nick had gone to a few weeks ago. It was nearly double the size that had ambushed him yesterday and all of the people standing there were holding microphones and cameras, some video cameras and some photography cameras.

"The crowd is huge isn't it?" Cooper asked.

"Yep."

"I'm sorry Blaine. You deserve everything but not to be harassed by the press. They won't go away. They are like a bad smell that no amount of air freshener will get rid of." An involuntary laugh spilled out of Blaine and he heard the smile in his brother's voice.

Cooper's voice then turned serious. "Are you going to be ok?"

"Probably." Blaine shrugged even though his brother couldn't see him. Luckily, none of the paparazzi had seen him just yet. "I have to be, right?"

"Have you spoken to Kurt yet? He's probably being mobbed as well."

"Not yet." Blaine rubbed the back of his neck and turned away from the door, walking back inside the warm dorms. "Cooper, what do I do?"

His brother was hardly an expert at how to deal with the paparazzi. Cooper had never been photographed while revising in Central Park and he certainly hadn't accidentally shown his mark to the media and had a hundred or more journalists camped outside his house the day after.

"Ring Kurt and let him know what's going on your end." Cooper said in a very matter-of-fact manner. "Then I'd go to your lectures and try and forget this. Have you got any classes today?"

“One revision seminar for my next exam. In an hour or so actually.”

“Leave now and hide in the seminar room for as long as possible. And then go to Kurt’s tonight because they might not know where that is. Not that I’m advocating my baby brother spending the night with his soul mate. I want no funny business.”

“Don’t call me that, Coop.” He replied, referring to ‘baby brother’, “But thanks.”

“Good luck, squirt.”

Before Blaine could reply that Cooper shouldn’t call him that *either*, he had hung up the phone. Blaine raced back upstairs, ignoring any and all of the people calling out his name. Sugar and Jennifer had left the room but Nick was perched on Blaine’s bed, wading through the numerous gossip websites that featured Blaine as the main story.

“Where are you going?” Nick asked when he saw Blaine slipping on some shoes, grab a cardigan from his closet and swing his bag onto his shoulder.

“The American history seminar.” Nick checked his watch and Blaine pre-empted the question. “I know it’s not for a little while, but if I can make my escape now then the huge crowd of photographers might not see me sneak out and I can hide in the seminar room for a little bit.”

“You know there’s only one way out of this building, Blaine.” Nick stood up and hurried out of the room with his friend, Sugar following when she saw Blaine walk passed her open door like he was on a mission, “How will you sneak out passed all those people?”

Blaine shrugged and bounded down the stairs. With Nick and Sugar following, he had an audience and people on the lower floors crowded round the staircase to see the boy in the news run passed.

When he got down to the front doors however, he saw that his plan wouldn’t work. In the time he’d been upstairs grabbing the last minute things he needed to leave the safety and warmth of his dorm, one of the photographers had noticed he had been standing in the tiny porch. And one person was all it took to get the crowd of photographers to turn around and face the building.

So when Blaine walked into the porch again, Nick and Sugar right behind him, flashes went off like a conductor had started the symphony. All three paused and stared at the crowd, not knowing that many

cameras even existed in New York. Then Nick and Sugar grabbed one of Blaine's arms each and pulled him back inside the dorms.

"Sorry, Blaine," Nick said after he'd withdrawn his head from round the door frame as he'd taken a second look at the crowd, "I don't think you're leaving the dorm."

--

Kurt had stopped at hummels to briefly pick up Tina and dumped the majority of what he'd taken to the fabric factory in his office. Now he just carried his phone which he'd stuck to his ear to try and get hold of Blaine. Every time he rang his soul mate's number, the line was engaged so Kurt would end the call and try again.

He had a pretty good idea of what was happening. Friends, family member and the paparazzi would be calling Blaine, trying to talk to him to find out what was happening or get a statement to release to the public. They were all calling and thus were blocking his call.

Tina was also on the phone but she was ringing the PR department, telling them in no uncertain terms not to answer any questions about Blaine, Blaine's mark, Kurt or Kurt's mark. Not until Kurt gave the ok: which would only come after he saw Blaine.

"Any luck?" She asked, typing an email to a nosy shareholder who felt that just because he owned a few shares that he had a say in how Kurt's soul mate was revealed.

Kurt shook his head. "Not yet." He tapped Blaine's number again and held his cell up to his ear again. Engaged tone again.

His phone started ringing in his hands and an unknown number filled the screen. Kurt rejected the call and rang Blaine again. Still engaged.

"How close are we?" He asked, looking round to see if he could spot any recognisable landmarks.

"Close."

Kurt had demanded they drive straight to Blaine's dorms and Tina had agreed. The outside of hummels had been mobbed. Customers could barely push their way through the crowd of journalists to get inside



the store and that was no place to deal with the likelihood that Blaine, inexperienced with the press as he was, would be swarmed as well.

Currently they were driving through the busy streets of New York, getting closer and closer to the NYU dorms with each passing moment. Kurt wanted to get as close as possible. He'd probably have to run through the crowd of reporters to get to Blaine so he wanted to at least be prepared first.

His phone rang again, an unknown number but the same as the one that had rang the time before. Kurt ignored the call again and tried Blaine. Still engaged.

"How are you going to handle this, Kurt?" Tina asked. She'd finished her emails and was perusing the gossip sites to find out what people were saying. Some were annoyed that their business had been splashed around the tabloids like that while others were very amused that Blaine and Kurt's relationship had been revealed in such a way.

"First I'll get to Blaine." Kurt peered out the window, still not recognising the buildings, and held the phone up to his ear again. Still engaged. "Then I guess I'll have to make a statement. Although I still might wait for that Marie Claire event. Just because everybody knows that Blaine's my soul mate doesn't mean it's their business."

His phone rang with the same number for a third time and now Kurt answered it.

"Listen, I am not taking any questions at the present time. Thank-"

"Kurt, it's me." Blaine said quickly.

Kurt took the phone away from his ear and stared at the unknown number. "Where are you ringing me from?"

"Nick's phone. Mine hasn't stopped ringing so I've put it on silent and buried it in my bed."

"Blaine." Tina's gasp told Kurt that she hadn't realised who he had been talking to. "What happened? Where are those pictures from?"

"Um," Blaine went silent for a moment, "well, I got cornered after my exam yesterday evening. And the lights were really bright and I was already disorientated after my exam so when a camera flash went right into my eyes I brought my hand up to shield my eyes from the flashes."

Kurt understood what had happened and sunk his head into his free hand. "Blaine."

"I know, I know!" Blaine sounded distressed but not defensive. There was nothing that could be done anyway. "I didn't think about which hand I was using and I didn't think I was showing them my palm or your name on my hand and I just, I don't know-"

"It's ok." Kurt and Tina exchanged glances. It wasn't ok but there was nothing that could be done now.

"There are all these photographers outside my dorms, Kurt. I can't even leave. I don't know if anyone can leave, for that matter." A voice was heard from the other end of the line, high and sugary and Blaine corrected himself. "Actually, no one can leave. The hall reps have had to call the university to explain why people can't get to exams. G-d Kurt this is all my fault."

"Stop it. This isn't your fault. You made a mistake but you didn't ask for those pictures to be printed." He glanced at the streets again. Finally a landmark he recognised: they were close.

