

# **Know Your Enemy**

**by**

**Mmerainbows**

**Kurt/Blaine || AU || R**

*Set in another world in another time. Burt, Finn, Kurt, and Noah are the heads of an army that crosses the continent liberating the oppressed from wicked rulers. The time has come to deal with a personal vendetta against the Kingdom of Dalton and its ruler, King Anderson. But even if they liberate Dalton, can they unite its people under its unwanted son, Prince Blaine?*

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## 1. Prelude to War

Burt looked over the letter in his hands towards the messenger waiting before him. "Give me a moment with my generals please. This needs to be discussed before I can make a decision."

The messenger bowed to the brown haired man standing in front of him in the army tent and exited through the canvas flaps. Burt turned around and ran a hand through his thinning hair. He was getting too old for this, but he couldn't refuse the job either. Not with such desperation expressed in this letter, and the letter that came before it for that matter. No, he had to do this. He couldn't refuse them and keep a good conscience, and even if he wanted to, his boys wouldn't let him.

He put his palms down on the table that had the continental map on it. Pins and little figurines spread over it to represent different territories, armies, and the locations of any scouts and messengers he had out. To his left side stood Finn, out of uniform as the messenger had caught them during a rare moment of calm. Instead he wore a simple brown tunic over grey slacks. Regardless of the lack of uniform, Finn was always armed and this was no exception, a belt hitched over his hips holding up his sword right now.

To his right was Noah Puckerman. Noah was in uniform, having been in command when the messenger arrived. The dark metal armor braced against his skin. His sword was sheathed on his back and he kept a dagger on each hip - his preferred weapon. When he was younger, Burt would have never thought Noah would have risen the ranks to general, much less stuck around at all, but the discipline and bonds he made with Finn and the others formed him into an amazing fighter and leader.

Across the table was his own son, Kurt, wearing a sombre red tunic and dark tights, a black cloak over his shoulders. Kurt rarely wore armor, and didn't need to. Where Finn and Noah were respected for their fighting prowess and tactical skills, Kurt was a diplomat. He could often diffuse volatile situations before Finn and Noah were even needed. Burt had fought for years against involving Kurt in his "missions", but Kurt wanted to be with his dad and over time, had proven his worth. He was truly his mother's son and Burt couldn't be prouder if he tried. Kurt was staring intently at Burt, waiting for him to speak out of respect, though it was evident by the way Kurt was pursing his lips that the boy had plenty to say.

"You boys know I want to retire. I thought the last campaign would put an end to the inhumanity that we're called upon to face. I thought I had ensured that the continent was free of tyrants who prey on the weak." He exhaled, pausing a moment to look down at the map, "I was so ready for that break that I ignored the kingship of Dalton. I was wrong to do that, and now we get letters every day and see the

refugees.... and... damn it. I just want to be able to retire with a clear conscience. That I did everything I could to make this world better for the grandchildren I might one day have.”

Finn pressed his lips together at that, Burt’s stepson through Carole. He knew he’d likely be the one providing said grandchildren since Kurt, for all his diplomatic skills, never seemed interested in talking to any of the eligible men. They had known and accepted his preference for men for years now, hoping that he would find someone to make him happy and then take in a child who needed a home, but Kurt hadn’t even looked twice at anyone in the time he’d known him. He had been far too focused on his father’s dream of a peaceful continent.

Kurt’s eyes followed his father, “Dad. You could retire. You don’t have to do anything more. We can handle it. It has to be done, but that doesn’t mean you have to lead the charge.”

Burt caught Kurt’s eyes with his own. “No son. This is King Anderson. If we take him down it’s going to be a hell of a fight, and I’m the only one old enough to know his history and strategies. Plus it’s personal. You all know the stories....”

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*Burt had been the son of the king of Lima, heir to it’s throne. He had studied to be a compassionate, and benevolent ruler. Lima was no Eden, but all of its citizens were fed and people usually looked out for one another.*

*Then the neighbouring empire of Dalton lost its king and the young prince Anderson was crowned king. He immediately had the men of Dalton conscripted and set about conquering other nearby empires over the next year. Burt thought Lima would be safe when his father went to negotiate with Anderson. His father returned... in a coffin, and Lima was overrun within the week. Burt escaped. Those who escaped with him either left to join other empires, or stayed on and became a part of his nomadic empire.*

*For the first while after Lima’s fall, Burt and his people just travelled the countryside, trying to stay alive and stay safe. They eventually reached an area far to the north and while settled there, were approached by the citizens of a small community who pleaded with Burt to help them. The ruler of the area had his men make*

*weekly raids on the citizens in order to keep his own pantry and treasury padded. The people were starving but if they attempted to leave, they were killed. Those who did escape would hear that their families had been murdered in retaliation. Burt, with nothing more to lose, agreed to help and took a contingent of volunteer troops with him to overthrow the ruler. It had been a bloody battle, but successful. The ruler was put to death by his own people and his successor asked that Burt and his people stick around to help him learn to be a responsible and respectable leader. When the task was complete, many of Burt's people choose to stay permanently in those lands. Burt himself was invited to stay as well, but then received a plea from another community which was being abused by another tyrant, and so he and his men went to free the people of that land.*

*This cycle continued. For every land that discovered peace, Burt was called upon to help somewhere that was suffering. Over time his army grew as men and women joined who felt a calling to serve the greater good. And so the prince became an army leader.*

*He did, for a time, experience peace himself. When Elizabeth came into his life, a smile that lit up his heart, and eyes that pierced him with love. He was thankful he had lost his kingdom when he met her, for if he was a king, he would have been expected to marry royalty, and she was a peasant from a kingdom in the northwest. He had saved her people from a mad queen who, in losing her mind, was making disastrous decisions. Elizabeth had been in the queen's dungeon when he had stormed the castle. The queen had apparently been planning to kill and consume her in a wild plot to stop aging.*

*Elizabeth had been quick to show her appreciation for being saved, leaving Burt's face covered in kisses. And while Burt had been the recipient of many kisses from thankful women and men, this was the first one that made his heart speed up and his pupils dilate. Within a year they had married and expecting.*

*Kurt made his way into the world the same way he went through it now - stubbornly. It was a long birth and Elizabeth loudly informed Burt many times over that 'he would pay for getting her pregnant'. When Kurt did arrive though, Elizabeth was nothing but thankful for her son and Burt declared that he would take a break from saving everyone else so he could focus on his family.*

*And he did, for six wonderful years. He had a modest but self sustaining farm, far from any empire to worry about - good or bad. He had a beautiful wife, and a healthy, happy son. His army continued without him, having left a competent group of generals in charge. Life was blissful.*

*Elizabeth had left one week to visit the closest market to purchase the things they couldn't make for themselves - fabrics, certain spices, and always new books for Kurt. Because of the distance, she was usually gone for a week once every few months. Burt lamented that he couldn't go, but the work on the farm had to be done to make sure they could feed themselves. Kurt usually stayed with Burt so they could enjoy some father-son time, as the instant Elizabeth was around, Kurt attached himself to her hip.*

*It had been ten days however since Elizabeth had left and Burt was worried. There was no reason to be so late. The weather had been good and passerby's had not noted any trouble with bandits. Leaving the farm behind, Burt took Kurt with him and they spent the next three days travelling to the market east of their home. When they got there, it wasn't. Everything had been burned down. A Dalton flag erected in the centre of what had been the town. He never did find Elizabeth's body.*

*After that he rejoined his army who gladly took him back. He wanted to go after Dalton and King Anderson, but they had already committed themselves to another empire... and then another... and another. Kurt grew up and Burt found love again in Carole, one of his best field medics.*

*Dalton was always in the back of his mind, but he avoided it. With it came the hate, the memories, and the inability to keep himself composed.*

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"You don't think it's personal for me too Dad? Believe me... all my diplomatic skills will probably go right out the window if I'm face to face with him." Kurt huffed and crossed his arms over his chest.

Finn chimed in, "Doesn't matter. Personal or not, we need to deal with this. He's letting his people starve, killing anyone who tries to get out, having his elite guard raping women who marry men he thinks are unworthy to spread their traits, using his subjects as guinea pigs for weird experiments.... it's like everything we've every fought against all rolled into one."

"And he's only getting more powerful. With all those daughters he has, he's making marriage alliances everywhere. He just had another daughter and she's apparently already betrothed!" Puck added.

Burt sighed and looked up at them. His boys. One truly his, one from his wife, and one so close he may as well be another son. "I can't ask you to fight this. He will fight dirty, and unlike so many of our other adversaries, he does have the man power to hurt us. We all know we can't even try sending Kurt in first, because he wouldn't come back to us alive. If we do this, it has to be by force."

"I agree. I'm the only who usually argues for the peaceful solution, but I just don't see it here." Kurt looked at each of them in turn, "I may not be able to fight as well as you, but this is a cause worth fighting for, and one that we need to deal with before it becomes too much. We need to do this.... not only for... mom..." He swallows and looks down, his breath hitching. "But for those people. Hell... we even have the noblemen writing us letters. You know it's bad when the rich are complaining."

Burt nods, "Alright. I'll call in the messenger. Go prepare yourself and your men. This is it."



## 2. The Cat and the Mouse

Blaine woke up with a start, a book falling to the floor from where it had been resting on his chest. He groaned and ran his hand over his head as he looked to the window trying to judge what time it was.

Not that it mattered. It was best if he stayed in his room in the castle and read his books. He knew that he was best served by staying out of sight, and therefore, out of the mind of his father. Elias Anderson, the king, had been on one of his tirades all week, and anyone who got into his path suffered for it. Blaine would be no exception, in fact, he would probably get it worse than anyone for being the “useless sissy boy” he was. His father regularly reminded him that it would have been better if he had been born a girl so he could be married off like his sisters. Instead he served as a reminder to his father that not all his sons were war hungry obedient lap dogs to their father.

It wasn't that Blaine couldn't fight. He fought better than anyone he knew in fact, including his older brother Cooper, which said a lot. He was very skilled with swords and even trained himself with bow and arrow. He had done better in his tactics and strategies coursework than Cooper too, and his tutor had lost his head for saying as much to his father.

No. The problem was that Blaine didn't agree with his father, and unlike the other boys in the family, couldn't restrain himself from saying so. He had the stitches from the last time he argued with his father still healing up in fact. It made no sense, he had told his father, to take over lands when the people in our own lands were starving.

That was a mistake. There was no getting through to his father, so there was no point in saying anything to him. He had been questioning his father's actions since he was a boy but had always been unwilling to defend himself against his father's hands, or even the hands of his guards when his father wanted him punished but didn't feel like doing it himself.

It didn't help that he was gay either. Couldn't even be married off to a princess – not that any of the patriarchal rulers his father negotiated with would want an Anderson boy in their home. A woman was fine. A woman, in his father's mind and the minds of those he associated with, was for breeding and keeping quiet.

Blaine knew that it wasn't that way everywhere. He spent his time reading since he wasn't allowed out (his father didn't want anyone outside the family and elite guard to associate with him). The books told him of other places, other ways of thinking. They helped him escape his reality into other places.

In his reality, his mother was long dead from the birth of her fifth child. His father was on his fifth wife, having lost the others to childbirth or suicide. His sisters would be taught the skills of a wife, and would be married off as soon as they could. His brothers taught to fight from an early age and sent over the continent to claim lands and wealth. That is, with the exception of Cooper, the eldest male and thus, the heir, and Blaine, who couldn't be trusted.

In his reality, Blaine had never left the castle grounds. He couldn't even see over the walls from the windows in his room. When he wasn't reading, he was drawing or talking to his cat – Cat. Not the most clever of names, but one that he didn't feel ridiculous using when he was having a conversation.

In his reality, his best friends were servants of the house. Thad, David, Wes, Nick, Jeff, Trent. They worked in the kitchens, the baths, and the horse stalls. They made sure Blaine got something to eat when his father tried to starve him, and cleaned him up after the beatings. Nick had even flirted with one of more ruthless of the guards, Sebastian, in order to distract him from the beating he was giving Blaine at the time.

In his reality, Blaine was lucky to still be alive.

Blaine stretches his arms out over his head and leaned over to pick the book off the floor. He puts a bookmark into the place where he was when he dozed off and stands up to return it to its place on the shelf.

“Well Cat. It's starting to get a little cool in here. Shall we start up a fire?”

The grey haired cat sleeping on the bed doesn't move except for the occasional twitch of the tail.

Blaine sighs and goes to stoke the cinders in the fireplace of his room, building the fire up slowly and carefully so it will last most of the night.

He wishes for someone to talk to. To have a real conversation with beyond the brief interactions he has with the servants here. Cat is great... for a cat. He wants a friend. One he can bond with like those in his books. His great tales of men forming brotherly friendships as they go into battle, or confiding in one

another over drinks, even the gossip and often catty relationships of women depicted in some of his books. Anything would be better than the nothing he endures.

And he does endure. He doesn't know why. At some point his father will succeed in killing him off, and even if that doesn't happen, then what future does he have to look forward to here? There are only so many more books in the library he hasn't read, and even if his father dies, who knows what Cooper will allow for him. Blaine hasn't really been allowed to get close to his brothers since they figured out he was gay.

Blaine washes his face up in the wash bucket and smooths back the curls on top of his head. Maybe it's the curls that curse him. All his brother's have straight hair and he has the damned curls. He's always trying to keep them flattened with the honey pomade Thad makes, but they always come back.

He steps to the window and opens it up to allow in a little cool air and gazes out over the courtyard of the castle. It's dark outside. A few flickers from lanterns from the guards on patrol move around below him and also up on the wall, but there's nothing else.

Blaine looks up. He scans the stars and thinks back to his astronomy books. He does this every night. It used to be to help him remember the information, now he does it as one more thing to pass the time.

It's spring. He already knew that. He can see the lion constellation and the crab clearly from his position. The air has always smelled different in the spring somehow too. He doesn't know what's over the wall, but he imagines it as great farmlands where the farmers right now are preparing their crops. Crops that somehow aren't enough for his father and the troops. He may not know what's going on out there, but he knows from what David and Wes say that people are starving.

This summer two more of his sisters will be married off as part of pacts his father has made. He swallows to hold his tears back. He loves his sisters, and can't stand when they leave. He never ends up seeing them again. They're all gone by the time they're fourteen. Never a word about them, or from them, again. For all he knows they're dead. If he ever had a daughter, he doesn't know how he would be able to part with them ever, yet his father casts them off as quickly as he can.

He teaches his sisters how to play different instruments. He's not allowed to teach them to read or teach them anything "useful" as his father puts it. He still tries to sneak in what he can, but being under guard all the time makes it difficult and his sisters end up punished when he tries to educate them. Music is not useful according to his father, so Blaine is free to use it as a means to spend time with his sisters.

He is the only male he knows who can play instruments. The servants like to sing together and he's joined in before as they've burst into song in the kitchen peeling potatoes and decorating cakes. It's some of the most fun he has, but it doesn't happen too often. His father keeps the servants quite busy and Blaine can't be seen with them too much or he'll likely put them in danger by association.

Blaine sighs once more and shuts the window before he negates the purpose of starting up the fire. "Well Cat... it's been /such/ an exciting day but I think I must get to bed."

He changes himself into his pyjamas and crawls under the covers. "Goodnight Cat."

Cat meows, and Blaine closes his eyes.

### **3. Soup**

Kurt is yelling at a cook when Noah finds him.

Noah shakes his head and stands a few yards away to allow the fury that is Kurt complete his tirade at the obviously startled and scared cook.

“What makes you think soup is the best thing to bring on a campaign?! What are the soldiers supposed to do? Stop and break some crackers over it? Maybe we should also stop for tea time? While we’re at it, let’s trade in our armor for little tutus and prance about because maybe that would be more effective in fighting the biggest empire? SOUP!? For goodness sake.... How can we eat this when we’re in a trench or ....” Kurt is tossing his hands up in the air as he speaks and it’s a hilarious sight for Noah. Not so much for the cook.

Noah has been on the receiving end of Kurt’s ire so many times that it’s a nice change of pace to see someone else getting it. It’s no wonder Finn, for as good as a battle brother as he is, had a hard time keeping his laughter in when it was Kurt yelling at Noah.

The cook looks from side to side for some kind of help, but everyone else seems to know better than to interrupt the proceedings. He looks up to Kurt from where he’s hunched over, “Well... sir.... I thought we could put it into flasks to drink... a nice broth...”

“WATER! Water goes into the flasks. We never negotiate on the water. Soup can go bad or will just dirty up the flask. Standard procedure! Water into the flask!” Kurt adds a theatrical stomp at this point and Noah bites his lower lip to keep from laughing aloud.

The cook backs up a step, “Yes sir. Of course sir. I will... I will make the usual battle rations then. Sorry sir....” He steps backwards towards the canteen tent, not daring to turn his back to Kurt and not daring to look up.

Kurt grumbles something to himself and turns on his heel when he spots Noah. “Catch my performance did you Puckerman?”

Noah nods and just smiles to Kurt.

“Well honestly.... I like a good soup as much as the next person... but during battle? Really? I’m not naïve enough to wear my best clothes to battle. I know I need to wear armor. It’s the same for food. We can’t expect fine dining between swordfights.” He steps closer to Noah, putting a couple feet between them.

“Anyhow Puckerman. I need to know your numbers so I can make sure your troops are adequately prepared and supported.”

As Kurt’s forte was diplomacy, he was the general in charge of support – cooks, medics, scribes, engineers, and so forth. He ensured that Noah and Finn had what they needed for their men and ultimately took care of everyone by making sure that things were taken care of. He needed to know how many troops Noah had and in what organization.

Noah passed him a paper with the details. “I thought as much Kurt. Here you are.” He paused and then added, “Are you alright? You laid into that cook pretty hard and I know you’re usually more... reserved with such minor things..”

Kurt sighed and looked to the ground, his hand moving over his hair in what Noah had long ago identified as an unconscious self-soothing tic. “Puckerman...”

“Hey man. If you don’t wanna talk about it I get it. But you’re usually the calmest of us and right now I’m looking like the cool and professional one...” Noah gestured at himself.

Kurt let out small chuckle and looked at his once tormentor, now friend. So much had changed over the years. Five years ago when Noah joined up, Kurt had been at the receiving end of some of Noah’s rage. His father had abandoned the family and then his mother died, leaving Noah with the care of his younger siblings. He joined up to avoid having his siblings on the street and now they were both in the junior ranks. Noah was all peace and tranquility when he was with his siblings, but in the ranks he was unruly and unpredictable. More than once he had gone overboard with Kurt in sparring training.