"But it's my hand. You don't get more proof of who someone's soul mate is than the writing on their hand. You can't argue against that. And what if people don't like that I'm your soul mate? Like who-"

"Who wouldn't like that you're my soul mate, Blaine?" What had Blaine been hearing? "It's not anyone's business. Soul mates aren't chosen randomly, you know that. We're each other's perfect match. How can anyone argue with that?"

"Well I'm not anyone famous or special. Like there's this poster who commented saying he always hoped you'd be with Chandler Kiehl. And another one who said that they wished you-"

"Forget about who my fans want me to be with, Blaine!" Kurt said with a laugh. They finally pulled up to a curb just round the corner from Blaine's dorm rooms. They'd have to get even closer if Kurt was going to run through the crowd of photographers to get to Blaine.

“And don’t think you aren’t special just because you’re not famous.” Kurt insisted. Edward killed the engine and twisted in his seat to talk to Tina, who slid closer to their driver. It gave Kurt some semblance of privacy in the car with two others. “You’re my soul mate, what’s more special than that?”

Blaine fell silent and Kurt imagined that he was trying to hide a small bashful smile on his otherwise worried face.

“I don’t understand what the big deal is though,” Blaine said after a moment. Kurt heard him rustle around the room he was sitting in. “I mean, I think there are more of them that have turned up. Just for a picture of me leaving my dorm? I don’t understand what’s so special about that?”

That was the question every celerity wanted to know the answer to. What was so special about then leaving their house in the morning, or going for a run or walking their dog? What was so special about whom they were dating, or sleeping with or the name on the palm of their hands?

“That’s a good question, Blaine, but no one knows the answer to it.” Kurt settled for saying. He too had seen a new van of reporters drive up to add to the horde of people standing outside.

Suddenly Blaine laughed. “I just saw two people just try and break through the crowd. They probably have an exam they don’t want to miss.” Then his voice turned guilty again. “I can’t believe they nearly missed their exam because of all the paparazzi waiting for me.”

Sure enough, two frazzled students pushed through the crowd of photographers. Kurt watched them shake their heads at the people, who looked ready to climb over each other to get close to the doors and closer to Blaine, and then hurry away towards the subway a few blocks from there.

“Stop it Blaine. It is not your fault they are outside.” Kurt’s voice was firm but he kept it light. Blaine was doing enough worrying for the both of them.

“What are we going to do about this?” His voice was quiet and muffled, his face still pressed against the glass of the window he’d been looking out of.

Kurt ran a hand over his face and rubbed a little at his tired eyes. And to think: he’d woken up feeling good about today. “We’ll go to the press event Jane is putting on next week and talk about this then. Not a second before. No questions, no statements; nothing.”

“What is that event? I saw it mentioned in the article but I don’t remember you saying anything about it.”

“Jane is just putting on a black tie event, an evening to show off what Marie Claire can do and to get more high profile people to agree to do photoshoots and interviews with them.” Kurt explained. “But the press have been invited and there will be a red carpet, so she came up with the idea that we go together and tell a reporter there that we are soul mates.”

“That was planned before I decided to have a photo taken of my left hand.”

Kurt gave a small laugh, seemingly inappropriate given the circumstance. “Yes, that’s true. But we can still make the official announcement there. Until you or I say something specifically about whether we’re soul mates or not, believe it or not, it’s still just speculation.”

Now Blaine laughed at the absurdity of what Kurt was saying. “Speculation? About whose name is scarred onto my hand? There’s pretty much all the proof the world needs.”

“But we can still make the announcement romantic.”

Blaine fell silent for a moment and Kurt waited patiently. “Ok. We’ll announce it then. But you have to talk; I don’t have a good past with talking to people with cameras.”

“Deal.” Kurt fell silent and something he’d been thinking about for a while flitted through his mind again.

“I wish I’d met you earlier. Before all this.” He said. He kept his voice low and Tina and Edward diplomatically put their heads together to talk a little more about what was going to happen next for hummels.

“What do you mean?”

“Back when we were in high school.” Kurt traced a line down his jeans with his perfectly filed finger nail. “When we were younger and still competing in Glee, worrying about which cheerleader was dating the quarterback and how lucky our friends were to have connected in high school.”

Blaine gave a small laugh and a sound of agreement but he didn’t interrupt.

"That way, we'd have gone through this together. My move to New York, becoming famous, you following me to go to NYU. I'd have had my soul mate by my side this whole time. And you'd have had me as well: no questions about my name and yours, and definitely no press camping outside your dorms for hours."

He fell silent and both of them pictured what their lives could have been like if they'd connected earlier. Maybe they'd have met at Sectionals, a romantic connection across the stage that they'd have hidden because Ohio wasn't the friendliest to gay soul mates. Or they'd have connected beforehand and Kurt might have moved to Dalton rather than North Lima High during his junior year when Karofsky's bullying became unbearable.

"I might be majoring in music right now." Blaine quietly admitted. There was a truth Kurt had known for a while but finally heard being admitted. History was a subject Blaine enjoyed but not his passion.

"We could have both been famous."

Blaine laughed again. "I doubt that. You would have always made it Kurt. You're just so special the world deserves to have you working for it in such a powerful way."

"Saving the world one fashion victim at a time?" Kurt asked with a smile on his face.

"Exactly. Me, I'd have been content with small shows or teaching music at a music college. I wouldn't be famous, except for carrying your jacket on the red carpet."

Another van pulled up at the curb just outside the dorms and Kurt watched three more photographers pour out and join the crowd pushing to get closer to the doors. From the phone he heard Blaine sigh loudly.

"G-d, more people have just turned up. Is there nothing going on elsewhere? The elections? Some other scandal that's actually a scandal." Blaine made an exasperated noise. "I really wish you were here Kurt."

"I am."

"What?" Even through his confusion, Kurt heard Blaine's excitement.

"I'm here. I'm outside."

--

Blaine was standing next to the window in Nick's dorm, the borrowed phone held to his ear and one side of his face pressed against the glass. He heard what Kurt said the first time but it didn't register but then when Kurt had told him that he was sitting outside, Blaine had eagerly pressed his whole face against the glass as if trying to crawl through it to get to him.

"Where are you?" He asked. He looked up and down the street to try and spot a car that he recognised.

"A street or so away but I can still see the horde of followers you've got. I can move closer if I need to come inside."

Blaine just about resisted crying out for joy and asking Kurt to do just that in a voice that would have squeaked in his excitement. He tried to peer round the window pane, through wood and brick, to see where Kurt was sat.

"You were going to brave the crowd of paparazzi just to get inside the dorms?" Blaine asked. He couldn't keep the hope out of his voice. He hadn't seen Kurt since before the article in Marie Claire had been published because of his exam. So seeing his soul mate was wonderful news. And in the middle of this mess, a mess of his own creation no matter how many times Kurt said it wasn't his fault, seeing Kurt was like the first ray of sunshine after a monsoon that devastated a town.

"Of course." Kurt gave a tiny laugh. "I'm not dressed for it, but I'll walk right through that crowd if they won't part."

"Now?" This time he sounded too eager but Blaine couldn't bear it. A black car moved into his vision and the smile that grew on Blaine's face was wide and joyous. He knew that was Kurt. He watched the car halt just opposite the entrance to the dorms.