Kurt was used to having more bruises and bumps than the rest of the troops after training exercises. He was seen as weaker and given preferential treatment because his father was in charge. Kurt could have told his dad, but that would only make what they said true. He learned to talk down his tormentors. He had learned to identify person’s mood and pick up on their tells. He was able to see when they were lying,

when they were enticed, when they were about to attack all by watching the little movements in their faces and body language.

With Noah, it had been realizing that he took his aggression out on Kurt because he was overcompensating for being the only parent his siblings had now. When Kurt had talked to him about it, Noah had broken down crying. With Kurt's support and guidance, Noah had been able to turn himself around and be a soldier and older brother the troops and his siblings could look up to.

Kurt smiled at the man before him, "No Noah. You know this is personal for my dad and I, and because of that, I just wish that he'd... give you and Finn a little more authority for this mission. I'm afraid that he won't hold back, and I'm afraid that I won't tell him to stop."

Noah shook his head, "That won't happen. Now that you know that's what you're worried about, you won't let it happen."

Kurt nodded and gave one nod, "Maybe so... anyhow. I'll make sure this.." he lifted up the paper in his hand, "gets taken care of. We go tomorrow morning, so make sure your troops are ready."

Noah nodded and walked off, leaving Kurt there to continue coordinating support.

He barely had time to breath before an overly chipper voice piped in beside him.

"Mr. Hummel, sir. Another group of refugees has requested to speak to you."

Kurt turned to look at the woman beside him and grinned, "Thank you Rachel. I assume they're in the medical receiving tent." He leaned over and dropped his voice, "One day we'll all be retired from this and you can just call me Kurt."

Rachel smiled up at him. "Of course sir. Yes sir." She gave him a little wink and turned around to continue with her duties.

Rachel was under his authority. She was a senior message specialist and spent her time sending and receiving messages within the camp. She was also his best friend, though out in the open, they needed to keep up with protocol.

Kurt hurried over to meet with the latest batch of refugees. They always wanted to thank them for the food and shelter they offered, at least temporarily. Some wanted to join up since they lost their homes and livelihoods.

He pushed into the tent and squinted a moment to allow his eyes to adjust to the lower lighting. Kurt scanned over the group. A woman and three young men. They looked much the same as many refugees he'd encountered, dirty, and looking defeated. Except...

The one boy, who stood at the back with his arms folded over his chest and was pacing back and forth. He was better dressed than the other three and kept adjusting a cap on his head. The boy's clothes, though expensive, were oversized and he looked like he was drowning in them. He kept his face turned mostly away from Kurt, though kept looking sidelong at him for brief instances.

"Oh sir... oh sir... we thank you and yours so much.... We hadn't eaten in days and if it weren't for your scout we would've died. The scout told us where to go...." The woman rambled on her story, and Kurt nodded politely in acknowledgement, but kept his eyes on the curious boy.

".... But sir.... I must ask you a favour. My sons and I have family along the coastlands and will go there, but this one here.... Well... ah... he doesn't belong to us." She gestured to the boy.

Kurt blinked back into the conversation and nodded to the woman, "Certainly. When you and your sons are feeling up to it we will get you some rations and you can make your way to your family."

The older woman and the two young men with her exited through the canvas flaps, repeating their thanks the whole way out. Kurt kept his eyes on the boy.

When they were gone, Kurt looked over to the boy, who was now turning to face Kurt. A hand went up to the cap on his head and he pulled it off, eyes locked with Kurt's the whole time. He had a shock of blonde hair and bright blue eyes. He pressed his lips together and then spoke.

"Sir. My name is Jeff. I work... worked in the castle. I can only guess you're planning to make a move on Dalton and I'd like to offer you any information I can in exchange for helping to get my friends out of the castle."

Kurt's eyebrows rose. Well, his day had gotten more interesting.



## **4. Long Road to Ruin**

It turns out that Jeff is a member of the Warblers, the Dalton castle's distinctive servant group. They all have their specialties, but are also all trained in what the others do so they can help them out if required. Jeff's focus is in horse grooming, which is how he managed to get out of the castle simply by taking a horse for grooming and snitching some discarded clothing of the heir, Cooper Anderson.

They haven't met anyone from the castle before. It's well guarded and few people go in and out. Jeff offers them a myriad of information from castle schematics, to guard schedules and patrols, and even some insight on the inner workings of the elite guard and the king's family.

Jeff decided to escape after he received word that his family had died. He was denied access out of the castle grounds for the funerals and chose to escape then. He intended on coming back, but when he saw what had happened to the lands he grew up in as a result of the king's "leadership" he knew he couldn't go back. His family died after being selected by the guard for testing the neighbors had told him. All the neighbors knew was that his family was picked up one day for the testing, and the next day they returned for burial.

And so Jeff now sits with Burt, Kurt, and Finn around a drawing of the main castle and shows them the back entrances and different quarters.

"How many elite guard are in the castle at any given time?" asks Burt.

"Anywhere between twenty to fifty depending on his mood. None of us could make rhyme or reason of it. Most of them will be on patrols that go through the main hall here." He points on the mapping, "and then out through the courtyard. There's always at least four with him, and he usually had two watching Blaine and the princesses."

Burt furrows his brow, "Who's Blaine?"

Jeff takes a moment to recognize that Burt truly doesn't know about the prince and looks at Kurt and Finn who also seem to be awaiting an answer. "Blaine is the king's son sir. The second son."

"Then why isn't he off pillaging farmlands and raping women like his other brothers?" Kurt spits out, knowing all too well the reputations of the Anderson brothers.

"Blaine isn't like the rest of the boys..." Jeff looks down, feeling the hate in Kurt's words, "I'm sure the king would kill him if everyone didn't keep secretly interfering..."

Finn's face scrunches up confused. "Wait. He'd kill his own son?"

Kurt arches an eyebrow at Finn, "Really? This is Anderson we're talking about here. The rumours go that he killed his own mother so he wouldn't have to wait for the throne after his father died."

Finn shakes his head in disbelief, but keeps quiet.

Jeff continues, "He's also killed two of his wives when they spoke up against his treatment of his children and people." He shakes his head as in disbelief that those words came out of his mouth. "So long as Blaine keeps out of the King's way, he manages to avoid getting hurt. Sometimes the king will send two of his more malicious guards, Sebastian and Hunter, to rough Blaine up, but we've been able to keep him fixed up and fed."

Burt nods, "Sounds like this kid might be a good replacement once we get his dad out of the way...."

Jeff's head tilts to the side just a little and looks at Burt, "You really think you'll be able to do that?"

Burt grimaces, "Well damned if we aren't going to try."

Kurt looks to Jeff, "I have a bed set up for you in tent 206 near the medics area. You should get some rest. You have been extremely helpful."

Jeff doesn't immediately get up, "Are you sure you don't need anything else? I mean, you leave in the morning... if you need to know anything..."

Burt puts a hand on Jeff's shoulder, "We were hoping you'd come with us as a guide."

Jeff blinks, then swallows, and then looks down at his hands. "I will do anything to get my friends out. If the kingdom is going to go to hell, I don't want them there to burn along with it. They're good people in a bad situation."

Burt, Finn, and Kurt smile and nod. Kurt stands and offers Jeff his hand, “Come on. I’ll show you where you can get washed up.”

It’s late when Kurt finally gets to his own tent. One of the perks of being a general is the privacy. No tent-mates.

He washes up with the water provided in a basin and changes into a comfortable set of pyjamas. He uses an array of ointments made from different herbs and poultices to moisturize his face. He doesn’t want to look like some of the guys who have been fighting for over ten years – skin leathered from the elements. He knows his family wants him to find someone, but unlike his dad and step-brother, Kurt hasn’t been able to see the point in looking for romance while you’re stuck in battle. He has already lost his mother, and on too many close calls lost his dad. He isn’t able to risk heartbreak over someone who could die in battle, or risk breaking their heart if he dies.

No, now is not the time for romance. Leave that to Finn and Rachel, and their not-so-secret, secret affair. Leave that to Mercedes and Sam, two of the colonels. Leave that to Brittany and Santana, two officers who both have repeatedly turned down promotions so they can be at the forefront of any battle.

Kurt needs a clear head to do his job. If he needs to get involved in the fighting, he doesn’t want to worry about protecting anyone other than himself.

And maybe, just maybe, if his dad is right, they can retire at the end of this. He can find someone, someone far away from any of the politics and danger he’s grown up around. He can have a life free of wearing the tacky uniforms and unfriendly, yet necessary, protocols.

And he’ll have a dog. A nice big dog that will get hair all over his nicest clothing and track dirt everywhere. A dog that will curl up at his feet at night and lick his face in the morning. A dog that will make him gasp for clean air with the smelliest dog flatulence. A dog to run with him in the mornings. He’s always wanted a pet dog. Unless it’s trained for specific purposes, a dog in an army camp isn’t welcomed. Pets are a luxury they can’t have here.

It's funny that he's put more thought into the type of dog he wants than the type of man he wants. Maybe that's another luxury he hasn't been allowed. Maybe it's one he's denied himself because he doesn't want to hope for something that he might never get a chance at.

Maybe... he needs to stop thinking so much and get some sleep already.

In the morning, everyone is in their armor. Anyone with rank is organizing those under them. Formations are being formed and inspirational speeches are made.

Kurt's contingents are kept in the back of it all. He has medics assigned to different brigades; his engineers are in their own small contingents ready to help where necessary. His dad is far off in the front of it all, and Kurt is sure he is thankful his son and wife are in the back.

They set off, in a steady march over the land toward Dalton. It is an empire made of smaller empires, yet instead of liberating all the smaller empires it has overtaken, they have opted to cut through and go to the center of the empire, Westerville. Westerville is the capital and where the castle is. It is a 'cut off the head of a snake' strategy, and the one most risky. It is where all the most loyal and trained guards to the empire are. But if they succeed, it will allow for all the smaller empires to be liberated easily.

"What do you think the casualties will be like?" Quinn, head medic, asks. They are both riding horses and she has rode hers up beside him.

Kurt thinks for a moment. He doesn't want to think about casualties. They haven't had major casualties in all the years he's been a part of this. His dad has been too good. The enemies have been too weak, ruled over troops and people with limited loyalty.

Anderson will be different. Yes, people are dying and fleeing, but the guards and soldiers in Dalton are treated well and given freedom to do as they please. Most have a very strong loyalty to the empire because it allows them that freedom. Most of the Dalton soldiers have bedded women who have bore their children and who are now bound to them.

The commoners don't have the weapons, or freedom of assembly to rise against their oppressors. The nobility is kept in strict control and guards and spies are kept in their homes to ensure they don't rebel.

Kurt sighs and looks beside him at the pretty blonde who always sees the worst consequences of the battles, "Too many."

Quinn nods, "I will tell Joe to be ready."

Joe is the chaplain of the troops. Kurt is not very familiar with him, not trusting any God to watch his ass – whether in battle or in negotiation. He doesn't have much to talk about with him. The man seems nice enough though, and many of the troops and his own people, Quinn included, see him for guidance.

"Are you alright Quinn? I know you had a hard time leaving Beth with the caretakers back there." Kurt watches Quinn. He watched her this morning having a difficult teary goodbye with her daughter. Noah was there too, since Beth was also his. Kurt wasn't really sure what was going on between them. In public there were quite cool with one another, but he saw the way they looked at one another, pupils dilated with want.

"Don't tell me I could've stayed Kurt. You know I can't. I can stitch up faster than anyone... and maybe I'm a control freak, but I don't trust anyone else to take care of my friends. I'm not afraid I won't see her again. I'm afraid Noah won't... and despite everything, she loves her dad." Quinn swallows, to hold back the tears threatening to overtake her eyes.

Kurt looks back ahead. "Well. I'm glad you're here. I know I certainly don't want anyone else but the best at my side, and you're it."

"Thank you Kurt." She stills and looks ahead now too. "How much longer?"

"So long as we don't face any armies, which our scouts tell us aren't along this path, then we should see the outline of Westerville by nightfall." He responds.

Quinn looks away from the road and back to him again, "And then?"

"And then we prepare to fight."

## **5. Brotherly Love**

Blaine hid in his room. Not just inside his room, but ducked down behind his bed. He held Cat in his hands and stroked Cat's fur unconsciously. He was listening intently on what was going on outside his door.

It started in mid-afternoon and it was night now, well past when he usually went to bed. The whole castle was in an uproar. There had been yelling and running back and forth through the halls. He had earlier made the mistake of venturing out to see what was going on and when Hunter saw him he was brought back to his room by Trent and Nick, who stayed to tend to the new bruises and cuts.

"This isn't as bad as it usually is Blaine. You're lucky they have other things to worry about than you." Trent said as he checked the bruising on Blaine's back.

Blaine nodded and looked between his two friends, "What's going on? I went out there to check...."

"The Hummel Army is coming. Your dad is getting ready to defend Westerville." Trent supplied the answer so matter of factly that he might of well been listing off the ingredients to one of his famous pies.

Blaine furrowed up his brow, "The Hummel Army?" He hadn't heard of them before. Maybe a group of rebels from a small land that his father had taken over?

"Oh yes. They've liberated countless towns and empires from different rulers. Apparently they've been enlisted to liberate Westerville now. It's good Jeff got out when he did." Nick mused, trying not to frown as he thought of that beautiful blonde boy who he hadn't seen now in over a week.

"Jeff? What? He's gone?!" Blaine snapped his head up to look at Nick inquiringly. He felt at an absolute loss. When it came to knowledge of music, astronomy, mathematics, or literature - Blaine knew it all, but being trapped in Dalton and despised by his father meant he didn't know what was going on most of the time.

Nick nodded solemnly, his lips pursed together.

Trent cut in, so Nick having to speak about it. "He got word his family had passed on. He was denied bereavement leave so he snuck out. He told Nick he would come back, but he hasn't."

Blaine winced as Trent took that moment to wipe over a small gash with the antiseptic. "No one told me..."

"I... we thought he'd come back and didn't want you to get included in his escape. You take enough heat. We were all going to be questioned after lunch about the matter when scouts came in and reported the army enroute." Nick stood up and put his sewing kit into a bag sitting on the bed. "No stitches needed today."

Blaine sighed and looked at his hands, feeling absolutely useless. "Thank you Nick. I'm sorry. I know you two were close." He flinched again as Trent cleaned over a new spot. "I'm sure he's alright."

Trent pulled Blaine's shirt down over his back. "I'm all done too. Please stay out of their way though. I don't know what's going to happen. I've heard they're a decent little militia, but you know your dad has never had a problem dealing with uprisings. No one has ever attacked Westerville directly before."

Blaine stood with a small wince, nodding to Trent. "Thanks." He went then to sit on the edge of his bed. "Well if they make it through then I imagine they'll kill off all the Anderson's around, so I'd better write you guys some letters of reference."

Blaine's attempt at humor wasn't appreciated as Trent looked at him aghast and Nick made a small squeak of shock.

"Blaine, please. Just hide. We can... we can pretend you're a servant... or..." Trent stumbled over his own words before Blaine broke in.

"Don't. I'm surprised I'm not dead already. Besides..." he pulled down the corner of the collar of his shirt, showing the top of the tattoo all the Dalton royalty had - a cursive D in front of a shield "I'm pretty sure the only reason my father hasn't tossed me out to fend for myself is because no one would dare hire me with this, and it would look bad for his image if the world found out one of his sons was actually here instead of taking over the world."

Trent turned his head away and rubbed the back of his hand over his eyes to push away the tears forming. "I'm sorry Blaine. I just... we grew up in this castle together. I can't help but be worried." Once the tears were dealt with he turned back around and grabbed one of Blaine's hands, "Promise me you'll hide though. Your dad might take advantage take out his anger on you. I haven't been taking care of you this long just to see you drop now."

Blaine laughed. He had to. The precarious nature of his existence necessitated that he find joy wherever he could. If there was one thing that wouldn't be taken from him, it would be his joy. "I will Trent. Cat and I will stay in here and have ourselves some philosophical debates on the meaning of catnip."

And so Blaine stayed in his room. If someone opened the door, they wouldn't see him hidden between the bed and the far wall. He had been listening into the frantic yells of the elite guard within the castle, and troop leaders out in the courtyard below. He had been hoping to get a sense of what was going on, but because he could only hear fragments of conversations, he was more confused than ever.

He stayed there with Cat having hushed one-sided conversations, hoping that the door would stay closed and he could stay invisible.

At some point Blaine dozed off, leaning against his bed with Cat making a bed of his lap. The sunlight of a new day was just starting to make streaks in his room when he was awoken by screaming out in the courtyard and the smell of burning... well burnt something. Blaine wasn't able to place that smell.

He carefully put Cat down beside him who in turn gave him a look as if to say, "I don't care if the world is going up in flames. That was my spot. How dare you move me from it." and then Blaine crept to the window to peek outside.

The courtyard was eerily quiet as the sun was coming up. The sky was still glazed in orange waves which meant that there would usually be lots of activity below as servants prepared to feed, entertain, and take care of the royal family. But this morning, there was nothing to see below. Off in the distance he could hear the odd yell, but the wall blinded him from seeing anything more.

He looked back to his door. Had his family left? Had they been taken over in the night? Where the hell was everyone?

He stepped to the door and pressed his ear against it, just listening. Nothing.



The thought passed through his mind that maybe he died in his sleep and now he was eternally cursed to be locked in the castle, but with no one else there.

He looked over his shoulder at Cat who had found a spot on the bed to curl up on. "I'm just going to see what's going on Cat. You stay here and take care of my things."

Cat did not look impressed with the given assignment.

Blaine opened the door and peeked out into the corridor. No guards, no noise. Nothing.

He went out and started looking into his sisters rooms. They had all been left open and they were all empty. The library and the music room were also empty. He continued looking through all the rooms as he passed them, even the woman's wardrobe - a room bigger than his own that housed all of the finest styles for whomever his stepmother of the moment could wear.

When he got to the personal armoury of his father's, he found it in disarray. No armor had been left and as he searched through the room, all he found was a simple sword. He opted to take it along with him as he continued the search.

When he got to his father's private quarters he paused, the last time he had been permitted in was when he was five.

He turned the knob and then felt a hand on his shoulder. The sudden shock of knowledge that he wasn't alone and he managed to let someone get behind him without noticing caused him to yelp and turn in place.

It was Cooper.

Blaine looked up at his older brother. Cooper's face was covered in what he assumed was a mix of sweat and blood. Blaine couldn't tell if the blood belonged to Cooper, but if it did, it didn't seem to bother him. His brother was in full armor and had his sword unsheathed in his right hand, the left hand pulling back from where he had placed it on Blaine's shoulder.