Blaine tore himself away from the window and threw himself down the hall, speeding passed his open door and seeing Nick, Jennifer and Sugar fly out into the hallway. Other people he passed called his name to try and get his attention but he ignored them all, not even stopping to apologise if he ran right into them.

"I'm at the door." He said to Kurt when he reached the double doors leading to the outside world, to the paparazzi and to Kurt. He was grateful now that the inner door was of thick wood because he could loiter here until Kurt made it through the paparazzi.

"Ok. Prepare for this run."

Kurt kept the line open and through the phones, Blaine heard the car door open and then slam shut. He heard Kurt mumble to someone and then heard more footsteps as Kurt crossed the busy road. He bounced on his toes for a moment longer before he could stand it no more. Blaine opened the inner door and stepped out onto the concrete porch to watch Kurt.

Photographers started snapping pictures but many had turned around and were aiming their cameras in the opposite direction to Blaine. To where Kurt was obviously coming from. Blaine watched from behind the frosty glass, standing on tiptoes and ignoring the cold seeping through his body from his feet as he strained for a glimpse of Kurt.

Then Kurt broke free from the main body of paparazzi and the last few stragglers parted like the Red Sea to allow Kurt to pass. They didn't stop taking photographs of the pair of them however. Kurt was holding his head high, hair coiffed perfectly even after pushing through a crowd and scarf only a little askew. Edward was walking a step behind him, his arms outstretched and keeping a small distance between his boss and the overeager paparazzi. Blaine could see that they were shouting questions but Kurt ignored them all, looking down his nose at a few who were too enthusiastic with their questions.

If Blaine had been outside, he would have seen a hundred faces of his peers pressed against the windows of all floors of the dorms. Nick, Sugar and Jennifer were in the room Blaine had been in but were smiling with happiness: at least Nick was, Sugar had taken to straightening her outfit so she could give Kurt a good first impression. All hundred peers had their mouths open and their camera phones out, documenting every step Kurt made towards their dorms.

Kurt was only a few steps away and Blaine pushed the outer door open, a wide smile on his face. One hand he kept on the door to hold it open while he held out the other for Kurt to take once he reached him. A cacophony of sound hit him like a tidal wave when he removed the last barrier between him and the outside world. The noise of the traffic, the paparazzi, the questions, the cameras snapping nonstop. But Blaine ignored it all and kept his eyes on Kurt.

The feel of Kurt's hand in his was almost like coming home after a long trip away. They immediately interlocked their fingers and Kurt paused for a moment before crossing the threshold.

"Good luck, Mr H." Edward said, a Bronx accent sounding strange after the familiarity of Kurt's Ohio one. Then the driver turned to Blaine. "You too Blaine."

"Thanks, Edward." Kurt said sincerely. Photographs were being taken to document every second and questions were still being shouted. They ignored them all and Kurt stepped inside Blaine's halls for only the second time, Blaine quickly closing the door this time.

Kurt was completely aware of the glass surrounding them so he gestured towards the inside door. Blaine led him over that threshold without looking away from his soul mate, almost like a man who'd lived in the dark was seeing the sun for the first time in his life. Once the inner door closed out the paparazzi for the time being, Blaine pulled Kurt in an embrace that had him burying his face in Kurt's neck.

"I'm so glad you're here." He mumbled.

"There's nowhere else I'd rather be." Kurt whispered. The repetition of the words Blaine had said only a few days ago wasn't lost to either boy and they separated only when the creak of a staircase alerted them to their audience inside. Blaine's NYU peers were crowded on the staircase and staring down at the couple like they were new animals in the zoo.

"Come on. My dorm's on the third floor." Blaine took Kurt's hand and pulled him down the corridor, quickly climbing the three flights of stairs and ignoring every single staring face. They could have run down the third floor corridor, hand in hand and smiling at each other but they didn't: Kurt's shoes weren't made to run in and Blaine would have slid all across the floor in his socks. Instead they walked together and Kurt looked from side to side to take in what the inside of college halls looked like.

Nick, Sugar and Jennifer were standing outside Nick's room when they passed it and Blaine saw Nick clap his hand over Sugar's mouth as she tried to step forward to talk to Kurt. The look of outrage on her face made Blaine chuckle but he didn't stop walking towards his own room even though Kurt turned to see what was so funny.

The loud slam of the door to his room was satisfying, separating him and Kurt from the outside world. It left just the two of them in the small room that Blaine called home, pictures from his Dalton days on the



bookshelves and a framed photograph of his family on his desk, posters of musicians on the wall and his cupboard door wide open showing the world the state of his clothes. Kurt hadn't noticed the many bundled up sweaters and Blaine quickly closed the door before his soul mate could spot them.

Kurt had perched himself on the bed having straightened up the rumpled covers. They could both hear the vibrations of Blaine's phone that had been hastily stuffed under his pillow and they shared a small laugh.

"Thank you for coming here." Blaine said once he'd taken a seat next to Kurt. He reached out and covered Kurt's hand with his own. "How you took today off work, especially with your new line, just to come here..."

"Blaine I'm the boss: I don't need to worry about being fired if I take a day off work." Kurt nudged Blaine's arm with his own and gave a smile when he saw one spread across Blaine's face.

"Besides," Kurt said, his tone leaving no room for argument, "I don't care about a crowd of sweaty vultures who are swooping for the newest scoop. They want a picture of you and me but I'd rather make sure you were ok. You came and stayed with me while you should have been revising for your exam. Skipping a day of work to be here for you is nothing."

Maybe it was the emotional twists and turns of the past few days. Maybe it was the fact that through whatever had happened with the media to the two of them, and had been going on for weeks with the speculation now, they had been there for each other. But Blaine was sat on his bed, watching Kurt as he talked about the scavengers circling below and feeling his soft hand below Blaine's own and he had never felt more perfect.

"I love you." He said, his mouth moving and speaking his mind without conscious thought. As soon as he said it, he realised it was a hundred percent true.

Kurt had fallen silent in the moment that Blaine spoke and he turned his head to look, not staring but just looking. A small smile grew on his lips and he flipped his hand so that the back was against Blaine's bed and he could hold their palms together.

"I love you too." He said, quickly and almost in shock that he was saying those words.

They smiled at each other for a moment, silent but completely comfortable, before leaning together for a kiss. The sound of people walking up and down the hall outside didn't disturb them. The sound of the

paparazzi outside, some leaving as there was nothing happening here for the moment and other shouting for Blaine and Kurt, didn't distract them. Public and popular opinions were ignored. Instead they were just soul mates who had come together and confessed their love.

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There was a torrent of sound outside the press event put on by Jane Goodman the following week. A large red carpet was laid out on the ground and it led into a hotel with its doors wide open, an event hall with tables set up and a large area for speeches where Jane and other high ranking editors of Marie Claire would promote their magazine and the newest fashion showcased by them.

The media stood outside alongside screaming fans, shouting the names of their heroes, designers and models alike waving happily to people who called their names. There was a schedule for people to arrive at the event and currently four designers and three models were stood on the red carpet, slowly making their way up its long length towards the hotel.