Cooper looked to Blaine and shook his head, "The family is in retreat little brother, those...." he turned and spat on the ground, "... fucking Hummels and company knew too much. They must have had moles everywhere."

Blaine blinked. How did this happen? How could he have not heard? Not noticed? His jaw dropped a little but nothing came out of his mouth. What could he say? What could he ask?

"I'm joining them.." Cooper began

"How do we escape?" Blaine interrupted and grabbed the hilt of his sword tightly.

"We don't. I stayed behind to pass a message to you from father." Cooper studied his younger brother. He hadn't been permitted, and certainly didn't have the time to speak to Blaine with any regularity. Blaine had gone through all the same studies Cooper had, so why did he seem so ill-at-ease right now when they had grown up training for and living for battle?

Blaine started, "What?" then a dull calm passed over him, a realization. His door was never opened because his father meant for him to be left behind to die. No doubt the message from Cooper was going to be to the effect of 'Say hi to your mom for me!' or something equally diminishing.

"You're going to stay behind. Tell them you refused to fight and flee with us. With your reputation they might just buy it." Cooper moved his arm past Blaine to open the door to their father's quarters. "Listen to what they say, pay attention to their patrols, anything that seems important - you write it down."

Cooper went into the room, and Blaine followed, moving in a state of mixed shock and disbelief.

Cooper went to the fireplace and pushed in a brick at the side, exposing an opening. "Anything you think might help us retake the castle, you put in here. It drops to the passages under the castle."

"Cooper..." Blaine began but Cooper shook his head immediately.

"No. This isn't up for debate. It's father's orders. Look brother...." Cooper placed a hand on Blaine's shoulder then and looked into his eyes steadily, "I know you get the brunt of it... but it's because you're so much smarter than me... than any of us. If you can pull this off, you might be able to get into his good graces. Please try for me. I'm going to have to rule this kingdom one day and I want you to be able to be there to help me. Just... try."

Blaine pursed his lips together. His father had kept them apart so much, this was the most Cooper had said to him in years. The look in his brother's eyes was so needy, so earnest.

“I.... I’ll try.”

Cooper grinned and then pulled Blaine into a hug with the hand that had been on his shoulder, “Just you wait and see little brother! You and me! We’ll take back our kingdom and then one day... we’ll be kings!” Then he pulled away and gave Blaine one last smile before turning and running out into the hall.

Blaine stood there for a minute... five minutes... ten. Once his stomach and his heart settled back into place he pulled back the brick exposing the drop to the passages back and walked back to his room.

Cat crawled into his lap as Blaine sat down on the edge of his bed. “Well Cat, it seems I have a purpose.”

## 6. Erase/Replace

His arm was getting tired. Kurt was backed against a barn where he had been hacking and slashing at the odd Dalton soldier who would make it through the lines and come towards this building where Quinn had set up an auxiliary hospital.

The dead lay around him, most from his own sword, but a couple were allies who had fallen helping him protect the barn. He was exhausted, covered in his own sweat, the blood of others, and dirt. His usually well coifed hair flattened against his head with the weight of the sweat on it. He had given up his helmet ages ago to a medic who had been assigned to help in the barn but was needed to help in the front lines.

And he couldn't tell if things were in their favour or not. Every now and then a stretcher would be run back to the barn from where the major fighting was occurring. On it was his own troops, but also wounded Dalton soldiers.

They found out early on that Dalton didn't help its fallen and he had made the call to help them. Quinn hadn't been too impressed because that meant more work for her medical brigade, and he had to remind her of the hippocratic oath - to preserve the purity of life.

Now he had found himself in a lull. No Dalton troop had broken through the lines in over ten minutes. His arm now had the chance to burn with the ache of being used so much, with so much force. Kurt called back into the barn, "I need a messenger!"

Within a minute Ryder was at his side. The aptly named boy was probably the fastest foot messengers in existence. He had been helping inside until he was needed. "Yes sir." He saluted.

Kurt waved off the salute, "Stand down." He pointed out with his sword towards the fighting that was ahead of them, starting in the next field over and extending to the edge of the town. "Do you think you can get yourself to the front lines, see how we're doing, and then report back here without getting hurt?"

Ryder looked out and bit his lower lip. He was fast, he could probably do it. He just needed to make sure that he didn't get too panicked or he might not see danger coming. "Yes sir. I can sir."

Kurt nodded. "Well. Don't waste any time."

Ryder started running off then, and Kurt watched as he became just another body among hundreds of bodies in the distance.

Another stretcher came into view while he was looking out and as it came closer he recognized one of the men holding it up, "Mike!"

Mike looked over at Kurt and nodded. Once he had helped bring the stretched into the barn he came back out and joined Kurt at his side. "We're being helped...." the taller, lithe darker man started.

Kurt raised an eyebrow. "Helped? By whom?"

Mike unsheathed his sword. There was no one coming, but he knew from experience it was better to be on the safe side. "The nobility apparently. They somehow managed to coordinate some troops of their own and help us flank the Dalton soldiers. I've never seen anything like it."

Kurt took a minute to consider that bit of information and realized that in the last hour, the soldiers being brought in for medical treatment were at a majority, from Dalton. "Do you think we're winning?"

Mike shrugged, "I was just trying to stay alive. I was in the middle of it all so I couldn't tell much of what was going on." He glanced back at the barn a moment, "Is... Tina in there?"

Kurt smirked a little, another "perk" of romance - getting distracted from bloodshed and chaos by the possibility of seeing one's spouse. "Yes. She's up in the loft last time I checked. It looks like I'm alright out here for a bit if you want to see her before heading back."

Mike gave a quick nod and ran back inside the barn before Kurt might change his mind. Tina was Burt's personal secretary and usually would stay back at the main camp, but insisted on coming out for this campaign in case Mike was the one coming in on a stretcher.

Kurt turned his sights back to the battle ahead. It would be dawn soon. He would be better able to see what was going on and maybe even by that time, an outcome would be determined.

As the sun crept up, the fighting died down. More and more stretchers came and eventually they had to set the wounded in front of the barn doors for lack of space.

Ryder had returned with only a nick to the cheek and had reported that the fight was in their favour. He had spoken to Burt and confirmed that the nobility was indeed supporting their efforts in the field. Apparently some peasants had even come out, using pitchforks and hoes to help bring down the Dalton soldiers.

Ryder had then gone on to recount how Santana and Brittany had been running into any massed group of Dalton soldiers they could see and making short work of them. Ryder was clearly star struck as he spoke about how Santana had cut through several soldiers with her greatsword. Kurt shook his head when he heard that. Santana loved her big, over the top sword which was nearly as long as she was tall and required both hands to wield.

Brittany had been using her dual-wield stilettos. Using them with ease to cut into the spots between the armor plates of the soldiers. Ryder rapidly told Kurt about how a soldier had come up behind Santana and Brittany had thrown one of her stilettos in the soldier's head.

Once Ryder had finished his lusty recount of the exploits of Brittany and Santana, he managed to inform Kurt that as a last ditch attempt, a small batch of elite guard had been sent to the field to fight. No one had told these guard though about the help from the nobility and the peasants, and on their way through Westerville to aid in the fighting, they had been attacked by a mob and surprisingly, brought down.

The message from Burt was to expect to call a victory within the hour and be ready for the march through the streets to the castle.

Kurt nodded and dismissed Ryder. He swallowed and tried to not focus on the smell of rotting bodies around him, or the general disgust for his present state.

His dad was alright and things were in their favour. All he had to do now was wait.

In the end they had lost roughly one hundred men and women, and most of those were in the early hours of the fighting. That number would have been unheard of anywhere else, but today it was cause to

celebrate. That was much less than they originally thought and the Dalton soldiers left were few and far between, most were wounded beyond being able to fight back.

As they marched through the streets of Westerville, the nobility rode up beside his father to discuss next steps and try to sway his opinion of what needed to be done. The citizens cheered their march on, throwing ribbons and bits of confetti along their path.

Most of the troops revelled in this part of the campaign. This was the part where all their work was appreciated and the part that gave them strength and motivation to continue their work. Kurt never enjoyed it however. In his mind, it was sad that the sight of troops was what made people happy. If people ruled justly and responsibly, this would never be necessary.

When they reached the castle, Jeff helped them by showing them the side passage into the walls and he, with the help of several volunteers, opened the gates.

The courtyard they entered was empty and the scouts who ran ahead said there was no one to be found. One of the nobles suggested that the royal family probably escaped through passages that were rumoured to exist all over the castle and into the town.

Burt raised his hand to indicate that his troops should pause and he walked a few yards ahead of them to turn and speak. "My brother and sisters in arms! Today...." and Kurt started to tune him out at this point because he had heard this before, in many various iterations. He looked at the battle weary around him and then back to his father, who was pacing back and forth in front of them, every now and then raising a fist to the air which garnered a cheer from the crowd.

Kurt took a few steps backward and then walked himself into one of the side doors of the castle. He exhaled. He hope he hadn't been seen because that would obviously look bad to everyone, but he needed to escape. Escape the crowd, the stench of death that coated all of them, the celebration of conquering. He hoped his father was serious about retirement, because Kurt refused to retire until he knew his dad was safely retired.

Kurt looked around the room he found himself in. It was a huge hall. The largest he'd ever seen. At the end of it was a series of steps that led to a throne. The throne was ornately decorated with gems and strips of gold. The seat looked incredibly comfortable as it was covered in a very plush, however tacky, red velveteen.

He bit his lower lip, suddenly enraged. How could people be starving when there was enough richness in that chair to buy food from other empires to feed all the people in Westerville and beyond?!

Another cheer erupted outside and he looked behind him to see if anyone had followed him in. He thankfully found himself still alone and so he continued his exploration, going up the stairs on the left side of the hall.

Kurt noted the exquisite rugs he was walking on, the elaborate painting that lined the hallway he found himself in at the top of the stairs, the jeweled candelabra chandeliers that were hinged to the ceiling to provide light in the evenings.

The castle was the total opposite of what existed outside of the walls. People in Westerville could barely afford to a shelter of any sort. The small homes were often packed with multiple families. The streets were lined with human excrement and garbage. At one point in the march after being given yet another grin of gums from a peasant woman, he had wondered if the people purposely pulled out their teeth, or if the nutrition was really that bad that they were losing teeth so young, so often. And teeth aside, they were all so skinny. Even the nobles, who in other realms were usually the ones with a little bit of girth.

Kurt walked down the hall slowly, pausing to look at the paintings, which were mostly of what he assumed were Anderson men in combat.

He paused at one painting in particular, this one had a caption on gold tile below it - Elias Anderson. This was the king. Kurt studied the face in the painting. It was pale, with gaunt cheeks and lines that were drawn out from amber eyes and a small mouth. His hair was black with the odd grey highlight and it was kept long, pulled into a ponytail.

Kurt had never seen the king, only heard descriptions. The painting was done to instill fear, not respect. It was of a man who bore frown lines with pride, whose eyes were cold and hard. This was the man who starved his people so his family could live in luxury. This was the man who commanded death, and who had been responsible for the orders that killed his grandfather and mother. This was what hate looked like.

Kurt felt a hard, pointed object press into his shoulder between his sections of armor at that point and he hissed, realising that he had been caught off guard.



A voice behind him commanded, "Drop your sword, raise your arms, turn around."

Kurt quickly weighed his options, but the press of what he assumed was a sword in his back aimed at his heart didn't give him a lot of choice. His hands unbound his belt and he let it drop to the ground with his sword still sheathed in it. He lifted his arms up to level with his head and slowly turned, the blade on his back following the line of his armor as he turned so he was always at risk of being cut.

When Kurt saw the unarmored, slender man in front of him, he had to stifle a chuckle. Surely this couldn't be the last attempt at a Dalton victory?

The man gritted his teeth together and pressed the sword in a little harder, cutting the fabric of Kurt's tunic. His eyes were wide and glazed with... tears? "What's so funny?!"

Kurt let his expression go flat. This wasn't a soldier. The man before him was too well dressed, his hair tidy in a short mess of black curls, and his eyes... amber eyes, not unlike the picture now behind him.

"What are you doing here?! Who are you?!" the man demanded, he was shaking a little.

"I'm Kurt. I'm part of the Hummel army. We've taken Westerville. You need to understand that the army is in the courtyard and nothing will be served by killing me." Kurt kept his voice calm and steady, watching this... was this a relative of the king?

"I'm dead either way." the man spat, "You'll kill me because I'm part of the royal family and my father will kill me for refusing to support him."

So he was royalty, "We won't kill you. That's not what we do. However if you do kill me I can't account for what my family might do to avenge me and I don't think you've ever killed anyone before. I don't think it's something you want to do."

The man bit his lip and Kurt watched his eyes as he considered his words. Before he could respond, Kurt asked, "What's your name?"

The man trembled a little and let the sword drop, falling to his knees in front of Kurt and hiding his face in his hands, "Blaine... I'm Blaine Anderson."

## **7. Lower than Deep**

Blaine had waited in his room, one hand on Cat, one gripping the hilt of the sword with white knuckles.

While he waited, he alternated between a state of cool confidence, and complete unease. He had to opportunity to make things good in his family, but he needed to play a role he didn't know and didn't know that he wanted to know. He didn't even know if he would be allowed to live in order to spy on the enemy. This could be his last few hours and it crossed his mind that he hadn't even thought of what he wanted to accomplish in life. In all his books the hero had a lofty goal. He never had a goal except for survival.

He'd never even heard of the Hummel Army before all this, how was he supposed to know what to expect? If they defeated his father, well, at least pushed his father into hiding for now, then they must be warriors of the highest quality. Fearsome, and terrifying. How was he supposed to face that?

As he waited he contemplated too how he might approach them. He certainly couldn't be found in his bed sitting and waiting. If they had decided to kill him, then he didn't want to die in his room, his blood all over Cat. He also couldn't just stroll out and announce that here he was, the not-so-great Blaine Anderson. He tossed around different scenarios and ideas in his head, occasionally letting a tear fall when he remembered how truly alone he now was.

He was still considering how he might present himself when he heard yelling in the distance, over the wall. It was coming closer and with it came the blast of trumpets and cheers. Perhaps Dalton was victorious after all and the people were celebrating? Surely his father had succeeded in commanding a last push against the enemy and they were returning. He went to his window and watched and waited. He wouldn't have to be a spy after all.

Then a flash of blonde hair below went to the gate controls along with a few other bodies in unfamiliar black armour. They opened the gates to the cheering and trumpets and in came a hoard of bodies, most clad in the same black armor. Several flags were carried, which Blaine was unable to see the details of, but could tell they were red and white. One figure moved in front of the crowd that had filled up the courtyard and still extended past the gate. Blaine watched as he threw his hands up in the air and spoke to the crowd of success and liberation, the crowd in turn cheering.

Blaine blanched and backed away from the window. They had been invaded. Those black armored soldiers below were here to take over Westerville and the empire. He would die or he would spy.

Quickly, he turned and pulled Cat off the bed with one hand, who gave him a short hiss of displeasure. He opened the clothing trunk at the foot of the bed and pulled his clothes out with the other. Once the trunk was empty he put Cat into it and shut the top over her. He used the sword to poke a couple holes in the back of the trunk, out of sight and then kicked his clothing under the bed.

He didn't have much to protect, but he wasn't going to risk losing Cat.

Blaine's ears perked then as he heard footsteps out in the hall. He could hear the victory speech still being given outside his window, so it couldn't be one of the Hummel army. The thought struck him that maybe Cooper had come back for him at the last minute and they could escape through one of the passages that only Cooper and his father were privy to the knowledge about.

He tiptoed to the door and peeked out. Mere meters from him black armor and he felt all hope in him die.

Cooper hadn't come back. He had been abandoned here after all. Where he had once had hope, anger began to flood him. He hadn't had much before, but at least he knew what to expect, how to survive. Now he had nothing. He might never see his sisters at all again. He had at least had the ability to enjoy their company before they were married off before all this.

His grip on the sword got tighter and he slowly opened the door and crossed the hall, pressing the tip of his sword into the space between the shoulder and armor plates on this intruder. All his anger pointing through the sword at this invader, who hissed as he realized he had been caught.

"Drop your sword, raised your arms, turn around." Blaine commanded, trying to keep his breath under control as he spoke. Be the prince you should be he reminded himself.

The invader took a moment but then seemed to understand as he undid the belt holding his sword and let it drop to the floor. His hands lifted up aside his head and he began to turn. Blaine very carefully traced the tip of his sword along the edges of the armor plating while the invader turned to ensure he had a point on him at all times.

As the invader faced him, a chuckle began to escape his dirt covered lips. In fact, aside from the odd place where dirt had been wiped away, the man was entirely covered with dirt. The stink was nearly unbearable too.

Blaine's anger flared again, tears forming in his eyes, "What's so funny?!" He pressed his sword forward a little more and his stomach seemed to turn when he heard the tear of fabric under it - at least he hoped it was fabric. While Blaine had been taught formal sword fighting, he had never drawn blood. The thought made him queasy.

The man's smirk dropped, and aside from his eyes, his bright blue-green eyes, Blaine could read nothing from him. It was hard to make out any features on the man in front of him. His hair had been slicked back under the dirt, and he was a couple inches taller than Blaine.

"What are you doing here?! Who are you?!" Blaine shook as he spoke, not used to being so forceful, authoritative. Perhaps he had more of his father in him than he let himself know.

The man spoke softly, with a light voice that Blaine certainly wasn't expecting from a battle hardened warrior of the Hummel army, "I'm Kurt. I'm part of the Hummel army. We've taken Westerville. You need to understand that the army is in the courtyard and nothing will be served by killing me."

"I'm dead either way." Blaine responded without thinking, "You'll kill me because I'm part of the royal family and my father will kill me for refusing to support him."

"We won't kill you. That's not what we do. However if you do kill me I can't account for what my family might do to avenge me and I don't think you've ever killed anyone before. I don't think it's something you want to do."

Blaine bit his lip and considered. They had defeated the Dalton army, how could this man in front of him not be a heartless killer? Why wouldn't they kill him? But if he did kill this man, he was definitely dead when the rest of the army found him. Maybe his best chance was surrender.

Blaine was still thinking when the invader - Kurt - spoke up. "What's your name?"

Blaine couldn't kill him. In the end, he was the weakling his father insisted he was. If there was any shot of staying alive, it meant giving up. He dropped his sword and the the weakness in his stomach seemed to

take over his whole body at that point. Blaine dropped to the floor and shamefully hid his face in his hands. "Blaine... I'm Blaine Anderson."

The invader quietly considered the response and Blaine waited for him to pick up his sword and cut him through. At least it would be quick... he hoped. They wouldn't prolong this with torture would they?

Instead a hand was offered to him. A filthy hand that was streaked in red - blood? "Well then. I think we'll be needing to speak with you."

Blaine considered not taking the hand, how much of his peoples' blood was on this man? Was this a ruse of some kind designed to embarrass him further? Kurt seemed to pick up on his hesitation and pulled his hand back.

At that point the noise of running was heard and as Blaine uncovered his eyes to look down the hall, he noted they had been joined by two more in the black armor. Both were taller than he was, both also filthy - covered in dirt and death.

"Kurt! Are you alright?" The taller invader stopped and drew his sword as he approached.

The other one with a black streak of hair in the midst of his own filthiness came up behind Blaine, clenching a dagger in his hand, "Who is this?"

Kurt held up his palm, "He's surrendered himself. This is Blaine Anderson."

Instead of relaxing, the two seemed to tense up more, "The tower prince?" the taller one asked, "Was he trying to kill you?"

Blaine flinched, uncomfortable with how close these two were getting. If they were going to kill him though, best not to show too much fear. Die with dignity, just like the heroes in your books. Don't cry... don't cry.

"Yes, and he didn't, so back off." Kurt took a step forward, and in doing so, the other two took a step back and Blaine suddenly felt able to take a breath.

Kurt knelt down in front of Blaine and tried to look him in the eyes, which Blaine avoided, turning his head down and away. If he cried now, it couldn't be in front of the enemy. He had to keep his senses.

“Blaine. We need to speak with you. Our army has taken over Westerville and we need to know where you stand.”

Blaine shivered and looked down at the sword beside him he had dropped. He couldn't go through with this. He had no training in being subversive and deceptive. That was part of the problem, he too often spoke without thinking. They would find out he was working for his family and kill him.

In one quick movement he reached out and grabbed his sword, in the next moment, he felt a sharp pain against the back of his head and he felt himself fade to darkness.

When he awoke it was in small dark cell. His senses were flooded with the stench of urine, feces, and vomit, which made him turn over in the small cot he was in and vomit onto the dirt floor.

He wiped his mouth with the back of his sleeve, noting that the stench off one of those invaders was perfume compared to this.

The cell Blaine was in was barely bigger than his wardrobe. Metal bars encircled him and there was room for a small cot, a piss bucket, and a little room to stand. The light of a candle flickered by a door outside of the cell.

“Why did you go for your sword after you surrendered?” a familiar voice spoke in the darkness and he turned his head toward it. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust, but he was able to make out Kurt, sitting on a bench across from the cell he was in.

“I... I...” Blaine hadn't been able to kill himself. For one short moment before he had blacked out he thought he might have just been that quick. “They were going to kill me. I thought I'd save them the trouble and do it myself.”

Kurt turned his head away so Blaine couldn't see his eyes. Those eyes which just seemed to glow like a candle in this darkness. In his home of amber, the only time he'd seen such eyes was in Jeff, who up until this point he considered exotic.

“They thought you were going to stab me with that sword. That's why Noah knocked you out with the hilt of his dagger. You're lucky they didn't do more.”

Oh. Blaine shook his head, "No. I couldn't do it... you said so yourself. I couldn't kill you."

Kurt stood up then and walked to the side of the cell. Blaine was able to see that while Kurt hadn't completely cleaned up, that he had managed to wash his face. This man before him had beautiful pale skin and lips that looked absolutely delicate to the touch. Jeff was definitely no longer the exotic one in his mind, Kurt was.

"I can't let you out. I don't have the key. I do believe you however. I'm trained for negotiation and can tell." Kurt's face was stony. If he felt anything about what he was saying, one way or the other, he wasn't letting it show. Technically Blaine hadn't lied about taking the sword to end his own life anyhow, but it had more to do with the futility he felt at that point and less to do with the threat of the other invaders.

"Thank you..." Blaine flushed, looking at the meager quarters he had been relegated to. Suddenly his entrapment in his room all the time didn't seem so terrible. "What... what are you going to do with me?"

Kurt clasped his hands behind his back, "That will be for Marshal Hummel to decide. I will advise him however. I would like to ask you a few questions before I speak to him however."

Blaine nodded. This was his best shot right now at getting into a position that allowed him to help his family, help Cooper. "Of course. I'll respond to the best of my ability."

Kurt's mouth turned up at once side, seemingly amused by that response. "Alright then. Why were you the only member of the royal family here?"

Blaine grimaced. If Kurt was really good at detecting truth and lies he had to be careful with what he said.

"My family... they don't approve of me. I'm the only son, aside from the heir Cooper, who stays in Westerville. It's because my father doesn't want anyone to see me. I embarrass him. I embarrass the family. I speak my mind too much and it's unwanted." Blaine pauses, "I didn't even know they had fled, until I searched for them later. I was left behind."

Kurt watches his face the entire time. It isn't a lie, but it does omit pieces of the truth, however Kurt seems to accept that and continues the questioning, "Why didn't you try to catch up with them or find them?"

Blaine shakes his head, "I didn't know where they went or where they would have gone. There was no point in following. I've never left the castle."

Kurt's eyes widen at that and Blaine worries for just a moment that he's said something that could get him into trouble. But then Kurt's face resumes its hard expression and continues, "So you have no idea where they might be or might be going to?"

"No.. my father would only speak to me if he had something caustic to say. Definitely not to tell me anything of importance." That part is definitely true.

Kurt nods, considering this, "Can I ask... why you embarrass them? What could you possibly say that offends them so much?"

Blaine sighs and leans back on the cot. "I don't agree with how my father operates. I'm not included in political decision making, but I overhear things of course. I don't think his method of rapid expansion is effective for maintaining the food supplies and successfully integrating new lands into Dalton. And of course, I'm gay."

A shake of his head shows that Kurt is in disbelief, "You're gay? Anderson... your father, is notorious for homophobic policies and he has a gay son?!"

Blaine tilts his head to the side just slightly and looks up at Kurt. Didn't what he say make sense?

Kurt exhales and, seeing he won't be getting a reply to that, continues speaking, "Well I'll talk to the Marshal and see what I can do. In the meantime you'll have to make due down here in your castle's dungeon."

So that's where he is. Blaine has never been allowed into the dungeon's before, and thank goodness.

Kurt turns to the door and begins to walk off when a thought flashes through Blaine's mind and he calls out after him, "Wait!"

Kurt paused and looked back to Blaine.

"Can you... can you make sure my cat is alright?"

Kurt's mouth twitches up into a small amused smile and he returns to Blaine's cell to get the details on how to find and care for Cat.



## 8. Peacemaker

Kurt feels guilty about his bath. The tub he used was big enough to fit an entire family into and it was lined in gold and silver on the outside. The water the servants brought in was deliciously hot and they even added the petals of some local flower which made the whole experience absolutely intoxicating.

Kurt hasn't smelled this good... well, he doesn't know when, and he always makes the extra effort to look and smell as good as he can, whenever he can.

But he definitely needed the bath. When he leaves the tub, it no longer is filled with steamy translucent water, but instead looks like a brown soup with bits of grass and pebbles mixed in. He shudders at how absolutely disgusting he had allowed himself to become, and for so long.

He grabs a towel and dries himself off thoroughly. He has claimed one of the royal bedrooms as his headquarters during the transition period. A messenger has already delivered his clothing and personal items, which he now goes through to find something comfortable to wear.

A meow beckons him from by his leg, and as he looks down, Cat begins to rub against his leg. "Apologies Cat. I took entirely too long in the bath and left you all by yourself."

Kurt chuckles to himself at the absurdity of the one-sided conversation and pulls on a loose white cotton tunic with green embroidered lines running along the seams. He then pulls on pair of black cotton pants, just a little snug, but not enough to showcase his attributes to the world. Finally a plain belt to hold the sheath for his sword. Never can be too careful, style or not.

Once he's completed getting ready, he leans down and scoops Cat up into his arms, giving the demanding creature a little scratch behind the ears. "Well then, let's go get to work."

Kurt exits the room and walks through the hall and down the stairs to the main hall where tables have been set up, each functioning as a station for various planning. Before he finishes going down the stairs, he takes note of where his father is and heads in his direction.

Noah is beside Burt and see's Kurt first, arching both brows as he notices the cat in Kurt's arms. "Did you find a friend there Kurt? And here I thought you didn't like pus-"

Noah is cut off by Burt who not-so-accidentally bumps into him as he turns around. "Son. You look much more... yourself." The older man smiles.

Kurt takes a moment to shoot Noah a glare and then his gaze softens as he looks to his father. "Thank you. I feel guilty about the luxury of the estate, and the service for that matter, but I don't think I could have been of very much service with all the mud in my ears."

Burt reaches out to give Cat a short pat on the head. "Well those Warblers, the servants I mean, have been absolutely gracious. Especially considering they had locked themselves into the cellar for nearly a day until they felt it was safe to come out when they heard Jeff yelling for them. The boy really didn't have much to worry about in the end."

Kurt nods, his body relaxing as Cat purrs against his chest. "Have you given any thought to Blaine's status?"

Kurt has been thinking of the slightly shorter boy all afternoon. The tortured look in his amber eyes, the finely curled rings just falling across his brow, the sun kissed skin... It didn't help that Blaine had announced to Kurt his sexuality down in the dungeon. Kurt, who usually kept himself cool around any attractive men, found that Blaine's admission gave him allowance to think of him in a lustful manner.

No matter. Kurt had to deal with it in the professional and icy manner he always had.

"We've talked to those Warblers about what they know. It corroborates what he told you in the dungeon. No shortage of daddy issues there. Apparently he's also quite academic and skilled in many areas, but has never been permitted to exercise those skills aside from music. He will need a lot of work if we decide he is the best candidate for taking over control of Westerville." Burt explained.

"Will you release him from the dungeon then so we can judge those skills and knowledge?" Kurt asked.

Noah interrupted at this point, "No way. He grabbed his sword. He was going to try and kill you Kurt!"

Burt nodded, "I know you said he was going to use it on himself, but I don't know if I want to take that chance. I agree he has a lot of potential from what we've heard, but I can't risk you son."

Kurt shook his head and took a step back, "That boy in the dungeons has been trapped in this castle his entire life. From everything we've heard, he had every reason to feel that amount of desperation in that moment. He had no problem talking to me in the dungeon, the servants have only kind things to say about him, and he has pampered this cat like it is a child! I would stake my life on him being fine with us!"

Burt winced and looked to Noah who just shrugged.

"And if you don't let him out, I'm going to end up spending a lot of time down there that would probably be better served up here!" Kurt added.

Burt sighed and reached into a pouch on his belt, pulling out a key. "He's your responsibility. And I want a guard assigned to him at all times until further notice. Pick someone you trust."

Kurt snatched the key and turned on his heel, "Yes sir."

Burt wondered how he would have managed if he had both Elizabeth and Kurt at this stage in life. He would likely have been a very whipped man.

Kurt spoke quickly as he walked towards the stairs that led into the dungeon, "You don't need to be right behind or beside him, just keep him in your sights. He's been locked up forever. We don't want to give the impression that we're just here to continue on with his entrapment...."

"Sure thing sir. I know you can handle yourself in close proximity." Sam replied, trying to keep up with Kurt. Sam was still in his armor and dirty as hell, but hadn't had time to clean himself off, having offered Mercedes time in the baths first.

"And I don't expect you to be there each and every hour. Find a couple others to help you out and schedule yourselves for coverage. I just want you to coordinate it." Kurt reached the dungeon door and paused, looking back at Sam.

"And, if anything does happen around me, try to let me defuse it before you jump right in."

Sam nodded rapidly. He was ready to get a look at the 'Tower Prince' as he had been nicknamed by many of the troops. The son of the wicked king, apparently as gentle as a kitten with no claws.

Kurt pushed the dungeon door open and stepped in. He turned to his left and walked the few steps to the cell Blaine was in.

Inside the cell, Blaine had fallen asleep in the straw cot. He had his arms wrapped around his torso and his legs curled up as the mattress wasn't as long as he was tall. Kurt exhaled lightly, watching the boy sleep for just a moment. So that's what peace looks like.

Then, catching himself, he struck the key along the bars of the cell, making a series of deep chimes, "Rise and shine. You've been given your papers!"

Blaine woke up with a start and sat straight up, his eyes wide. Kurt smirked. This boy wouldn't be much good if someone sneaked up on him at night. Too much calm, and then, too much panic. But calm could be taught. Kurt had not always been so composed either.

Blaine rubbed his eyes and pulled himself off the cot and stood up by the door. "Really? I was expecting I would have to figure out how to clean up this place to make it livable..." He offered Kurt a weak smile as he spoke, clearly trying to make light of his situation.

Kurt unlocked the cell door with the given key and pulled it open, "For reasons I'm sure you can appreciate, there will still be eyes on you, mine included. In fact, you'd better get used to me since you're under my care as of now."

Blaine nodded once, looking Kurt over, and then past him to the blonde hulk in armor standing quietly.

"And this is Sam. He is in charge of your personal guard. Let him know if there's something you need." Kurt gestured back to Sam who gave a quick nod.

Blaine's eyes travelled back to Kurt, "What do you mean... under your care?"

"Well you're the only one left of your family here now. Depending on your skills and knowledge, you might be the most capable one to take care of Westerville once we leave." Kurt turned to exit the dungeon, Sam waiting until Blaine began to follow before bringing up the rear.

Blaine slowly trod after Kurt, wincing as the light from outside hit him. As he allowed his eyes to adjust to the sudden burst of light he asked, "What do you mean, 'when you leave'. This land is yours now. You conquered it."

Kurt chortled a little and turned his head to flash a grin back to Blaine as they continued their way back to the castle, “You really have been locked up your whole life hmm? We don’t conquer. We liberate. Believe me, none of us has any interest in ruling anything.”

They rounded the corner and Kurt noticed how Blaine was taking in everything around him. There was activity all through the courtyard as different groups within the army established headquarters in different parts of the castle, and nobility and peasants were coming in and out from the city to provide information, beg for help, and get news.

Blaine seemed to consider Kurt’s words as they came into the main hall, where conversations hushed as people noted the ‘Tower Prince’ walking beside Kurt. Blaine tried to shrink behind Kurt as he noticed all the attention he was getting.

Kurt tossed a hand in the air, “Continue with your business! You should have no shortage of work to do!”

And the hush ended just as quickly as it had begun, aside from the odd look in his direction, most of the troops took their cue to get back to work seriously.

Blaine looked to Kurt, “You must have some power.” It was more of a question than a statement.

Kurt sighed as they reached the stairs, “Yes. Unfortunately I do.” He turned and offered Blaine his hand at the edge of the stairs, “Come on. Your cat has gotten fur all over my clothing and I really don’t want to get mad at the poor thing.”

Blaine glanced at the hand only momentarily this time, taking it in his, and following Kurt up the stairs.

## **9. A Matter of Time**

Blaine found his room had been left untouched by the invaders that seem to have filled in every other free spot in the castle. He had collected Cat from the room of one of his sisters, which Kurt had taken over, and come back here to collect his thoughts while Kurt had to deal with some troop requests.

Sitting on the edge of his bed, he found himself suddenly overcome with tiredness. He had just been napping in the dungeon cell, but it was far from a restful sleep, and since this whole mess had begun, he may have slept, but he had not rested.

Cat pulled away from Blaine's arms where the feline was being held and hopped down to the floor, sashaying over to the door where Cat pawed and meowed.

"Oh so suddenly now my room isn't good enough for you?"

Cat looked back at Blaine as he spoke, then turned back to the door and continued to try and pry it open with a paw.

"Well I guess I shouldn't be surprised that you would want to leave me either."

Cat was now trying to dig a paw under the door to try and pull it open from below.

"Well I'm sorry to say that you're stuck with me! I'm sorry for putting you in that trunk but I didn't even know if they'd like cats! You could've been in a stew by now if they didn't!" Blaine was getting exasperated and he didn't know why. Why was Cat making him so mad?

Cat decided that trying to open the door was futile and instead circled in spot by the door and laid down. Cat would be ready to bolt when the door was opened.

Blaine fell back on his bed, his legs still dangling off the edge. He stared up at the red canopy over his bed. "I am never complaining about my room again. I can tell you that much."

Maybe in an odd way his father did care about him. His father did let him stay in the castle with his own well furnished room after all. He could have spent all his time cooped up in one of those dingy little cells. Unable to eat because the smell of the dungeon kept his stomach in constant flux. He could have been reduced to peasant wear instead of his soft, fine linens. Servants had been tasked to always deal with his night bucket and bring him fresh water to clean himself. In the end, Blaine supposed he was allowed by his father to be treated royally and that had to count for something.

He would find out what he could about the plans of Marshall Hummel and his army and then figure out how to get past the personal guard he had been assigned, who now watched outside his door, and send his family the information.

In the courtyard he had seen all castes of people mixing together. How were the peasants and soldiers supposed to respect their leaders if they were allowed free reign in the presence of their betters? This couldn't last. The peasants needed direction so they could live productive lives in the service of the empire. They didn't have the education or sense to be speaking to leaders of the empire. Blaine was sure they were nice, even good people, but there was certain protocols to being a leader that were being broken all over the place here.

At least he had found himself partnered with someone who had some authority. It would make getting important information easier. His heart seemed to drop a little as he thought this. Kurt was gorgeous, especially once all the blood and dirt was off him. Blaine was able to see just how creamy his skin was, how ethereal his eyes were, and to feel the softness of his hand was absolute heaven. If he didn't know better, Blaine would have never been able to know the armored invader he met in the hall this morning was the same person who had taken care of Cat while he was in that cell.

Blaine rolled over onto his stomach and pressed down on the hardness forming in his slacks, trying to will it away. Don't think of the enemy like that. Don't let him get to you. Don't think about him in your bed... Blaine groaned and reached for one of his pillows to bury his face in. He was so utterly pathetic. How was he supposed to pay attention to military details when he was going to have to focus on keeping himself from being aroused around Kurt.

A knock sounded at his door and he lifted his head up and turned towards it, "Yes?"

Without asking permission, the door was pushed open and Cat bolted out. Blaine pulled himself up to sit again on the edge of the bed, his grimace forming into a grin as he saw who was coming in.

“Jeff!” and behind him, “Trent! Wes! David! Nick! Thad!” Blaine stood up and a small laugh of joy escaped him, “I thought you were all gone by now!”