Inside the car just three from the beginning of the red carpet, Blaine was sat with his knee bouncing up and down with nerves. He kept tugging at his checked, multi-coloured jacket, made especially for him for this event by Kurt. Kurt who, sat in the back of the car next to him, looked like they were on their way to buy a cup of coffee.

"Are you not nervous at all?" Blaine asked. One car had moved away and Edward followed the line of cars as they moved up. From outside the front window, Blaine watched as a woman was helped out of the car, her legs going on for miles.

Kurt shook his head but he reached out and straightened Blaine's tie, rearranged the lapels on his jacket and brush off some imaginary lint from the shoulder. The car moved up again and now they were due to be the next ones out.

"We'll be fine." Kurt assured him. He took a moment to straighten his own clothes, a black suit jacket with silver buttons and silver embellishments on the shoulders, black waistcoat with the same silver buttons and black suit pants, complete with his own bow tie. He peered into the rear view mirror to straighten the bow tie, silver and eye catching, while the car crawled the last few metres.

Edward finally pulled up at the start of the red carpet. The door opened and Kurt stepped out of the car first, a blinding smile on his face as he swept his eyes over the scene. Blaine quickly scooted over the seats and took Kurt's hand before he left the safety of Edward's car.

The sound could have knocked him back and the lights left searing spots on his vision but he kept his composure and stuck to Kurt's side like they were glued. He closed the door gently and felt it leave. For a moment he wanted to run from this crowd of people, lights and noise and dive back into the moving vehicle but he squeezed Kurt's hand instead and together they stepped out onto the red carpet.

Fans were cheering Kurt's name and Blaine raised one eyebrow when he heard his own name being shouted a few times. Kurt simply waved at a few people but didn't give any autographs: this was a press event so the people with cameras and microphones standing a little further down the red carpet were more important.

Kurt chose one seemingly at random and headed their way, tugging Blaine along behind him while his eyes continued to wander over the scene in front of him. Lights were still flashing and his ears were still buzzing from the sheer amount of noise out there but this time Blaine could see the other people on the carpet with them. Models who towered over everyone in beautiful dresses and high heels were posing for pictures. Fashion designers were talking with the press about their newest designs or an upcoming fashion show. Fashion editors were also being interviewed, laughing loudly about how they were on the other side of the notebook this time.

A tug on his hand made Blaine focus on the conversation that had just begun in front of him. Kurt was still smiling widely, a smile that Blaine knew was one of the ones he put on especially for an event like this. It wasn't genuine but still beautiful.

"I hear you've recently connected, Kurt, congratulations." The journalist was saying, holding the microphone close to her mouth. "You had us guessing for a while but recent developments have shown us that you have found *the one*."

A blush bloomed on Blaine's cheeks. Recent developments like the picture of his mark circling the gossip tabloids for days.

Kurt, however, only laughed and said: "Yes. Thank you. We were keeping it out of the public eye for a while but no more."

The interviewer reclaimed her microphone but turned to look at Blaine. She spoke again, still directing her words at Kurt. "This is him?" She winked exaggeratedly at Kurt, making sure the camera caught it too. "He's cute."

"Thank you." Kurt repeated with an accompanying laugh. "This is my soul mate, Blaine Anderson."

The roaring that had settled in Blaine's ears but it seemed to grow in pitch when Kurt said the fateful words. He smiled at her and the camera, his blush still high on his face from his mistake and the reporter's compliment.

"Can we confirm a few things then?" She asked with a cheeky smile. Kurt shrugged one shoulder so she took that as a 'go ahead'. "The article that had you connected with someone else...?"

"That was false, but I do wish him luck in finding his real Kurt Hummel." Kurt said quickly, actually leaning towards the microphone in his haste to answer the question.

"And what's in store for hummels? I hear rumours about a new line on its way." She prodded, seeking all the scoop she could get.

Again Kurt laughed. "Yes. My new line. But that's all I'll say about it for the moment."

"Can we have the name of it?"

Kurt looked at Blaine with a far smaller and far more genuine smile. "B.A." He said simply and Blaine's blush bloomed again. Kurt's new line was based on and named after *him*?

"Isn't that romantic." The reporter said into her camera. She turned back to Kurt and Blaine, nodding her head at both of them in turn. "Well congratulations Kurt, congratulations Blaine." She turned to the camera again. "That was Kurt Hummel and his lovely soul mate, a face we've seen before but can now put a name to."

"You're naming your line after me?" Blaine asked in a quiet voice as they moved away from the journalist and walked a little further down the red carpet.

Kurt nodded, a little bashful. "It's based on what you wear and you're so important to me so I thought it would be appropriate." He halted and brought their joined hands up between their bodies. "Is that ok?"

For a reply, Blaine leant forward, raised himself slightly off the ground and pressed a small kiss to Kurt's lips. The increased flashing of cameras catching on of the first romantic moments between them wasn't lost to either boy. They just didn't react.

"So ok." Blaine replied when he'd settled on the floor again. "Was that alright? Not too much?"

"Not too much." Kurt repeated. He jerked his head towards the hotel. "Come on."

They walked towards the hotel down the rest of the red carpet, hands tightly clasped together and smiles on their faces. Cameras flashed to take a picture of every step they took but that was fine. Blaine would get used to that. He squeezed Kurt's hand again. For the first time at a public event, Kurt wasn't wearing gloves. They could both get used to that too.

It wasn't like the camera and the people behind the camera knowing who they were to each other would change anything, after all.

## Chapter Fourteen

Blaine woke up before the alarm, which wasn't so unusual. Today he woke up to the birds chirping outside Kurt's bedroom window and he took advantage of his wakefulness to gaze down at the man next to him. Blaine had all but moved into Kurt's apartment, having already signed a lease for a shared apartment with Nick and two other guys from their course before he'd connected with Kurt, so he woke up here more often than not.

But seeing Kurt while he was asleep or had just woken up was something wonderful that Blaine was so lucky he never had to give up. Kurt looked peaceful, his hair fluffed out over the pillow, his eyelashes fluttering against his cheek, his eyes owlsh and oh so blue when he did wake up and the morning kiss they would always share.

Blaine propped himself up on his elbow to watch Kurt sleep. They had been tangled up during the night and now Kurt was lying on his front with one arm thrown out on the other side of the bed but his face turned towards Blaine. A lock of hair was lying over his eyes but was curled in such a way that it framed his lashes.

"Why are you watching me?" Kurt mumbled. He sounded barely awake, having been roused from sleep by the small shifting Blaine had done in order to be more comfortable while watching his soul mate sleep.

"Because you're beautiful." Blaine leant over and pressed a kiss to Kurt's exposed cheek.

Kurt moved his head towards Blaine's lips, pulled like a paper clip to a magnet, and pressed their lips together. It was far more than their kisses in the early morning. Those were chaste, close lipped and like the staccato notes of a music piece. With this one, Kurt licked at Blaine's lips until they opened and kissed him deeply once they did.

While Blaine slid lower down the bed until he was lying on the pillow, Kurt lifted his torso and placed one hand behind Blaine's head, weaving his fingers into tangled curls and tugging. A moan was wrenched from Blaine and it only made Kurt press harder with his kiss, delicious pressure sending sparks of arousal down both of their spines towards their cocks.

"Good morning to you too," Blaine's voice was hoarse as they broke the kiss for breath but his smile was lazy and teasing. Kurt gave a breathy laugh before lowering his head until his lips hovered just a hair's

width away from Blaine's. There was a moment's pause, tension rising out of the lethargy of the early morning until it peaked and Blaine surged up to press their lips together again.

The kiss delved into more very quickly, mouths open and moving against each other, tongues deep in each other's mouths as they danced together. Blaine wrapped his arms around Kurt's torso and shifted until Kurt was lying on top of him, legs to one side but hips still mostly aligned. His morning erection had started to fade during the short time before Kurt had woken but it had returned at full force and the friction of Kurt's hips rubbing against his cock made Blaine moan again and shift his own hips.

Kurt replied with a groan of his own as Blaine's hips rose, creating a perfect thrust with the side of his hips against his cock confined in his pyjama bottoms. Blaine ran his hands over the soft silk top Kurt was wearing, sliding them lower and lower until he reached bare skin. He slid both hands underneath Kurt's top, feeling his body heat sizzle against his fingertips.

Kurt let go of his lips and neck for as long as it took to strip off the top. He laid it over the headboard on the far side of the bed but paid it no attention when it slipped off and fell to the floor. Blaine had also seized the opportunity to remove a layer and they returned to their fiery kissing like starving men finding food, both moaning at the feel of their bare chests coming together.

Kurt had one hand curled around the back of Blaine's neck and one hand in between their bodies resting on his chest. Both thumbs were moving and from the two points that were being stroked oh so lightly, Blaine was shivering with delightful arousal and shifting his hips that tiny amount, making Kurt shift his hips in return to build the friction and the tension.

"Oh G-d, take these off." Blaine said after particularly forceful thrust had his throwing his head back, making Kurt tug at his hair forcefully. One of his hands had slipped under Kurt's pants, massaging one of his cheeks and he traced a finger down from the top of his crack until it hovered over Kurt hole.

Kurt's only reply was a moan and then they were both scrambling to get their pyjama bottoms off their legs and their hands back on each other. In the scurried movements, Blaine sat up and flipped them over when Kurt had pulled the pants from where they had caught on his foot. Blaine settled in between Kurt's open legs and braced himself on his hands, their combined laughter turned into a groan when the movements aligned their cocks and rubbed them together. Blaine grinned seductively down at the man between his arms and reached down to take hold of Kurt's cock, squeezing and tugging in the way he

knew Kurt loved. After a moment, Kurt threw his head against the pillows and dug into Blaine's shoulders with his nails, scraping one hand down his back until he was grasping Blaine's bum.

They moved against each other, too hot skin sliding together, Kurt's hips thrusting up to slide his cock through Blaine's hand and Blaine returning each thrust with one of his own. Kurt's quiet moans were loud in Blaine's ear and every so often, he'd lick from over the shell of Blaine's ear which sent shivers down his spine.

Without thinking, Blaine reached out for the lube tucked away in a drawer. He took his face away from where he'd been alternating between pressing his lips to Kurt's neck and giving him tiny kitten licks to look and Kurt seized the opportunity to attach his lips to Blaine's neck instead.

"Blaine, hurry up with the lube." He ordered, his voice lust filled. Blaine's eyes slid shut and he couldn't help a perfectly angled thrust down against Kurt's cock still held in his fist. He could listen to Kurt's voice low and husky like that for hours, getting off so many times of his soul mate's voice alone.

He picked up a condom from the permanently open packet of condoms when he brought the lube out of the drawer, that he left open as usual. They'd fucked bareback before over the year they'd been together but the mess was far too much to deal with this early in the morning. Neither had properly woken yet, following their cocks' advice to fuck as soon as they woke.

Blaine slid down the bed, never stopped his hand's slow movements on Kurt's cock. Long than his own but thinner, Blaine loved holding Kurt in his hand and the heavy weight in his mouth. Though he'd never admit it out loud, Kurt loved it when Blaine would slowly jerk him off, teasing other sensual points like his neck or inner thighs until Kurt was panting and begging for release.

Blaine took his hand off Kurt's cock for as long as he needed to squeeze lube over his hands, rubbing them together and then quickly returning to what he'd been doing, squeezing the base of Kurt's cock ever so slightly before tugging once more, the movements so much more fluid that both of them moaned at the feel. With his other hand, he ran a finger around Kurt's balls, down his perineum to press against his quivering hole.

He lay his tongue flat over one of Kurt's hard nipples and felt Kurt's chest rise as he drew in a deep breath. Blaine gently pressed one lubed finger slowly inside Kurt, moving it in tiny circles and twisting his other hand just below the head of Kurt's rock hard cock.



"G-d Blaine, you need to go faster than that." Kurt's voice croaked as he spoke and he scraped his nails down Blaine's back again. The sharp pain sent a shiver straight to Blaine's cock, hard nails against his too hot skin making him pant. "I'm not going to last that long at this rate."

The only reply Blaine gave was a fierce kiss to Kurt's open lips that left them both panting and a hard tug at Kurt's cock before squeezing at the base again. "You'd better." He whispered against Kurt's lips.

But he did move faster, moving his finger in and out of Kurt until he saw in Kurt's face that he was comfortable and then inserting a second finger. The slide of his hand against Kurt's cock was made even smoother from the precome leaking out and Blaine's thumb rubbing over the slit to collect as much as he could. He pressed his lips to Kurt's burning skin and twisted his fingers inside Kurt, flipped them over quickly at the same time that he twisted his hand underneath the head again.

"Oh g-d, Blaine!" Kurt cried out, grabbing Blaine's shoulder again, his grip strong. Blaine repeated both movements and Kurt's echoed his cry. "G-d, Blaine, please. Faster, please."

Every word Kurt spoke went straight to Blaine's cock and he rocked his hips, undulating against the soft covers to gain some sort of friction. He knew he wouldn't last much longer, tension had been high from so soon after Kurt had kissed him so passionately when he'd woken and every noise and movement of Kurt's long, lithe body only added to the growing tightness in his abdomen. He added a third finger, moving all three together and opening them gently to stretch Kurt out further. Blaine added his little finger because he could but Kurt grasped his shoulder again.

"Now," He moaned, "nownownow."

Blaine sat up and Kurt spread his legs further, completely surrounding Blaine's body as he settled himself there. He slowly slid his fingers out of Kurt, letting Kurt's cock go to an almost annoyed groan from Kurt. He tore open the condom with slippery hands but Kurt's long fingers took it out of his hands and he sat up to roll it over Blaine's hard and aching length. Kurt looked up at Blaine from beneath his lashes, a lustful smile on his face as he blindly found the tube of lube and poured enough to coat Blaine's cock.

Wiping his hands against the top of the covers, Blaine hooked one finger underneath Kurt's chin and tipped his face up until they could press their lips together in a passionate but sensual kiss. Kurt lay back and wrapped his arms around Blaine's neck, pulling Blaine down with him. Blaine dutifully followed Kurt's example and felt out for Kurt's legs blindly, lips sliding over each other in perfect rhythm.

He slid one hand under Kurt's knee and brought a long, thin leg up and over his shoulder. With his other hand, he held his cock at the base of the condom and lined it up with Kurt's stretched and waiting hole. In one smooth movement he pushed in, spearing Kurt on his cock entirely. They both moaned into each other's mouths, Kurt moving his hips against Blaine's to get Blaine as deep as he could go.