In turn, each of the Warblers gave Blaine a pat on the shoulder and they together formed a circle.

“We locked ourselves in the kitchen cellar. We didn’t know how things were going to turn out so we grabbed some wine and cards and had probably the best day off ever!” Trent laughed as he spoke.

“I came with the army. I was so worried when I couldn’t immediately find everyone I’m sure the soldiers thought I was mad running through the castle and screaming everyone’s names.” Jeff spoke and Blaine couldn’t help but feel betrayed when Jeff admitted his connection to the troops that had overtaken his home. He kept it to himself though. He wasn’t about to alienate one of the few friends he had, especially if he needed them to help with his mission.

Nick noticeably moved closer to Jeff as he spoke and smiled warmly at the blonde boy beside him. Blaine was shocked when he saw their fingers brush and Jeff turning his head to return the warm smile back to Nick.

“Nick... Jeff... the laws....” Blaine tried to remind them. Sodomists could be killed on sight if discovered.

Nick and Jeff looked to Blaine in unison, and it was David who spoke for them, “The laws no longer apply. Blaine. Westerville is liberated. Nick and Jeff can love each other without fear.”

Blaine opened his mouth to speak but nothing came out. He shut it again after a moment his apparent shock must have been obvious because Wes sat beside him and put a hand on his shoulder. “The changes this brings... they’re going to be good changes. We always said things couldn’t get worse and that was true. There’s only room for them to get better, much better now.”

“I’m going to get to go home....” David spoke quietly, his eyes looking between all the Warblers and Blaine.

“What do you mean home? You are home.” Blaine looked to David in shock. He couldn’t remember a time without David.

“No Blaine. I was taken from my home when I was a boy. I saw my mom for the first time in years this morning....” David began tearing up and Trent placed a hand on his shoulder. “She was able to get into the castle now and... I’m going home.”



Blaine sat, mouth agape once again. He had never considered that his Warbler friends thought of the castle of anything but home. They had all been there so long. Well at least Trent wouldn't leave. He was the child of servants who still worked here so he had only ever known the castle.

"We're so happy to see you Blaine.... we didn't know what they'd do to you, or if your father would've left you here dead by his own hand." Thad spoke for the first time since entering.

"Well... I knew they would be alright...." Jeff admitted, further implicating himself in Blaine's mind.

Blaine shook his head. "Thanks you guys. I am happy to see you all. It's just been.... one hell of a day."

The group around him was a mix of small chuckles and nods.

"And I really think I need to wash up. I was stuck in a cell for the better part of today and I've never smelled anything so awful. I'm sure it's rubbed off on me.." Blaine admitted.

Within a moment, the Warblers were a flurry of activity, getting his bath ready, which stood in the back of the room to the side of the fireplace.

Blaine smiled, so thankful for his comforts now. When the Warblers exited, Blaine undressed himself, tossing his clothing into the fireplace. He wasn't about to rewear that. He would be amazed if half of the stench could be laundered out.

Slipping into the bath he found that most of the tension in his small, athletic frame washed out of him. He leaned his head back against the high part of the tub and allowed himself to soak.

"Oh! Excuse me!" Kurt's now familiar and very startled voice spoke up.

Blaine made a small gasp of surprise and looked over at the man, who had Cat in his arms, standing in the doorway.

"I just found something that belonged to you and I thought I'd return it." Kurt ran over to Blaine's bed, dropped Cat there, and ran back out the door, shutting it behind him.

Blaine groaned. So much for the tension being gone. He had forgotten, at least for a moment, that his home had been invaded. Kurt's gorgeous face stayed stuck in his mind after he left. That look of surprise, all his walls down as he found himself surprised. Had he seen anything?

Blaine looked down at himself to make sure everything was hidden from view, and noted that aside from his head and arms rested on the sides of the tub, he shouldn't have been able to see anything.

Cat had returned to sitting in front of the door, looking back at Blaine and yowling towards him.

"I am not letting you out Cat."

Cat hissed and returned to staring at the door, waiting for the chance to run again.

Kurt really was beautiful... and if David was right, he could now feel the freedom to think that way. He wasn't sure if Kurt was interested in boys, but at least Blaine could feel alright about the fantasy now. Jeff and Nick looked so at peace. How had they looked before? Blaine tried to think back and found he hadn't really been paying attention to reading their feelings before all this because all he came up with were images of Nick peeling potatoes and Jeff brushing horses.

Blaine let himself sink further into the water, groaning with pleasure. He reached for a scrub and began the process of getting rid of the grime and stink he could feel on his skin. When he reached his member, he let the scrub fall to the bottom of the tub and let his mind go back to Kurt's surprised face and his soft hands, his groaning now a result of more than a nice warm bath.

## **10. Behind Closed Doors**

Kurt caught his breath as he leaned against Blaine's door, his face flushed and red. Sam looked at him with curiosity spreading across his face. "What? Did you catch him in the middle of something embarrassing...?"

At that moment, Blaine could be heard groaning. Groaning all so sweetly and Kurt hid his face in his hands.

"Yup. Definitely caught in something embarrassing." Sam added nonchalantly and continued pacing the hall back and forth as he patrolled.

"No... no. Sam. He was just in the bathtub was all." Kurt was fully red now and his hands gestured madly as he tried to make his mind think chaste thoughts.

More groaning from the inside of the room and Sam shook his head, "If you say so. Doesn't sound like any boring ol' bath I've had... at least not one that was taken alone."

Kurt added a groan of his own at the thought and shook his head, standing himself up and walking down the hall towards the stairs. "Whatever. Just do your job and I better not hear the troops talking about this but with raunchy, unconfirmed, additions."

Sam laughed behind him and continued the patrol. Kurt went down the stairs and headed to the engineering station set up by the exit. "How's it going Artie?"

The boy in the chair that had been modified to have wheels looked back to Kurt, "Well we'll be able to take the gold, jewels, and other rich additions off most of the furniture with no problem. It's really only the stuff that was embedded into the wall, ceiling, and floors, when the palace was built that will be a problem."

Artie had been tasked with getting as much of the value out of the palace as possible so it could be used to buy food and supplies from other empires to help support Westerville and the Hummel Army.

"I trust in your abilities. Do what you can. Take a break when you need to. We'll be here for a bit so don't push yourself." Kurt nodded and Artie returned the gesture and looked back at some plans in front of him.

Kurt continued to table after table, checking on the progress of different groups with different tasks.

He was in the midst of looking over a list of the food supplies found in the palace when Burt interrupted him. "Can I speak with you son?"

Kurt nodded and passed the list back to the organizing brigadier, turning to his father.

"Let's walk" Burt said and led the way outside into the courtyard.

Kurt tagged alongside his father, waiting for the inevitable talk he knew was coming ever since he had informed his father that Blaine was gay.

"So... this prince.... I know you usually take care of training new leaders and helping them transition, but I don't think you should be in charge of this one." Burt began, purposely looking ahead as he walked and not looking at Kurt.

Kurt shook his head, having expected as much. "I disagree. I'm the one who usually does it, as you say, and I know the most about preparing someone for the role."

Burt nodded and kept pace, "I just don't want you to get... involved..."

Despite Kurt having expecting this talk, the rush of blood to his ears was immediate and Kurt snapped, "Because he's gay? Because you don't think I can handle that?! Believe me dad, the last thing I'm about to do is bed the son of the man who was responsible for mom's death!"

Burt flinched and at that point stopped, turning to put his hands on Kurt's shoulders. "I don't want you to get hurt. I know we're fought for a long time and you feel that now that we've succeeded, you might be able to let your guard down and let someone in, but I don't want it to be the first man you come across in this time."

Kurt looked down, the anger subsiding and being replaced with the guilt of worrying his father, who obviously knew him so well. He had been letting his guard down today. The thought of retirement had washed over him and in liberating this city, he had felt liberated himself.

"I understand. I have a job to do dad and you know I'm the best person for it. I won't let you down and I will keep my guard up until we find a little farmstead to retire to."

Burt pulled his son into a hug which Kurt eagerly returned. "I look forward to that time. Just remember, even though the battle is over, we still have to fight to really liberate this empire. But now it's a fight of words and wisdom and I really need you for that."

Kurt and Burt took a moment then to enjoy the closeness and then separated. Kurt knew what needed to be done.

He knocked this time before entering and when Blaine asked him to come in after he announced himself, Kurt opened the door, the damned cat running and winding himself in and out of his feet.

Kurt grumbled, and instead of reaching down to pick up the cat like he felt inclined to, he stepped over to the bed where Blaine was sitting, a book set in his lap which he must have been reading until Kurt had interrupted.

Kurt handed him a set of papers, "This will be your schedule starting tomorrow. I need to assess your skills and fill in weaknesses. You're the candidate now. After speaking to the nobility, no one else wants the job in case your father decides to show up again."

Blaine blinked in surprise and slowly took the stack of papers offered, looking down at them, "If my father did return and found a noble in his throne, they would be killed along with their family...."

Kurt nodded, "Yes. I was told as much. Therefore, you're the best person for the job, though I will have you know there's protesting about that too."

Blaine looked back up from the paper at Kurt in surprise, "But I'm royalty. You can't protest my lineage...."

Kurt smirked. Despite the gentle and naive nature of Blaine, he had obviously been led to believe that his blood was still purer than the rest of society's. "They can, and they probably will. Your father didn't exactly charm the citizens of Westerville and many of them are not in favour of any Anderson's being in power."

Blaine simply nodded and looked back at the stack of paper, "I don't understand why you need to check my skill sets honestly.... I'm probably the best educated person left in Westerville and regardless of what the people may think, I'm still a prince and best suited for the role."

Kurt crossed his arms over his chest. "Look. Let me try to explain this simply. We have liberated the people of Westerville from a tyrant - your father. We are not going to blindly put someone else into the role of king without first making sure they will take care of the people as the people deserve to be taken care of. If you don't adhere to the schedule I've given you, I will, somehow, find someone else and you will be relegated to commoner, which I somehow doubt you want."

Blaine flinched and once again nodded to Kurt, setting the stack of papers beside him on the bed. "I... I don't know if I fully understand, but I will do as you ask."

"And make sure you dress appropriately tomorrow. You'll have noticed the first thing on the itinerary is a tour of Westerville. Since you haven't been out of the castle before, you need to realise that not everywhere is as clean as the palace, so dress yourself down. Especially since we'll be touring incognito."

Blaine furrowed his brow and looked from the schedule beside him and then up to Kurt, "Why would we travel without people know who we are? Don't we want them to know me if I'm going to lead them?"

Kurt shook his head, "No. You need to see how your people are without them worried about a prince being around. People act differently when those in authority are around. Let that be your first lesson."

All the while this conversation had been occurring, Cat had been winding between and against Kurt's legs. He had been doing his best to ignore it and then snapped at Blaine, "Would you please control your pet?"

Blaine tensed and reached down to pull Cat up into his arms. "I'm sorry... I don't understand why Cat likes you so much."

Kurt sighed, realising that his efforts to remain tense were actually causing him to be irritable. Reaching into a pouch on his belt he pulled out a few leaves of catmint. "This is probably why..." He put a leaf on the bed and Cat forcibly pulled out of Blaine's arms and began nibbling on the leaf.

Blaine's brow again furrowed in what was quickly becoming one of Kurt's favourite expressions of confusion he had ever seen on anyone. "It's Catmint. I use it in a tea to help with headaches and sleep. It's also something of an aphrodisiac for felines."

Cat purred as if to add credence to Kurt's information.

Blaine reached out to pet Cat while the feline rubbed its head into the leaf. "Thank you. Here I just thought Cat just wanted to leave me like everyone else."

Kurt's heart cracked and he swallowed in an attempt to keep himself cool. How could anyone not want this beautiful boy. "No... just the leaves..."

Kurt needed to escape and turned to leave when Blaine called at his back, "Kurt..."

Kurt stopped, but didn't turn or speak, not wanting to let Blaine see how much he had already cracked at his stony facade with that simple statement.

Blaine stood up behind him and set a hand very gently on Kurt's shoulder, "Um... well I was hoping we could have dinner."

Kurt's breath caught.

"You know. I just need to know what's going on. My whole life has changed in a day and I thought maybe you could help me understand why."

Of course. Of course. An innocent and purposeful dinner, that was it.

Kurt nodded without looking back at Blaine, pulling himself out from Blaine's hand and walking toward the door. "My room then. At dusk. I still have things to take care of before I can eat."

He immediately went into his room despite Sam's questioning look in the hallway and closed the door behind him. He was going to need to do something in order to not get lustful at dinner, and for the next few weeks of training, in order to make sure he got his job done and his dad off his back.

Kurt started going through the things he had stacked up on a bedside table. Sweet Violet, Devil's Claw, Milk Thistle - no, those wouldn't help. Black Cohosh - why did he even have that herb? Cinnamon - no, that was the opposite of what he needed. Skullcap! That was exactly what he needed.

Kurt made himself a tea with the purple petals and sat back in a chair beside the bed as he sipped the bitter concoction. Thank goodness he had befriended Quinn and learned the tricks of herbs. Better yet

that he kept himself supplied so he didn't always have to go to her when he had a stomach ache or headache. He had never taken skullcap before, but Quinn had told him about it's used and he had kept some he had found growing in the lands of a previous campaign.

If he had made the tea right, it will reduce his blood flow just a bit, to make it difficult for him to become aroused. Apparently it was also good for rabies, which was why he had originally decided to keep it just in case anyone received a bite from a rabid animal.

Once the vile concoction had been down, Kurt went into the hall and called for Sam who came over to him.

"I'll watch his door for a bit if you'll tell the kitchen staff that he and I will be having dinner in my room at sunset. I figure you might want to grab a snack. Please tell them nothing with cinnamon, cantauba, goatweed, or cowhage."

Sam nodded and walked off, and Kurt hoped that he didn't know what those herbs were for. That would be truly embarrassing. But he didn't want to take an herb in his supper that would counteract the skullcap. Admittedly, he wasn't sure if all those herbs could be used in cooking or even if they were native to the area.

Kurt paced the hall up and down. He couldn't believe how naive Blaine was. Sure he appeared kind and intelligent, but his interactions and experience was limited. He obviously had no clue about how the other half lived, and above all else, he was the son of a murderer. Did evil run in family lines? Kurt hoped not. Not only for Blaine's sake, but for his own. If Blaine couldn't be trained to lead, then they'd be here longer looking for a replacement and Kurt wanted his retirement. He wanted to be a local performer in some small community, or even a tailor. Something far away and very different from what he was used to.

His stomach grumbled. Either he was hungry or the skullcap was not sitting well. Either way, he had about an hour for it to take effect before dinner. Please let it work.



## **11. Everybody's Fool**

Blaine poked through his wardrobe and even dug the clothing out from under his bed trying to find someone appropriate to wear.

Clearly he had done something to upset Kurt, or maybe Kurt was upset at something else, because in the short time he had known him, Kurt had gone from warm to cold. Maybe that was part of his diplomatic skill, making it seem like he was truly interested in a person and then when he had the person hooked, becoming indifferent to them.

Blaine needed Kurt to be open with him though. He was his best shot at getting the information he needed to help his family. Plus of course, it wouldn't hurt to take the opportunity while it was available, to get close to such a good looking individual. Nick and Jeff were no doubt enjoying the freedom they suddenly had, so why shouldn't he?

He pulled out a red tunic and put it across his chest. He hadn't worn this in awhile. He discarded the hanger to the ground and pulled the tunic over his head. It had a built in gold-threaded rope belt which he drew together and tied. With the plain white leggings he had one, this should make him look regal enough.

Blaine looked over at Cat, who laid on the bed in some sort of drugged and dopey state, rolling around in the pillows and mewling periodically. The Catmint was long gone at this point.

He shook his head at the sight and smiled to himself. If Cat could enjoy the evening, so too should he.

Blaine walked to his door, pausing at the dresser to grab a nice silver chain which he strung around his neck and left the room, closing it behind him.

Crossing the hall, Sam nodded to him and spoke, "Just so you know, my replacement for the evening will be here by the time you're done your supper. His name is Jake. He will patrol this hall until dawn."

Blaine nodded his acknowledgement and knocked on Kurt's door. He had purposely waited until just after sunset to come across the hall so he didn't appear over eager or insistent. He could smell that the food had already arrived from the smell emanating from behind the door he stood at.

"Come in." Kurt's voice called from inside. Blaine turned the knob and opened the door, stepping in. The food was placed on trays atop the table sitting near his sister's... now Kurt's bed. He salivated a little, realizing how long it had been since he had actually eaten in all the chaos of the day. It was a nicely spiced chicken with potatoes and a mix of greens. It was accompanied by bread rolls, dipping sauces, and rice pudding for dessert. His stomach made a low growl.

Kurt was across the room, standing at the window which on this side of the castle overlooked the stables. He had a glass in his hand of what Blaine assumed was a red wine by the looks, nearly emptied. He did not turn to greet Blaine, looking over the stables below. Blaine could hear from where he was the yelling outside as people called for horses for evening patrols.

Blaine stepped further in and shut the door behind him, feeling ill-at-ease with the lack of any acknowledgement. He took a deep breath in and reminded himself that this was an opportunity to show his skills as a leader, and initiate.

"I apologize for my tardiness. Can I offer you another drink or would you like to begin dinner?" Blaine stepped towards Kurt, stopping when Kurt turned. Kurt's face was flushed and his pupils were blown. He held the glass to Blaine who took it. "I think a drink AND dinner would be just fine." Kurt brushed past Blaine and went to sit at the table, picking up a fork and looking over the plate in front of him critically.

Blaine took the wine bottle off the table and poured Kurt another full glass which he then set in front of the red-cheeked boy. He sat across from Kurt and spoke, "Thank you for agreeing to meet with me tonight. I understand it's been a difficult day for you as well and I appreciate everything you've done for me despite that."

Kurt poked the greens with his fork, "Do your people cook everything so thoroughly or am I going to have to make my own suppers?"

Blaine had not anticipated that response. "Ah... well... The king... I mean my father prefers everything cooked thoroughly, so that's what they're used to making. I'm sure if you preferred a salad we could accommodate you however."

Kurt huffed and let his fork fall, reaching for a bread roll. "Who is... 'we'? You haven't been granted any special privilege by me and you're already speaking in royal english." He tore a bite out of the bun and stared at Blaine as he chewed.

"I..." Blaine startled and looked at Kurt intently back, "I didn't mean to offend you. Please... tell me what I've done. You went from friendly to angry with me and I don't know why." Better to be direct since I have no idea what's going on here.