G-d, Kurt was so tight, so hot, that Blaine had to stop moving for a moment to settle himself. He could lose his mind every time he was inside Kurt, so perfect, so tight around his cock. His hips were still but Kurt was undulating sensually against him, bucking his hips in tiny movements and gasping against Blaine's mouth. They weren't kissing anymore, just had their lips touching and open as if air was a hard thing to get.

Blaine opened his eyes and grasped at Kurt's leg tighter, thrusting out and then into Kurt's body in a strong movement that had Kurt moaning his name loudly, driving Blaine crazy with the low register of his lust-filled voice. He thrust his hips harder, driving into Kurt without pause and moved a hand down Kurt's damp chest to pinch his nipples.

Kurt cried out again, whimpering when Blaine sped up the movement of his hips, Kurt's cock leaking precome and sliding smoothly against their stomachs. Kurt's eyes opened and Blaine's breath caught in his throat. His soul mate's blue eyes were filled with lust and love, pupils wide and eyelids fluttering to veil his eyes so seductively. G-d, he was beautiful. There was nothing Blaine didn't want to do with Kurt; he'd kissed every part of him, touched every part of him and he'd do it all over again every day.

As Blaine fucked Kurt harder and faster, the moans and whimpers he was making grew in noise and sent sparks of arousal down Blaine's spine, tightening the tension in his abdomen and making him move his hips even faster. Kurt was slowly tightening around him and had grabbed Blaine's hand, pulling it off the bed and directed it to his cock still pressed between their stomachs. Taking the hint, Blaine took hold of Kurt's neglected cock and tugged hard, timing it so each movement of his hand was alternating with a thrust of his hips.

"Oh g-d Blaine, so close, so close," he said in between moans and Blaine sped up his movements, tightening his hand ever so slightly and pressing his thumb against the prominent vein on the underside of Kurt's cock.

Kurt gasped out Blaine's name then came, spurting over Blaine's hand and their stomachs and panting against Blaine's mouth. The feel of Kurt tightening around his cock, the look of his beautiful face and Blaine was gone, coming with a ragged moan and pushing into Kurt's body with one last thrust.

Senses in overdrive, Kurt wrapped around him perfectly, Blaine all but collapsed onto Kurt. He let Kurt's leg drop and it slowly slid down to flop onto the bed. Their lips were still touching and Kurt, who recovered from his afterglow first, pressed sensual kisses first Blaine's top lip, then Blaine's bottom lip until they were moving in perfect rhythm again. Kurt released his grip on Blaine's shoulder to cup his soul mate's face instead, sliding his fingers into Blaine's sweat-tangled curls to hold their lips together. Even while they kissed, Blaine reached down to hold the base of the condom and slowly, carefully, slid out of Kurt. The movement made Kurt's hips jump from sensitivity and they broke their kiss to laugh, panting into each other's mouths.

"That's the best kind of wake up." Kurt muttered against Blaine's lips. They were both breathing heavily and could have easily slotted against each other and fallen back asleep, comfortable in their soul mate's arms.

They didn't fall back to sleep and Blaine carefully pushed himself off Kurt's body, moving to rest on his knees as he took off the condom and tied it, leaning over to throw into a nearby bin. He turned back to Kurt and his breath caught in his throat. Kurt was lying casually on the bed, eyes hooded, legs and arms spread, hair messed from the sex, lips red and swollen and oh so kissable. He was so beautiful, so perfect.

"You are so beautiful." Blaine whispered with a smile. Kurt immediately blushed and laughed bashfully. He shook his head and Blaine, who had anticipated the disagreement, repeated what he said emphatically. "You are. Just because your hair isn't perfect doesn't mean you aren't beautiful."

Kurt laughed again and pushed his body up on his elbows. "You do know the right things to say." Blaine gave a self-satisfied smile and Kurt couldn't resist pushing himself up fully to wrap one arm around Blaine's neck and find his lips again.

"Come on, we have to shower. And then I'm not leaving the bed a mess like this." Kurt said when they broke their kiss. He manoeuvred off the bed, struggling to get his legs together without hitting Blaine, who laughed appreciatively but followed his soul mate into the bathroom to shower together.

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For the few runway shows Blaine had been to since he'd met Kurt, he'd always been front of the house. Sitting in the seats while he waited for the models to strut down the runway and show off their garments. Mingling with the other fashion elite while he talked politely to people so that he didn't show Kurt up.

But now, he was stood backstage and he was watching the pandemonium take place. Models were being shoved into clothes and having their hair styled every time they turned around. Assistances would be running from one side of the backstage area to the other, carrying thread and needles just in case and bringing bottles of water to gasping models as they were pushed and pulled into place. Kurt was everywhere. He was shouting at this model to straighten his tie and that assistant to fit the sweater more carefully on the model they were working with.

Blaine was standing in the corner, his hands in his pockets and his eyes wide as he took the scene. He had no real reason to be back here. This was Kurt's work, Kurt's runway showcasing his long awaited b.a. line. Kurt's family was here as well as Cooper and Blaine could be out with them, front of house and away from all this madness.

But the only other time he saw Kurt completely in his element was when he was sewing a new outfit for some event that they had to attend. Seeing him now, ordering people to look their best and striding through the horde of people to get the exact bow tie he wanted for one specific model, was seeing Kurt at his best.

Blaine walked closer to the entrance to the runway. Kurt hadn't done anything fancy with this: he'd said that a busy runway would deter from the clothes and he wasn't inviting hundreds of people to judge him on the state of the runway and ignore his designs. It was white and lit from above, with big white temporary walls separating the seats from the public. On the back wall where the models would enter from, the word 'b.a.' was written in silver ink in Blaine's own handwriting.

Sticking his head round one of the walls, he saw that the room beyond the backstage area was full of people milling around, drinks in their hands and smiles on their faces. Delight filled him. He always wanted his soul mate to do well so seeing the room packed with people was really heartening.

Over the past year, they had gotten a lot of flak for the way their relationship had been revealed to the media. Many had complained that they had tried to keep it a secret but every time Kurt had said that it was nobody's business but theirs. There had also been so much speculation about Kurt's third line ever since he'd announced its name nearly eight months ago.

And Kurt had pushed until it had been finished and ready to be showcased on today's exact date. March 15th, exactly a year since he and Blaine connected in the office of Kurt's store.

"What do you think?" Kurt asked, taking a moment out from his manic schedule to peer around the wall between the runway and the backstage area with Blaine. He quickly took in the crowd then pulled his head back behind the separation.

"I think it's amazing, Kurt." Blaine said. He took Kurt's hands in his own, ignoring an untied bow tie draped between the fingers of his left hand. "This whole thing is amazing."

Kurt tugged at their hands which forced Blaine to stumble closer until they were just shy of nose to nose. Taking advantage of the proximity, Kurt pressed his lips against Blaine's. Both of their eyes slid shut and amidst the hustle and bustle of the backstage of the fashion show, they kissed for a few long moments.

"Kurt!" Tina sounded panicked and when they broke apart, both looked to see her dragging a model towards Kurt, a tear in his patterned shirt. The colour drained from Kurt's face and he strode over confidently to examine the damage.