Kurt threw the bun to the side and stood up, leaning over the table with palms on the table. His face with a hair's breath away from Blaine's and Blaine could smell the wine on Kurt's breath and feel the heat radiating off Kurt's face. Blaine's cheeks began burning and he looked wide-eyed into the glasz orbs directly in front of his own.

"You wouldn't would you? You have been kept so pure and innocent in this little palace. You don't realize how much the clothes and necklace you're wearing cost in terms of lives. How most of your people probably don't get to bath once a week in dirty rain water and you get a full tub of hot, scented clean spring water. You have no idea what your family has done. You've gotten to live a plum little life with no cares while the rest of us have lost people we love because of your father."

Blaine's adam apple bobbed as he swallowed in his nervous way. The burn in his cheeks spreading out over his face. "I'm sorry..." he nearly whispered, surprised that the words came up at all.

"You're sorry?!" Kurt stood back up and Blaine released a breath he hadn't realized he had been holding in. Kurt raised both hands up in a frantic gesture, "You're sorry?! Really. Well too bad. You don't get to be sorry. Sorry isn't help the people around you. Sorry won't fix it. You have to do that!" Kurt grabbed his glass and took another full drink of the wine in a very un-gentlemanly like manner.

Blaine crossed his hands over his lap and shook his head. "You're right.... I am sorry though - and not for whatever my father has done that I will have to somehow make up for. I'm sorry about whatever is hurting you, about the pain you seem to be feeling."

Kurt stopped mid drink and set the glass down, walking around the table and kneeling now in front of Blaine. The heat was back and Blaine turned his head to once again go eye to eye with Kurt.

Kurt slipped his head forward and whispered into Blaine's ear softly and invitingly. "You know my father is worried that I'm going to fall for you and create some kind of over dramatic situation."

Blaine choked a little on his own breath. "I... what?" Not only was he not exuding the confidence he had hoped for this evening, he was also coming across as absolutely incompetent he was sure.

Kurt's lips stayed by Blaine's ear and Blaine found himself pressed his legs together tightly, trying to keep things contained. "My father is Burt Hummel. Leader of the army."

Blaine's eyes snapped shut. This is why Kurt was so respected among the troops. He was the son of their leader.

"Your father is responsible for the death of my mother and my grandfather."

Blaine's eyes snapped back open and he pulled his head back, looking at Kurt who was licking his lips. "What?!"

Kurt placed a hand on each of Blaine's thighs, and his lips twitched up in the corners, "So I'm not going to fall for you. You may have been here so innocent and carefree, but your innocence came at the cost of my own and my father before me."

Blaine's body was a mess at this point. Conflicted by the angry words coming out of Kurt's mouth which would normally put him on the defensive, and the touch of Kurt's hands on his thighs which might have otherwise relaxed him completely.

Kurt stood up and went to go sit back in his seat across from Blaine. "I'll eat your overcooked vegetables for now, because when I'm done preparing you for the throne, I will put this life behind me."

Blaine looked over at Kurt who started digging into the vegetables with his fork and shovelling them into his mouth, looking down at his plate the entire time. Did all that just really happen? How can he eat like everything is alright.

Blaine didn't know what else to do, so he picked up his own fork and began eating his dinner as well. For all his well laid plans about wowing Kurt with his eloquence and ideas for the kingdom, nothing came out of this dinner but silence and awkwardness.

When he had finished eating he quietly excused himself, though Kurt, in the middle of what Blaine had counted to be his fourth glass of wine since he had arrived, didn't seem to notice that Blaine existed anymore.

He fled back across the hall to his room, nodding all too quickly at the replacement guard there - Jake was it? Blaine shut the door behind him and ripped the clothing and chain off him, tossing them onto the floor as he went to his bed and fell on it, letting a low scream out into his pillow.

Dear god. What had his dad done? How could he be expected to fix things? He didn't even know what had gone on and now he had the son of his father's enemy flirting with him? No. It wasn't flirting. He was doing it to make him feel uncomfortable. He knew Blaine was gay and was using it against him.

Well he succeeded, Blaine decided. He felt smaller and more pathetic than ever.

He struck the stack of papers Kurt had given him earlier off the nightstand, letting them scatter and fall to the floor. Well damn him. Two could play that game. If Kurt's father was truly worried that Kurt would fall for Blaine then that meant Kurt had to be attracted to men too, which mean Blaine could use that to his advantage as well.

Blaine rolled onto his back and stared up at the red canopy. Tomorrow morning they would go into Westerville. He needed to keep it together. He needed to keep the upper hand. He needed to get over the fact that it would be the first time he had been out of the castle and maintain his focus. Tonight had been an absolute disaster and he couldn't let that hang over him.

Cat curled up against Blaine's side and purred. He reached down to pet the feline.

"I'm not going to let myself continue to be everyone's scapegoat Cat. This is my time."

## **12. Unnatural Selection**

The smell of his own vomit made Kurt's stomachs turn and he leaned over the cot he was on to dry heave into the bucket that had been placed beside the makeshift bed in the ballroom which Quinn had turned into a hospital.

His throat burned from having spent the night emptying the contents of his stomachs and his head felt as though it had its own heartbeat with the throbbing occurring in his temples.

"How's my favorite and dumbest patient doing this morning?" Quinn asked as she went to sit on the vacant cot beside his.

Kurt offered a groan in response and laid his head back on the pillow. "I don't remember coming here Quinn. Where did you find me?"

A bemused chuckle left her lips and she took a moment to wave a medic over to remove the used bucket before responding. "I didn't. Jake heard you moaning and groaning in your room and went to make sure you were alright. When it was very clear to him that you were not alright, he escorted you here."

Quinn offered thanks to the medic who responded and also asked him to return with a kudzu coffee. "Now what kind of bribery can I expect to keep this all put of the ears of your family?" A smile playing across her lips.

Kurt turned his head on the side, looking at her and trying to judge what she knew. "Honestly Quinn, I don't remember much of last night so I wouldn't be able to put a price on what I don't know about."

The medic returned with the coffee and Quinn handed it to Kurt. "You'll need to drink this if you intend to work today."

Kurt sat himself up and started sipping the coffee. Quinn sat quietly and watched him until Kurt could no longer take it.

"Are you going to tell me what happened or am I going to have to drag it out of you?"

The blonde continued smiling secretly, "Well let's just say that I had to pay Jake to ensure he didn't say anything to anyone and I want the favor returned. You've been able to drink with the rest of the troops at their pace and volume for years now and I've never, ever seen you even close to as drunk as you were last night. How much did you drink?"

Kurt uttered a groan and shook his head, "Only some wine... But I took some skullcap before that."

Instead of berating him like Kurt expected, Quinn started laughing. "Well now it makes sense! Skullcap is hard on the liver and if your liver isn't at it's best, all the drink goes straight to your head!" She continued to laugh as she stood up, "Oh Kurt. It's a good thing you're so good to me, otherwise I would have to report to your father how his son was found parading in his underwear and having a conversation with the fibres of the rug, and then being brought here and declaring it the height of fashion to anyone who would come near him."

Kurt's face went pale and he gawked at Quinn, "I did not."

Quinn smiled sweetly and reached over to give him a pat on the back. "Oh but you did. There's a reason why no one is on the cots around you. I managed to convince Jake to bring you some of your clothes and then I had to fight to get them on you. My dear Kurt, it's such a shame you like boys because there's so many ladies who would be quite impressed with the... 'qualities' you possess in certain places."

The pale that had taken over his face was now replaced by a full blush. "Quinn, please... please...."

She grinned, "I won't tell you dad, or Finn, and you'd better just be thankful Carole wasn't serving last night though she will be here within the hour so I expect you to finish that up and leave. Cost of service is a dress from one of the wardrobes in here, tailored to me. Oh, and the rest of that skullcap too. Once is funny, twice would just be sad."

Kurt moaned and nodded. She would haunt him for awhile with this information.

Quinn walked across the room to her other patients and Kurt guzzled down the tea, leaving the empty cup beside the cot. He quickly left the room and quickly walked through the palace to his room where he found Mercedes now on duty in the hall.

Before she could speak, he ducked into his room and closed the door behind him. He could see that sun was already breaking over the horizon and knew he didn't have much time to get ready before he was due to escort Blaine around the city.

He vaguely recalled the dinner from last night, though the details were unclear. He knew that he had been angry, and in turn, aroused - so much for the skullcap, but he felt that he had managed to eat supper with Blaine in the end so it couldn't have been bad.

Before he could worry about his clothing, Kurt first went to gargle and scrub his teeth over to get me taste of puke out of his mouth. He could put up with a lot of disgusting things but the taste of his own bile was not among them.

He quickly got undressed and then redressed in some very low key and plain clothing. The point of today was not to draw attention to himself or Blaine. A dark cloak went around his shoulders with a hood he could pull over his head as necessary.

He left the room and went across the hall, knocking on Blaine's door and taking in a breath as he prepared to take on the aloof disposition once again.

It took a moment, but finally Blaine opened the door, looking tired and still in a night shirt and pants. Kurt frowned and shook his head. "Dawn. You needed to be ready."

Blaine grumbled and pulled the door open all the way, stepping back into his room and letting Kurt follow, "Just give me a second..."

Kurt folded his arms over his chest and scanned over the room. The bed was unmade and clothing was all over the floor in a mess. Cat seemed to have made a nest out of a pile of shirts and was currently burrowed into it. The fire had gone out and the wash basin was half empty and its contents were dark. In the span of a day, Blaine had become messier than even the laziest soldier he had ever known.

As his eyes moved back to Blaine, they grew wide and his breath caught in his throat. Blaine had taken off his night shirt and was about to pull on a day shirt. For having been limited to the castle, Blaine has a stunning physique, lines drawing out his muscles and little trail of hair leading down into his slacks. Kurt snapped his head away rapidly, but it seemed Blaine had caught his look.



"I may not be a match for your warriors, but I spar with practice swords in my room regularly and try to keep up my overall strength. It gives me something to do, and gives boys like you something to look at."

Kurt looked back to Blaine and cocked an eyebrow, not expecting that kind of insinuation out of the sweet boy he had just met. His glance was met with a wink from Blaine who was tying on a cloak of his own. "I'm ready now."

Kurt swallowed and turned to head outside. He stopped outside of the room with Blaine as his shadow and looked to Mercedes, "Why don't you find Sam and have a little one on one time while you can. I'm taking him out and I want to keep it low key."

Mercedes looked from Kurt to Blaine and back again, assessing the situation. She was about to give her opinion on the matter when Blaine spoke.

"Are you a woman or am I just seeing things?"

Kurt's jaw unhinged and he couldn't get a word in before Mercedes responded.

"Oh hell to the no. I am not starting my day off with this kind of nonsense. Look little boy..." She took a step towards Blaine, who, to his credit, didn't back away. "In the real world, women fight as well, and in some cases better than you boys. We're not all happy housewives as your daddy might have you thinking."

Blaine lifted his hands, palms out in surrender, "Apologies. My experience has been limited to my sisters, step-mothers, and servants."

Mercedes pressed a solitary finger to Blaine's chest, "That's better, and I better not hear about you letting my boy here get into any trouble or I will get my sisters Brittany and Santana here with me and we will show you personally just how tough we ladies are."

Before Blaine could even think to respond, Mercedes had turned and walked quickly off, making sure she had gotten the last word in. As usual, Kurt thought to himself with a smirk.

"Well. Let's grab something from the kitchen then and we'll be off." Kurt led the way there and Blaine followed silently, taking a roll when offered to him from Kurt who had emptied a whole basket of them into a pouch he was carrying.

“Planning a picnic?” Blaine asked as he took a bite of the roll.

Kurt shook his head. “They’re for later. You’ll understand.”

They went into the courtyard and Kurt walked to the gate, still open. Kurt watched as Blaine stepped to the edge of the courtyard at the gate and paused before following after Kurt into the streets of Westerville.

“Nervous?” Kurt asked, pulling his hood up over his head.

Blaine pulled his own hood up, mimicking Kurt. “I’m done being nervous.”

Kurt led Blaine through the streets, casting sidelong glances to him to gauge his response to what he was encountering. It was evident that Blaine was trying to hide his disgust of the conditions people lived in, biting his lip when he saw people pouring their night buckets out onto the streets in front of their houses and then letting their animals drink from the collected pools of rain and urine in the streets.

Kurt saw when Blaine flinched at the man who had no teeth, and again with the girl who only had one of her hands. Blaine hesitated when they walked into the market area and merchants tried to push their wormy apples on him and cracked plates.

They had been out for an hour, in silence, and just walking when Blaine spoke up, “This isn’t what I thought was out here.”

Kurt nodded and led Blaine to a bench beside a chapel. He sat down and Blaine followed suite. “I know it wasn’t.”

Blaine looked over at Kurt, “What’s wrong with everyone here? Why haven’t they tried to make things better for themselves?”

Kurt shook his head, “They would if they were able. They are just trying to survive.”

Blaine looked out across the street to where a beggar was sitting, palms out and together as he begged for change. “Why doesn’t that man get a job? He’d do better for himself then just asking people for their money and hoping they take pity on him.”

Kurt sighed and stood back up, "Well let's go find out why..." He crossed the street and went to kneel by the beggar. Blaine took a moment, but finally followed him, choosing to stand behind Kurt instead of kneeling with him.

Kurt pulled one of the rolls out of his pouch and offered it to the man, "I brought too much for lunch and was hoping you'd let me join you if I shared."

The beggar took the roll and smiled almost toothlessly at Kurt, "Well thank you son." He patted the dirt beside him. "Take a seat. Name's Bry."

Kurt smiled and sat down beside the man, pulling out a roll for himself, and one for Blaine. He held the second roll up to Blaine who remained standing for a moment before he must have realized how awkward he must look and sat beside Kurt, carefully tucking his cloak under him.

"I'm Kurt. How's your day been?" Kurt asked before taking a bite of his roll and looking to Bry.

Bry finished a bite of his roll before answering, "Been alright. Got a few coins for later."

Kurt and Bry continued their conversation while Blaine sat there quietly, listening in and eating his own roll. Bry had been a soldier and gotten a good cut in his left leg, leaving him unable to walk or stand for very long. Since he was no longer of use, he was dismissed. He couldn't find a job that didn't require him to be on his feet as all sitting jobs had been strictly limited to those with noble bloodlines. His wife tried to work as much as she could as a laundress, but very few people had the money to launder their clothing and she, as a woman, was prohibited from doing a lot of other jobs. Bry had a son, but he had been drafted to fight with one of the Anderson boys far in the north and he hadn't heard from him in over a year.

As they finished their rolls, Kurt patted Bry on the shoulder and offered him a small emerald from his pocket. "Not much. But I hope it can help you for a bit."

Bry took the emerald with a shaky hand looked at Kurt in shock, "You're sure?" Kurt nodded. "Oh my...thank you so much son." Bry rubbed a tear from his eye. "You'd better be on your way before you see me blubber."

Kurt nodded towards Blaine and they stood up, continuing the trek down the street in silence for several minutes.

“Where did you get the jewel?” Blaine asked in a hushed tone.

“It was on a comb in my room. I removed it. Didn’t make the comb any less functional.” Kurt replied and turned into an alley.

Blaine followed, but kept a farther distance from Kurt as they moved into the darker, narrower space.

“That comb was my sister’s....”

“I’m sure her hair will survive without it. She didn’t bring it with her so it couldn’t be that important.”

The alley got darker the farther they went down it until they reached a small collection of haphazard tents, made of old clothing and torn blankets.

“One of the citizens told me yesterday that there are no orphanages established in Westerville. Did you know that?” Kurt asked, taking the pouch of rolls and setting it down on the ground. “Apparently the children have formed a little family of their own to care for one another. They stay here.”

Blaine looked around at the miniature tent city. As if on cue, a little girl came out from one of the tents close to them and looked hesitantly at the men and then at the pouch Kurt had put down.

Kurt smiled to the little girl, maybe only five or six. “Hey sweetie. I know you’re probably afraid. I’m just leaving you with some bread rolls here. You can take them and share them with the others here when I go alright? I won’t make you come to me.”

Kurt stood back out and started walking back out the way they had come, and for the first time that day, Blaine seemed to have to pry himself away from the filth he was immersed in.

### 13. Won't Let Up

Blaine grabbed his pillow and hugged it against his chest. Keeping his mouth shut as much as he did today was difficult, but not as difficult as processing the state of Westerville and its people. He had nearly lost it several times and nearly grabbed the little girl they had found in the dark of the alley to take her back with them and take care of her.

His sisters may have been married off young and denied the freedoms that the women in the Hummel army clearly had, but they never went hungry or without proper shelter and clothing. He was beginning to see how truly isolated he was from the world and he wanted to retreat back into the past with its predictability and guiltlessness.

Kurt also hadn't said anything about dinner the night before which meant that Blaine wasn't going to bring it up either. He certainly didn't invite Kurt for dinner tonight either, not wanting a continuation of the night before. He also didn't want to talk about what he had seen today. He was still trying to cope with the idea that so many were so in need and he didn't know where to begin to change their lots.

He looks over to his dresser. It had been built with finery in mind and showed off the wealth of his family with gems adhered around the edges on on the drawers. If one of those gems made that beggar break down and cry, what could all of that do? It wouldn't make it any less of a dresser to remove the gems, like removing the gems from the comb had made it any less useless for brushing through hair.

He started picking at the gems on his dresser and on the furniture and decorations around his room, which is where Kurt found him an hour later, spitting curses at a sticky ruby on his bed frame. Blaine had one foot pressed against the head board to brace it as he was using a spoon to dig out the ruby. A small pile of various gems sat on the nightstand beside him from various spots in the room where he managed to get them out without much trouble. His fingers told a different story - cut and torn at the ends where he had been getting out his anger in pulling out the gems with as much brutality as he had been able. He was drenched in his own sweat and hadn't changed from the clothing he had worn out before.

Kurt stepped towards the bed, but Blaine didn't stop growling at the gem and pulling at it, both hands on the spoon trying to wrench the damned thing from the bed. "May I ask why you are trying to make your room more of a mess than I thought was possible?"

Blaine released his grip and leaned back in the bed, taking a breath and brushing the sweat soaked hair from his eyes as he looked up to Kurt, "I thought..." he heaved and pauses a moment to take a breath before continuing, "If I got enough of these out of my room we could use them to finance an orphanage and I might feel less guilty."

Blaine watched as Kurt glanced to the nightstand and then back to Blaine, his eyes softening, "Do you want some help?"