Blaine stood back and watched Kurt work his magic. He literally grabbed the arm of a young intern who had been spiking up one model's hair from where it had fallen a little flat and pushed her towards the racks where other shirts were held. She ran off and returned with a different patterned shirt. Kurt stripped the model and forced him into the second shirt, pulling the perfect tie from a box placed just by the runway entrance for this exact emergency. The whole outfit was changed in less than a minute and when Kurt finally pronounced him fixed, a few people who had been watching clapped. Blaine included.

"You're magical you know that." Blaine laced his fingers through Kurt's once more when his soul mate finally stopped moving for a moment. He was still staring at the model whose outfit had been instantly changed, like something was wrong with it.

"I think the shoes are still wrong." He murmured. Kurt looked Blaine up and down, seeking inspiration and then a eureka moment hit. He let go of Blaine's hand and rushed off then turned right around to peck another kiss on Blaine's lips.

"If I don't see you until after the show," he said, speaking very quickly, "then I hope you enjoy it."

“Good luck.” Blaine couldn’t resist another kiss and with that, Kurt sped away, stopping only to pick up dark blue boat shoes on the way to intercept that model.

On his way out of the backstage area, Blaine wished Jeff luck as well. It was strange seeing him decked up in couture clothes, especially as they looked like a far more expensive version of what Blaine would wear and nothing like Jeff wore on days that he wasn’t modelling. Jeff looked nothing like the man he knew now, which his hair half way to the sky and colourful bow tie positioned dead centre on his neck.

“Have fun out there.” He said with a wave, not moving his head too much because the hair stylist was spraying a third can of hairspray over his hair. Jeff sent Blaine a happy smile that made him look more like himself and gave Blaine a message to give Nick.

Blaine tucked his hands into the pockets of his pants while he slowly made his way out of the bustling backstage area towards the loud but comparatively serene front of house. He was hit by the noise of chatter and laughter when he rounded the wall partition but this was nothing like backstage. People were talking, laughing at stories, catching up, commenting on clothes and generally enjoying the evening. Soft music was playing in the background and Blaine smiled when he recognised the song.

Kurt had insisted on one thing from Blaine for this fashion show. That he sing his favourite songs and they play the tracks as the music for the evening. Blaine had jumped at the chance to actually record some music, even if it was just covering songs for his soul mate’s fashion show. They’d spent many a winter night picking the perfect selection and Blaine had insisted they sing together for one of the songs. That had been a Christmas song so Kurt had vetoed it playing over the show but their duet was on a CD that never seemed to leave the sound system in Kurt’s apartment.

“Blaine, why haven’t you told me before that you’ve been recording?” Cooper appeared out of nowhere to sling an arm around Blaine’s neck and dangle a glass of bucks fizz by the side of his face.

“It’s not really recording, just covering songs and just for this.” Blaine took the glass out of his brother’s hand even though it hadn’t been meant for him.

“It’s still impressive.” Cooper said emphatically, waving his other hand. “It could give you a start. Someone could hear, ask the right questions... You never know.”

Blaine fixed Cooper with a look that clearly said he thought his brother was reaching. Blaine had been enjoyed to be in a recording studio but he doubted it would lead to anything. He was happy singing for Kurt and for something Kurt wanted him to sing for. And yet, the fact that his brother had recognised that the music was him singing gave Blaine a very happy and proud feeling inside. His voice was good enough to be recognisable.

“Where’s Heather?” He asked, changing the topic instead of labouring the point.

Cooper pointed towards the runway and grappled for his repossessed drink. The two brothers struggled momentarily until a waiter walked close by with a new tray of champagne and Cooper snatched a fresh glass before the waiter left.

They made their way towards the runway, winding through important guests and other fashion personalities who looked curiously at these two brothers who were strangely out of place at this fashion show.

“How’s the show going?” Blaine asked as they walked, taking a sip from his stolen drink as he did so.

Cooper had indeed landed one of his roles that he’d boasted to Blaine last year was a certainty. It hadn’t been as regular as Cooper had made it out to be, but it was still a role on a TV show. Blaine and Kurt had curled up together in each other’s arms with plate of cookies to watch the first episode Cooper had starred in. It wasn’t something either would choose to watch under any other circumstance that Blaine’s brother had a small role in it.

“Um, ok.” Cooper said, glancing to the side in an uncomfortable way. “They told me they are writing me out in the next season. I get to have a really dramatic death sequence though-” He said quickly when Blaine turned to him, shock written all over his face, “-so I can use that to try and get a new role quickly. It’s going to be an epic episode, my death.”

What can you say to that? Blaine could only hug his brother with the one arm he’d slung around Cooper’s back and watch him as Cooper’s face dropped out of his perpetually happy expression to show his disappointment.

But then he snapped back and said: “I still get next season, and I can now drop in that my little brother’s soul mate is famous so other directors had better hire me. Hey,” it was almost like a light bulb had turned

on over Cooper's head and Blaine steeled himself for whatever was coming, "Kurt doesn't need someone to do a commercial about his stores does he? I know that Nick's soul mate is the face of his new line but I won't mind being the face of his older lines or his store."

Blaine couldn't help but laugh and hugged his brother again, this time out of affection rather than for comfort. They had reached the seating area by this point and had to separate to walk behind each other in the narrow aisle. Kurt sat set aside most of the front row for the 'very very important people' as he'd said when organising the seating plan for the evening.

Sugar and Jennifer were already seated in the section for family and friends, having bugged Blaine and Kurt, when they'd been introduced, for tickets to tonight's event for weeks now. Kurt's family were also there, of course, with an extra chair hurriedly squeezed in when Finn announced at Christmas that he'd found his Laura. Kurt's immediately reaction, after the joy for his brother, was to whisper to Blaine that he dreaded giving the news to Rachel. She had reacted predictably badly, upset that Finn had found his soul mate before she had and that their perpetual on-again-off-again romance was now over for good. She was sitting with Mike and a few of Kurt's other old friends staring at Finn and Laura with a small sad smile on her face.

Heather was standing with Burt and Carole, talking amicably about life in LA with a budding actor. She'd worn a dress from Kurt's online collection, confessing proudly that she felt she just had to wear something of the great designer to his fashion show. Only when she'd walked into the event and seen the other people who'd been invited, and what they were wearing, she'd balked and had hidden herself with the other family members, worried that she looked far too casual for the evening.

Although, like Blaine had told his brother's soul mate, the clothes on the runway were of the smart-casual variety so you couldn't really look too casual at a runway show like this.

Burt clapped his arm around Blaine's shoulders when he and Cooper finally joined them, smiling down at his son's soul mate, his son-in-law in all but name. The arm heavy on his shoulders, that smile Burt gave



just for Blaine; it was all so fatherly and so natural. Over the year since he and Kurt had connected, even less time than that since Blaine first met Kurt's father, he had really been accepted as part of the Hummel-Hudson family without question. Christmas time had been the biggest indication of familial status: where Kurt and Blaine had turned up late because of a delayed flight and a stop in Westerville first but Carole and Burt hadn't started the meal because they knew the boys were coming. Then Burt had joked loudly that the greetings were taking too long and Finn, who'd stopped by and chose that night to give the announcement about his soul mate, would likely eat the whole meal for them.

It had been comfortable and so unlike the more formal 'dinner at seven or you miss it' attitude that was so often adopted in the Anderson home.

Blaine's parents had been invited to the evening and were sat in their seats already, looking mildly uncomfortable as Rachel used them to babble at while she avoided watching Finn and Laura. Cooper had kissed Heather briefly on the cheek, not wanting to interrupt her conversation, and then went to rescue his mum and dad.

"Kurt told me he had you singing, bud, and you sound really good." Burt said to Blaine as conversations continued around them. It was just as good as getting a compliment from his father. Better perhaps, because this was a man Blaine still tried to impress with every second he was in Burt's company.

"Thanks." Blaine mumbled, tugging at the hem of his one of a kind, hand stitched by Kurt cardigan. They looked over the runway and to the backstage area where both Burt and Blaine knew Kurt was still running around making sure every last thing was perfect.

"He's worked so hard at this for months now." Blaine commented. The song had changed to one of Blaine's favourites and one that Kurt had rolled his eyes exaggeratedly at. It had also sparked the on-going discussion on whether Katy Perry or Lady Gaga was the better artist. "I'm so proud of what he's done."

"So am I." Burt was nodding his head even as he looked at the blank white walls separating him from his son. "Every time he does something like this, he tops it by the next time."

Before Blaine could reply, the lights dimmed and a voice spoke over Blaine's rendition of *Last Friday Night*, asking if everybody could take their seats as the show was about to begin. Those in the friends and family section looked excitedly at each other before settling down, Rachel shooting another upset look to where Finn was sat. When Kurt had told Blaine the Rachel-Finn saga, he hadn't truly appreciated the

drama. Not until he'd seen them together for the first time at Kurt's birthday last year. Now he shook his head in fond amusement and sat in his seat next to Burt.

Nick slid into the seat on Blaine's other side with a glass of sparkling wine in his hand. He nudged Blaine with his elbow and leant over to speak quietly in his ear. "I like the songs. You sound horrendously like Katy Perry."

"Thanks, I think." Nick's backhanded compliment addressed, Blaine remembered Jeff's request. "Oh and Jeff gave me a message for you." Blaine then leant forward and pressed a quick peck to Nick's cheek. The sheer outrage on his friend's face made Blaine, and those around them who had seen, laugh.

"Nothing like Jeff." Blaine heard Nick mutter as he settled more comfortably in his seat and turned to face the runway.

The lights dimmed and the runway was lit up from lights on the ceiling. The smile that found its way on Blaine's face was large, joyous and infectious. The last notes of *Last Friday Night* were played and then a pregnant pause in the music, during which time everyone in the audience waited on bated breath.

Kurt's friend Mercedes, beautiful, outgoing and still aspiring singer, stepped out onto the runway to thunderous applause. Her soul mate Sam, sitting with Rachel and Mike, blew her a kiss which made everyone who saw smile. Blaine had heard her sing, saw her in the background of the music videos and agreed with Kurt's belief that it was beyond time that she have her light shine brightly. And Kurt's hadn't thought twice when asking his friend to be hostess for the evening.

"Welcome everyone." She said into the microphone set up on a tiny podium to the right side of the runway. Blaine knew that there were notes, written and rewritten on what she should say about each piece that evening, left on the podium. The audience fell silent, curious about what was coming next.

"I've known Kurt for a long time and it's an honour to be here introducing his newest collection to you." Mercedes said, a genuine smile on her face. "So without further ado; I present b.a. by Kurt Hummel."

Blaine looked up at where he knew a speaker was position and counted down from 3 in his head. When he hit zero, the opening notes of *Teenage Dream* filled the room and the applause started up again. Blaine's breath hitched as he saw Jeff step out onto the runway, one hand in the pocket of his long pants, woollen cardigan folded perfectly around the bowtie Blaine had watched Kurt make.

He felt Nick's hand squeeze Blaine's wrist as Jeff strutted confidently down the runway and paused at the end for pictures, the lights of the cameras illuminating every angle of the clothes Jeff was modelling. Mercedes' voice was audible over the applause, the cameras and the music but Blaine tuned out her words, having sat on the couch next to her and Kurt as they planned exactly what she would say.

Blaine watched with an awestruck expression on his face, his wide grin never dropping for a second of the runway show. Nick's grip on his wrist tightened when Jeff came out for a second and third time, his final outfit so similar to the very suit Blaine had worn when he and Kurt had attended the Marie Claire event and confirmed that they were each other's soul mates.

So much had changed over the year. A year ago, they were both still wondering and looking, still reading the gossip column as Kurt was preliminarily linked to anyone and shouted to at store openings that his soul mate was a woman. Blaine hadn't gotten used to having photographs taken when he stood in a coffee shop but he and Nick couldn't avoid the press very often. He still had no real idea what he was planning for the rest of his life so Blaine was going to carry on studying: to the outrage of Finn, who thought that studying even to postpone finding a job was ludicrous. Blaine only knew one thing for certain: that he'd be with the perfect man standing just behind the wall next to the entrance to the runway.

After Jeff had finished his final walk with his third outfit, he led the procession of models to the cheers of the crowd. Over the next few weeks, Blaine would collect any article or webpage about this fashion show and make a scrap book to keep a record of all the glowing reviews of Kurt's third line. But for now, he was still smiling to a point that his face was beginning to ache as he watched the procession and the professional photographers took as many photos as they could for the final pieces.

Then the applause turned into an ovation as Kurt stepped out onto the runway. His knee high, laced boots were eye catching and his footsteps were heard on the runway even over the cheering. He hugged Jeff, who stood next to the entrance, the rest of the models lined up down one side of the runway, and then hugged Mercedes before taking the microphone from her podium.

He walked down the runway until he stood half way along it, close to where Blaine was standing, staring up at him with rapture and love shining all over his face. Kurt raised the microphone to his lips, a bashful smile on his face when he saw the applause took a moment to die down before he could speak and be heard.

“G-d, thank you so much for coming out tonight and seeing my new collection.” His voice shook with emotion from the overwhelming support he’d been given that evening. He paused while the audience clapped his thank you. “And thanks to my good friend Mercedes for hosting the evening. But mostly, I wanted to say that this whole collection was inspired by and dedicated to my soul mate Blaine. I started designing this before I even met him, so I guess what they say is true: soul mates are truly each other’s perfect match.”

Kurt blew a small kiss to where Blaine was stood, cameras flashing wildly and capturing every moment to print later for fans to sigh in delight and romance over. Blaine winked and blew a kiss of his own. He never felt more perfect than he did with Kurt. Even standing apart with a runway stage in between them, he felt at home. They both did.

They’d handle whatever the future threw at them. They were each other’s perfect match: not even fate could argue with that.

In tarot, an upright ace of cups represents passion. It signifies creativity, compassion, overwhelming emotion. And most importantly love. When someone draws the ace of cups for what is happening in their present, it shows they’ve found the one. If anyone had looked in the future of Kurt and Blaine on the day they met a year ago, they would have pulled out the ace of cups and smiled. Most soul mates would have the ace of cups somewhere in their future. Kurt and Blaine were no exception: passion, creativity, emotion, opportunity for total fulfilment. The ace of cups would describe their relationship without flaw, without mistake and to perfection.

The ace of cups is the true love card and it has Kurt and Blaine’s names written all over it.