Blaine sat himself up and shook his head, "No... you were right last night. My innocence came at the cost of the innocence of others. I don't want to be the scapegoat for people anymore though, so I need to do something to fix what's wrong."

Kurt appeared confused for a moment and then stepped over to the nightstand, surveying the gems that Blaine had pulled, which unfortunately wasn't many since some of those had been stuck on quite well. "I'm sorry I said that. I wasn't myself last night." He looked back to Blaine, "With what you have here you know you could finance an orphanage and its staff already..."

Blaine stretched his fingers out and in. They had become stiff with the exertion and by taking a break right now, the cuts in them were starting to sting. "I was thinking we could probably hire Bry to help with it. See if he knows anything about managing files or something where he didn't have to stand. Help him feel useful again."

Kurt nodded, "That's a fabulous idea...." He looked down at Blaine's hands, "I have a poultice for small cuts and aches in the hands if you'd like. I know how sore the fingers get when I've been handling my sword for long lengths of time."

Blaine shook his head, "No." He balled his hands into fists and used them to lean back with on the bed, putting pressure back on them to dull the ache, "I need this pain. I felt dull after we went out today and the pain is waking me up. Helping me figure out things."

Kurt shifted from one foot to the other and finally nodded again, "I think I understand. But please... let me know if that changes, and don't kill yourself over a diamond. A human life is always worth more than a nice rock."

A knock sounded on the door, saving Blaine from having to force a response. "Come in."

The door opened and Trent entered, carrying a large tray, "Supper as requested."

Blaine screwed up his forehead, "I hadn't requested my supper yet...."

"I did." interrupted Kurt, "Apparently I need to make up for last night's supper so I asked Trent if he could make us some, though I hardly know where we'll eat in this mess...." Kurt kicked at some clothing on the floor as if to make a point.

Trent laughed, "Oh. I'll let someone know they need to clean up in here..."

Blaine shook his head, "No you won't." He stood up and walked to the table in his room, pushing the clothes and books and random items off of it and onto the floor to make a place for the food. "I'll clean it all up tonight. I need to take care of things myself if I'm ever supposed to take care of Dalton."

Trent's laughing stopped and he blinked in surprise, moving over to set down the tray. "Well then... I hope you enjoy your meal. General Kurt helped me out with the menu for tonight. A little bit different than what you're used to but I think you'll find it delicious."

Blaine took a seat and gestured to the chair across from him to Kurt. "Thank you Trent. I have no doubt if you were involved, it will be decadent."

Trent bowed and left, closing the door behind him. Kurt waited until Trent was gone before moving to sit across from Blaine. "That's very ambitious of you, cleaning up this room I mean."

Blaine let the corners of his mouth arch up in a weak smile and reached over to unlid the tray, revealing two plates with generous helpings of salad, roasted salmon, and steamed carrots. "This does look good..."

Kurt took his plate and smiled, "It's been awhile since I've had a good full meal, but when I do I try to eat what's good for the body."

Blaine took his own plate and stabbed the salad with his fork, taking a small nibble before putting it all into his mouth, groaning with pleasure. He hadn't realized, once again, just how hungry he was.

"Good to know you like it." Kurt responded to the groan and sat back in his chair, "Tomorrow morning you'll be working with some of our messengers to check your geographic understanding of Westerville,

Dalton, and the surrounding lands. I need to work with my people to figure out some supply line issue and the smithies have some concerns over the way horses are shod here that I somehow have to figure out.”

Blaine nodded and looked at Kurt over the edge of his fork as he fed himself. This was not the same man he had dinner with last night. Kurt was more reserved, more calm, and less agitated.

Before he spoke, Blaine finished off his salad so he wouldn’t interrupt the conversation with an ill-timed stomach growl.

“Is there anything I can help with?”

Kurt swallowed a bite of food, “Well my father and I do need to speak to you tomorrow. Apparently there’s been some... developments that we want you to be aware of, but we’re waiting on confirmations before we take these developments as facts.”

“Have you located my father?”

“No. Not yet anyhow. We know your brothers are moving their brigades back to Westerville but given the range of their exploits and the spread, we can’t pinpoint where they might end up meeting yet.”

Blaine nodded and dabbed his face with a napkin before starting on the salmon and carrots, taking one bite of salmon, then one of carrots, and repeating the cycle.

Kurt pushed away his plate when it was only half done and leaned back in his chair. “I’m afraid I’m not used to the portion size you are.”

Blaine looked at Kurt and let a laugh escape which which appeared to confuse Kurt as he furrowed his brow. “You have more height on me and certainly get more exercise and I can out eat you? Well at least I know I can best you in something.”

Kurt smiled back at Blaine, “My step-brother makes up for it, believe me. Besides, I hear you’re quite a talented musician which is something I can’t brag about. I would love to hear your playing sometime.”

“On what?”

Kurt shook his head, “I don’t understand. What do you mean on what?”



Blaine explained, "I play several instruments. What instrument do you want to hear me play? Piano, harp, guitar, lute...?"

Kurt blinked and Blaine realized that Kurt wasn't aware of the details of Blaine's musical prowess. "Tell you what. When we have time, I'll introduce you to my favourite room, the music room, and you can pick then. It will be nice... I usually play for my sisters and I imagine I won't get to do that... at least not for awhile."

Kurt seemed to catch the pain in Blaine's voice when he spoke about his sisters and leaned across the table, putting his hand on Blaine's. Blaine looked down at it, capturing the softness which captured him.

"I would love to, and I can't promise that we'll find your sisters... but we're going to try." Kurt pulled his hand back and leaned back into his chair and Blaine's hand immediately felt cold and lonely.

Blaine swallowed the last bite of his meal and put his plate back on the tray. "Thank you."

Kurt shook his head dismissively, "I was brought up to care for others. It's what I do."

"Then who takes care of you?" Blaine reached over to put Kurt's plate on the tray and then cover it back up. His first real effort at cleaning up after himself.

"My family. When you take care of others, they are able to care for you."

Blaine smiled weakly at that. He wasn't sure if his father and family had really cared for him or not. He certainly was fed and sheltered, but he didn't truly feel cared for. Perhaps he was as spoiled as Kurt had alluded to the night before and didn't know how good he really had it.

"Hey Blaine..."

Blaine lifted his head and looked at Kurt inquisitively.

"Where's Cat?"

Blaine smiled and stood up, stepping over to the trunk and opening it. Cat jumped out and took a minute to hiss up at Blaine angrily before scampering over to Kurt and hiding under his chair.

Kurt laughed and reached down to give Cat a pat on the head, "Poor thing. What did you do to deserve a time out?"

Blaine smiled and closed the trunk, sitting down on top of it. "Let's just say that when I clean Cat's litter box I'm hoping to find a nice amethyst."

## **14. Don't You Forget About Me**

Burt rubbed his thumb and forefinger over his forehead, trying to dull the ache growing in his head to no avail. He had spent the entire morning listening to a group of nobles, who seemed to have no sense of personal volume control, talk about their opposition to Blaine taking charge, yet none of them was even willing to step up either.

Many of the nobles expected the army to stay indefinitely, at least until Anderson and his family had been killed off and someone felt confident enough to take the lead among them. As it was, he had to put his foot down when it came to them demanding Blaine be executed as a sign of the fall of the Anderson house.

He had argued that if none of them were willing to put themselves at risk for the good of Dalton now, then none of them were cut out for leadership and at least Blaine was willing to learn.

He had been thankful for lunch that day, happy to have an excuse to leave behind that group and have some peace and quiet for at least a moment.

Now he was examining a map with Finn and Rachel trying to come up with some possible scenarios for the inevitable Anderson army retaliation.

Rachel pointed down to the south of the city where there was a small mountain range, "There have been multiple reports that he has recruited several independent bandit groups from this area." Her finger drew along the map until it reached a town, "The Queen of Forest Springs sent us a message saying that he was trying to negotiate with her for reinforcements and let us know, as a personal favour, that she was not going to respond to him."

Burt nodded. They had put that Queen in power and was thankful now for it.

Finn pointed at each of the red flagged markers on the map, "These are the best estimates we have of the brother's locations presently. Multiple reports show them continuing their march back towards Westerville."

“And what about Anderson himself?” Burt asked, leaning off the table and sitting into a chair that had been placed beside him by Kurt earlier in the day who insisted he take the time to relax when he could.

“No reports of him being spotted visually. Every communication report shows that he is sending letters and messengers. He doesn’t seem to do anything in the flesh.” Rachel responded.

Burt nodded and looked towards Rachel, then past her as he saw his son and the prodigal prince approaching. “You’re both dismissed for now. I need to speak with Kurt and Blaine privately. I will let you know when I need you back.”

Finn and Rachel nodded and went off together towards the exit. Burt smiled to himself and hoped that for all their secretitism, that he might manage to get a grandchild out of this deal.

Kurt stepped to the table across from Burt and Blaine stepped up beside him, giving a short nod to Burt respectfully, “Sir.”

Burt waved off the formality, “Technically, we’re all royals here whether or not I acknowledge it. Burt’s fine.”

Blaine nodded and sat immediately as Burt pointed to the chair beside him. Kurt stayed standing, hands clasped behind his back. Burt long ago had recognized that stance as Kurt’s means of keeping himself detached, but anyone who looked at him would have no trouble seeing that he had a royal heritage.

Burt looked to Blaine. “I’m going to update you on what’s going on and I want your honest feedback. I don’t know how some of the information might affect you because I really don’t know you that well kid, but if I’m going to put you in power, you need to know what’s going on and be able to handle that information.”

Blaine nodded towards Burt, “Of course sir - Burt. Apologies.”

Burt swept a hand over the map, “This is what our intelligence has gathered regarding the position of Dalton brigades, up to date as of lunchtime. Those red flags are your brothers and they’re moving back towards Westerville which probably means your father has had contact with them.”

Blaine nodded, “Yes. I imagine he is motivated to retake Westerville.”

Burt rapped his fingers over Westerville, "He's sent messengers to multiple empires and towns offering trades in exchange for reinforcements to support his efforts as well. The ones who have refused have all sent us the information and pledged they will not help him."

"What kind of trades sir? I don't know what he'd have to barter..."

Burt swallowed and slowly responded, each syllable being enunciated individually, "Your sisters mostly."

Burt watched as Blaine clenched his hands into fists on his lap and stared at the map but didn't actually look at it.

"You should already be well aware that has been one of his main strategies for forming alliances in the past. Taking your sisters with him when they fled was only so he could sell them off - otherwise they wouldn't have had much use to him - at least with his manner of thinking."

Blaine gritted his teeth and Burt heard the telltale grinding noise coming from the boy's mouth. "Can't you do anything to get them away from him?"

Burt sighed and shook his head, "We can't pinpoint where he is. He hasn't met with anyone in person and the one messenger we did capture had his tongue cut out and couldn't read at all. He was just used to deliver the message. He wouldn't have been able to tell us anything if he wanted to."

Blaine exhaled slowly and Burt looked up to Kurt who was watching Blaine's reaction. Kurt still stood in the same position as before, but his eyes had warmed and he was giving Blaine the same look that he gave to Burt when he was taking care of him after a battle. Worry and tenderness.

"I don't understand... how can I help? I'm certainly motivated to help, but damned if I know what to tell you or what to do." Blaine spat, teeth clenching back together as he finished speaking.

"I really need you to take your time and think of anything, anything you might have heard or overheard. Any place he may have favoured or any person outside of Westerville he would trust. I'd rather put down his assault before it comes upon Westerville. The people here have already lost so much..."

Blaine nodded in agreement. "They have." He sighed and unclenched his fists, running both hands over his hair, "I can't think of anything right in this moment, but I will let you know if I come up with anything..."

Burt nodded, "There is one more thing we need to discuss."

Blaine looked away from the map and to Burt. Burt was able to see why he hadn't been holding eye contact. Blaine's eyes were brimming with tears.

"You need to know that many of the nobility here have called for your execution as the lone member of the Anderson family still in the castle. They want you as their sacrificial lamb in this conflict."

Blaine tensed, holding a breath.

"That is absolute insanity!" Kurt suddenly chimed in, and Burt was expecting him to. "He is nothing like his father. They don't want to lead but they won't give him the chance either? What are we supposed to do? Put a pig on the throne?"

Blaine shook his head and looked down at his hands, "You can't fault them Kurt. I'm a living representation of what the people here hate. No one knows me to really know me, and even if they did, my death would still send a message to my family."

Kurt shook his head and slammed a fist on the table, causing all the little flags and statues to bounce and lose their places, "No. That's not an acceptable reason. We fight to ultimately save lives."

Burt threw his hands up, "Stop. I've already told them it's not going to happen."

Kurt looked back at Burt for confirmation in his eyes and when he seemed to have it he stood back up and nodded.

Blaine looked back up at Burt, "But why? It would make things easier... It might even scare off my father and his army."

Burt inwardly sighed. This boy did have an unconscious death wish. He had been more upset at how his sisters were treated than by the threat of his own death. "That's not the way we do things. Life and death is not something we use to motivate. That's a tactic of your fathers - threatening others with death if they don't comply with his demands, or using others as examples of what happens if people don't comply."

Blaine's pupils moved down and to the side, and it took a moment but he nodded, signifying his acceptance of what Burt had said.

“What I’m saying kid, is that you are going to need to spend some time gaining favour with the nobles here so they will support you when the time comes.”

Kurt interjected, “I can help you with that.”

Blaine looked between the father and son and just exhaled, “I don’t know if I’m the right one for all of this, but I’ll do my best to impress them and help you.”

Burt nodded. “I know you will kid. Kurt’s opinion of your candidacy so far is high and you’re willing to work with us to help you out.”

“Burt? Sir?”

“It’s just Burt. Not Sir Burt, not Burt Sir. Both of those just sound ridiculous.” Burt responded and waited for Blaine to continue.

“I wanted to apologise. It’s come to my attention that my father was responsible for the death of your father and wife. I want you to know that until two days ago I never knew anything about that, much less the other atrocities he committed. I’m sorry for everything you’ve had to suffer because of him.”

Burt took a moment to process the shock. He looked down and then back up at Blaine, “Thank you.” He stood up and gave a bow to the boys, “If you’ll excuse me though. I have some other matters to attend to and I’m sure you both have things to get done.”

Burt walked slowly to the infirmary in the ballroom, needing to see Carole. He needed to see her before he broke down.

## **15. Without You**

Over the course of the next week, Kurt kept Blaine consistently busy. He met with people of different occupations, from blacksmiths to boarders, to talk about their concerns and hopes for Westerville. Blaine had to demonstrate to Kurt, in several impromptu settings, that he could speak on a certain issues without much or any preparation to assure Kurt that Blaine would be capable of addressing a crowd competently.

Kurt also had Blaine spar with different individuals in the army so that he could get to know them, and also release the aggression that Kurt was seeing build in him as he realized the extent of the damage his father had done.

They had continued to have dinner together every night, discussing what they had done in the day, and what issues needed to be addressed and how they could best do that.

Blaine had accepted Artie's help in getting the gems removed from his furniture, and his room was now a lot more sombre - and clean. He had also cleaned out his wardrobe and donated half of it to the orphanage where it would be retailored to fit the children.

All in all, Kurt was quite impressed with Blaine's progress over the last week and a half that they had been here. It was hard not to be drawn to Blaine, but Kurt was managing to keep himself guarded around him, and found he could be friendly with Blaine without becoming automatically turned on and awkward.

They had scheduled meetings with individual nobles beginning tomorrow and Blaine was sitting across from him now at the table in Kurt's room rehearsing the list of policies he wanted enacted.

"Do you think that's going to be enough to convince them?" Blaine asked, taking a sip of the cider in front of him.

Kurt shook his head, "They're individual people Blaine. Each will respond differently and I don't know them well enough at all to anticipate their responses. However, your ideas are impressive and I like that you have included how they will be involved in the process. It shows you as a leader with a vision."

Blaine nodded and scooped a spoonful of rice into his mouth before continuing, "I nearly felled Noah today."



Kurt peeked over the paper in his hand towards Blaine who was grinning with pride. “Really? Nearly?”

Blaine nodded enthusiastically, “I didn’t anticipate that he kept a dagger in his boot though. Very valuable lesson for me.”

Kurt smiled in response and looked back to the paper in his hand, a list of supplies needing refreshing from the infirmary. He would visit with Quinn later to approve having them bought from a nearby village that she noted could supply all of them.

“When do I get to spar against you?” Blaine queried with a mischievous grin.

Kurt set the paper down on the table and looked back to Blaine, “Fighting isn’t my forte. Talking is.”

“So? I still hear that you’re pretty handy with a sword. Besides, you could use a break from talking all the time.”

Kurt coughed up a little laugh, “Oh really? You saying that I talk too much Anderson?”

Blaine nodded, “I am. You should challenge me to a duel for such an offense.”

Kurt let a full smile grace his face as he looked at Blaine and nodded, “Fine. But not tonight. I have medical supplies to duel tonight.” He tapped on the paper to supplement his preoccupation.

Blaine sat back in his chair, his plate now empty. “Spoilsport.”

“You really enjoy sparring Blaine. Why is that?”

Blaine looked to the side and then back to Kurt. “It’s an outlet I guess. I’m mad about a lot of what has happened under my nose and it’s a good way to get it out.” he admitted.

Kurt had already figured that out. He had secretly watch Blaine sparring with others on a couple occasions and had seen the fury in his eyes and the desperation too. He was trying to prove something when he fought. Blaine had received several cuts and many bruises in his spars but he didn’t let it faze him. He wouldn’t stop fighting until a blade was at his throat and the battle was called. Finn had told Kurt that when they had sparred, it was like fighting a wild animal who had no shortage of energy.

“We won’t always be around to spar with. What are you going to do when we’re gone and you’re mad about something or someone and you have no one to help you?”

Blaine blinked and Kurt conceded to himself that Blaine hadn’t thought about that as the boy across from him seemed to search for a response.

“You need to learn some other means of stress relief.” Kurt supplied for Blaine.

Blaine nodded and turned his body toward Kurt in his seat, “How do you do it?”

Kurt exhaled slowly and his eyes focused on the table, “Admittedly I don’t very well. I either take herbal teas that help with the stress or I end up taking it out on someone.”

“Like at our first supper together. On me.” Blaine noted.

Kurt looked back up at Blaine. What had he said? Kurt knew how angry he could get and winced when he realized he had taken out his own stresses on Blaine. Kurt wasn’t about to admit he didn’t remember that night though, and especially that he hadn’t been in control of himself, so he lied.

“I’m sorry for what I said. You didn’t deserve that from me. I hope I’ve made up for my indiscretions since then.”

Blaine smiled at Kurt. “You have. Please don’t worry about it.”

Kurt returned the smile. “So can you think of any other outlets for the stress you will ultimately be facing?”

“Well I’ve always enjoyed reading, but when I do that now it’s relaxing, but doesn’t get the anger out of me.”

“What about music?” Kurt suggested.

Blaine lit up at that and stood up, “Before you go to the infirmary, would you like to see the music room? I haven’t played anything in two weeks now, and maybe it would be good for me.”

Kurt stood up and followed as Blaine eagerly led them out and down the hall. Kurt had already seen the music room. He had surveyed all the rooms in the palace. He however had not seen Blaine in the music room and it was clearly important to him, so he pretended that it was the first he had seen of it when Blaine escorted him in.

“This is really amazing Blaine. So many instruments... I don’t even know the name of some of them.”

Blaine smiled and went to sit at a white piano. “This is my favourite. Something about the piano is so... expressive and soulful.”

“Would you play something for me?” Kurt asked, coming up behind Blaine and sitting beside him on the bench.

Blaine turned and grinned to Kurt, “Is there anything you had in mind?”

Kurt thought for a moment and a tune came into his mind. A song his mother used to sing for him when she tucked him into bed. He hummed the bars of the song and Blaine picked up on it and began playing. Before they realized it, Blaine was playing out the song and Kurt was singing the lyrics.

Every now and then Blaine looked over to Kurt with haunted eyes and then back to the keys. Kurt closed his eyes after awhile and let himself be taken back to his youth and his mother stroking his hair and telling him how much she loved him.

When the song ended, Blaine continued to look down at the keys and a whisper escaped his lips, “You have a beautiful voice Kurt. I don’t think I’ve heard anything more angelic.”

Kurt watched Blaine and without thinking, reached over and placed a hand on his thigh, “Thank you.. for saying that, and for letting me visit a memory with that.”

Kurt gasped slightly as his hand was covered with Blaine’s. They locked eyes and Blaine leaned his head closer to Kurt’s. “I wish you didn’t have to go.”

Kurt’s mind buzzed. Did Blaine mean go to the infirmary tonight or go when the training was done and he could be instated as the king? Why wasn’t he taking his hand away? Why couldn’t he stop looking at Blaine’s eyes, Blaine’s cheeks, Blaine’s lips?

Eventually all Kurt got out was a little squeak and “What?”

Blaine broke his gaze and looked down at where his hand had captured Kurt’s hand under it. “I don’t know what I’m going to do when your army goes and you along with it. I’ve never had anyone before... that seemed to care about me.”

Get it together Hummel. This is exactly what your dad was warning you about. This is not the time for romance.

“You will have others...” Kurt slowly pulled his hand away and Blaine turned to look at him, eyes reflecting the hurt of the rejection. “I can’t stay here.

“Why...?” Blaine’s voice was weak and cracking.

Kurt sighed and against his better judgement, he reached out and took Blaine’s hands in his own, finding his whole body enflame as he touched Blaine. “You will not be on your own. You will make allies and friends. You are compassionate, strong, and enigmatic.”

Blaine closed his eyes and his fingers wrapped around Kurt’s hands, “That’s not what I asked.... Why can’t you stay here?”

Kurt was trying to keep his breathing in check, and keep himself in order. He had never been touched like that, and it was such a simple touch of the fingertips. “Because....” Oh god, he needed to gain control of this situation before he found himself lovedrunk and out of the control of his logical mind. “I don’t belong here. I want a simpler life.”

Blaine had worked his fingers between Kurt’s so they were intertwined. “Kurt... you don’t think that would bore you? You’re absolutely brilliant and beautiful and you would be so wasted on simple living.”

No one had ever called him beautiful before... at least no one that wasn’t his mother. He felt Blaine’s breath on him as he leaned in so their faces were centimeters apart. It was absolutely intoxicating, but no....

Kurt pulled his hands from Blaine’s and stood up abruptly, nearly causing himself to fall back over the piano bench. “I can’t Blaine! I can’t.... “ He shook his head and stumbled towards the door.

A broken, small voice spoke behind him as he left, "It worked you know...."

Kurt stopped at the door and looked back in confusion, "What worked...?"

"Playing the piano... it drained me of the stress I had..." Blaine had turned himself back toward the piano and began to play another tune slowly. Kurt couldn't see his face, but knew it would probably break his heart if he did see it.

"I'll see you in the morning Blaine." Kurt said and left the room, mournfully walking to the infirmary.

## **16. Not With Haste**

Blaine was finishing off his second cup of coffee when David came into his room to collect his breakfast tray.

“David... I wanted to say goodbye... I know you’re going home tonight.” Blaine stood up to look at the dark-skinned man in front of him.

David smiled and nodded, “Thank you. Goodbye to you too. I hope everything goes well.”

“Can I ask you a question David? And can you answer it honestly?”

David pushed his eyebrows together as he nodded, looking a little worried.

“Do you consider me a friend?” Blaine caught David’s glance with his own and David immediately looked uncomfortable, looking off to the side and then down at the ground.

Blaine nodded, “You don’t. Alright...” He turned to sit back into his chair and pick his coffee back up.

“It’s not that I don’t like you Blaine. It’s just...” David looked like he wanted to crawl out of his own skin at this point and Blaine felt guilty for putting him on the spot like that. “Friendships are two-way streets. We’ve been, I mean I’ve been happy to help you over the years because you’re a genuinely nice person, but you don’t know anything about me and haven’t been there to help when I needed it. I think if the circumstances were different we could’ve been friends....”

Blaine nods and takes a sip of his coffee, taking it in soberly. “You’re right. I’m sorry David. I hope if we meet again we can meet as friends though.” He stares into his coffee cup and watches the black liquid instead of meeting David’s gaze again.

David shifts in spot for a second and then takes the tray out, closing the door behind him.

“I’ve been wrong about so much....” he speaks into his cup and Cat mews from the bed to make sure Blaine knows he’s not speaking in the right direction if he intended to speak to Cat.

Blaine looks up and over to Cat, entertaining the conversation. "I was wrong about Kurt last night. Think that I could sleep after that? No... you saw me tossing and turning all night. I've never needed coffee in my life and here I am on my second cup now so I don't make myself out to look like a total ass at my meeting today."

"And even though I meant for it to be a way to further gain his trust, you know I actually did want to kiss him last night. I do want him to stay. I want David to stay too, but you heard what he said... I've been selfish. How am I supposed to think of what others want when I have been so concerned with myself for so long Cat?"

Another meow and Blaine pretends to understand, nodding in return. "I know Cat. I shouldn't be distracting myself with lust when I have so much else to worry about. But I've never allowed myself thoughts like that, and damn it he's just gorgeous and smart and perfect...."

Blaine sighs and stands up, going to the washbucket where he takes a razor and begins shaving off his beard growth. Another skill he's picked up in the last week. He used to have Thad shave him. He's hoping to avoid any nics today.

Suddenly Mercedes bursts into the room and Blaine jumps, dropping the razor into the basin as he looks towards the ebony warrior woman with wide eyes and a half shaved face.

"The Marshal wants you to go to him as soon as possible. There's news!" She states and then leaves just as quickly, slamming the door behind her.

Blaine takes a moment to ensure his heart is still in his chest and hasn't jumped out onto the floor. He looks into the mirror to make sure he didn't cut himself in shock and then digs the razor back out of the basin to finish his shave quickly.

Once he's dressed and has downed the rest of the coffee, he heads into the main hall where he finds Burt at the war table, as many of the troops call it. Finn, Noah, Rachel, and Kurt encircle the table already and Blaine goes into the space between Rachel and Noah.

Burt looks up at Blaine and smiles. "We have your sister Emily." he states simply and Blaine just looks back at Burt blankly.

Rachel bursts in at this point, unable to contain herself, "One of our allies, the Stormway monarch pretended to agree to negotiations with your father. Your little sister was delivered to him and he is sending her by carriage to us."

Blaine blinks a few times and looks at the map to locate Stormway. It's nearly two days away by carriage. Emily is only seven, what had she been sold into....? A thought crosses his mind and his head snaps up as he yells, "He will be furious to be deceived like that! What if he hurts or kills my other sisters in retaliation?!"

Burt opens his mouth to speak, taking a moment to formulate a response and Blaine realizes Burt hasn't ever heard him raise his voice, but before Burt can speak, Rachel again interjects.

"But if she knows where he is, we can find out and stop him from hurting them AND put a stop to all this nonsense!"

She has a point, Blaine admits to himself, but it's precarious. Still, to see Emily and make sure she's alright...

Kurt speaks softly when he does and looks directly at Blaine, "If she had been sold off to a monarch who had been willing to trade real troops for her, she'd also be in a bad situation. At least this way she's out of harms way completely."

Blaine can't help but hold onto Kurt's gaze with his own. How much did he think about that face last night as he tried to sleep. His heart sinks when he thinks about the rejection and Kurt turns his gaze away from him, looking back down to the map.

Blaine moves his head up and down robotically. The risks have already been calculated for him and his sister will be back. He will have to see who has taken over her room and make sure there's a place for her to stay.

"She won't be staying here for long," Burt notes as if he can read Blaine's thoughts. "It's too risky if we end up attacked. She might be seen as traitorous by your father if he returns. When she gets here we will question her and then send her to a friendly empire who is willing to take care of her and educate her until this business is complete."



Blaine shuts his eyes. In the last minute he has been given hope at not being so completely alone, and had it ripped away. He agrees with the reasoning, and the need to keep Emily safe, but the selfish part of him just wants her to stay.... To stay.

Kurt looks to Burt then and declares, "We need to go to our meeting father. Would you excuse us?"

Burt nods and Kurt walks around the table to join Blaine at his side, walking quietly back to the hallway where Kurt waves Mercedes off with a hand. He turns to Blaine and their eyes connect. "I'm sorry about yesterday Blaine..."

Blaine shakes his head, "No. It was foolish of me. I'm the one who's sorry."

Kurt lets loose a long sigh and then reaches for Blaine's hands, reminiscent of the night before. The soft flesh enclosing around his own rough skin. "It's not that I'm not attracted to you... but..."

"But my dad was responsible for your mother's death." Blaine says, cutting in before Kurt has the chance to continue.

Kurt looks surprised, his jaw dropping and his eyes widening. "No.... that isn't it...."

"Then what?! I'm not a complete moron here Kurt. I know I've been locked in the bloody castle and am completely ignorant of so much going on in the world, but I also know that the way you look at me is the same way I've seen lovers look at one another, or am I wrong about that too? Like everything else I -"

Blaine is cut off when Kurt moves forward and presses their lips together. He feels himself melting into it and all the anger and pain he was expressing fades away, replaced by warmth and desire. Blaine pushes into the kiss and can hear a little moan exit Kurt's mouth as they break for air before pressing back together hungrily.

Their hands pull apart from each other and Blaine wraps his arms around Kurt to pull him closer against his own body while Kurt's hands go up into Blaine's hair and finger the dark ringlets.

He doesn't know how long it's been or if anyone has even seen them, but when Kurt pulls back and whispers, "We need to go..." Blaine knows it hasn't been long enough. He takes a moment to capture the lustful look in Kurt's eyes and the flush that has covered his face. He doesn't remove his hands right away either, taking a moment to run his hands down Kurt's back before stepping back.

Kurt looks up to the ceiling and exhales while Blaine checks down both ends of the hall to make sure they haven't attracted an audience.

"Alright... " Kurt's finger is suddenly pointing at Blaine's face, "We will talk about this at supper. Not before. You have nobility to impress."

Blaine nods and the warmth in his face remains as he follows Kurt down the hall and down the stairs to the meeting chamber.

The meeting goes well, very well in fact, and Blaine is hopeful the rest will be so easy. Kurt seems satisfied with the results and they separate for lunch as Kurt cites a need to talk to some troops.

Blaine goes up to his room and notes that there is no guard in the hall. He isn't being watched. He looks back and forth and then goes down to the end of the hall and slips into his father's room.

Somehow has taken over this room as armor is laid on the table and the remnants of a meal is on the nightstand, but whomever it is isn't here right now. Blaine writes out a quick note on a napkin and pulls out the loose brick, tossing the napkin in and hoping it will reach the bottom of the passage, however far that might be. He puts the brick back in place and leaves the room, relieved to see there still isn't anyone in it.

When he returns to his room however, the relief is gone. He grabs his night bucket and vomits his breakfast into it, crawling into his bed weakly once he's completely voided himself.

Cat curls up beside him and offers him a purr.

"No Cat... I definitely don't deserve anyone's care now...."

## **17. Follow Me**

Kurt pressed his fingertips against his lips and closed his eyes, taking a moment to relive the kiss - his kiss. His first kiss.

He groaned to himself recalling Blaine's lips pressed against his own and his arms around his body. Kurt could have lost himself then and there, thank goodness they had that meeting planned and the need to be somewhere else.

Now he stood outside by one of the wells in the courtyard, having excused himself from talking with Rachel about her self proclaimed 'amazing' plans for new courier routes. He pulled up a bucket of well water and used the cool liquid to wash his face and cool himself off. He needed to.

"Hey dollface. What's got you all hot n' bothered?" a voice called behind him. He turned and his gaze went flat when he saw it was Santana. She was in full armor, as always. He often wondered if she slept in it or actually let her guard down when Brittany was in bed with her.

"Nothing Santana. I just needed to wash up." He turned back to the bucket and made a show of it to convince her, drawing up his sleeves and dipping his hands in the frigid water with a wince.

"Oh please." She leaned up against the well beside his position. "You might have taken up the job, but we all know I'm the best one around for reading people, and you have either been getting some booty call or have been thinking about some booty call."

Kurt made a nervous cough and glared at Santana, "YOU can't speak to a superior officer like that Santana. And it's not true. It's ridiculous.."

"Right." She returned the glare. "What's ridiculous is you getting so defensive about something you're claiming isn't true when if you weren't actually thinking about it you'd laugh it off and wouldn't turn so red in the cheeks."

Kurt blinked and put a hand to his cheeks, which confirmed how flushed they were. He looked over his shoulder and off to both sides, making sure they were out of earshot of anyone else. "I kissed someone this morning."

Santana looked at him straight on and then tossed her head back in a laugh. "That's it?! Oh my goodness, and here I thought you might have actually had something interesting to tell me."

Kurt slapped a hand to the side of the well, "Santana!" His voice was a growl as he replied to her, "Not all of us are libido led pretentious..." "

His hand was covered by Santana's palm before he could continue. "Save it. I'm actually happy for you. Maybe now you'll loosen up enough to get that stick out of your ass."

He slowly pushed her hand out of the way of his mouth, "Sorry to burst your bubble, but it won't be going any further than that kiss. I like the stick up my ass."

Another laugh erupted from Santana, "Oh my... I know you swing that way but I didn't think you were so kinky about it!"

Kurt responded with a roll of his eyes.

"That being said - why would you stop at a kiss? What makes you too good for a little passion?" Suddenly Santana's face went from mocking to serious and she looked at Kurt with dead serious eyes.

Kurt sighed and looked at his reflection in the water. Blaine had called him beautiful. Was he? He didn't see that in his face. "I'm not. He's just not right for me."

Santana rolled her own eyes now, "Not good enough for you?"

"No... he's.... very good." Kurt replied. Too good. Blaine was gorgeous and intelligent, and what he didn't know he learned quickly. He knew what to say and how to say it, and damn could he kiss. Not that Kurt had any frame of reference for that.

"Then what?! Don't leave me hanging here honey."

Kurt searched in himself to find the answer and finally dragged out a response, though as he said it, he recognized how weak of an excuse it was. "He needs to stay here...."

Santana was about to automatically reply when recognition hit her and her eyes lit up. She moved her face in closer to Kurt's and hissed, "You have the hots for the prince!"

Kurt winced and quickly looked around again to make sure they were still out of earshot of anyone. "Yes...do you understand now why it can't be?"

Santana let out yet another laugh and clapped her hands together. "Oh come on! He's a prince, you're kind of a prince. Brittany is going to love this!"

"You can't tell her!" Kurt shouted and then caught himself, lowering his voice back down, "And I'm not a prince."

Santana waved a dismissive hand, "Oh you would have been if Lima hadn't been overrun. Whatever, and you know I don't keep anything from Brittany. She'll want to help you plan the wedding anyhow."

Kurt groaned and moved his hands up to hide his face with them. "Santana... there will be no wedding. We kissed. That's it. And it was a mistake."

"Did it feel like a mistake?"

Kurt dropped the hands from his face and looked at Santana who had once again taken on her serious face. "What?"

"I said - Did. It. Feel. Like. A. Mistake?"

Kurt thought for a moment. He knew it was a mistake. He couldn't stay here. But how did it feel? "It felt... perfect." Kurt admitted.

"Well sweetheart, then I guess I have got to find me some armor with some lace on it so I look good as one of your bridesmaids." She winked and walked off, leaving Kurt exasperated. Why did all the women have to have the last words?!

"This is absolutely ridiculous... I need to fix this..." He spoke to no one in particular.

A couple hours later he was in his room, waiting for the inevitable knock on the door. It was time for supper and it was Blaine's turn to be the host in his room. Kurt had avoided going over there and now that supper had come and gone, he expected Blaine to come see what was going on. Kurt would have to tell him then.

The knock came and Kurt took in a breath and reminded himself to keep breathing. He went to the door and pulled it open slowly, a bouquet of fragrant flowers greeting him instead of a face.

"What...?" He asked and pulled the door open fully, finally seeing Blaine behind the oversized bouquet.

"I didn't know what kind of flowers you liked... I should have asked.... but I got this mix from the market this afternoon for you." Blaine spoke bashfully and held the bouquet out to Kurt who took them slowly, looking at the mix of blossoms and then at Blaine again.

"Quinn took me with her to get some supplies. She told me you liked to collect herbs and flowers like she does... for medicinal purposes... but I thought it might just be nice for you to have something beautiful to look at..." Blaine babbled on in Kurt's stunned silence.

"If you don't like them though, I'm sure there's someone we could give them too. I just wanted to get something for you and I didn't know what. The woman at the flower stand helped me decide. She said this mix included all the major flowers and told me what each of them symbolizes..."

Kurt glanced back down at the flowers, his hands trembling ever so slightly, "What..." his voice lowered, "What do they symbolize?"

Blaine beamed and pointed at each of the flowers in turn, "Friendship, purity, beauty, hope, and... ah... true love." He whispered the last one and Kurt looked down at the simple five petalled flower associated with that. It was the most simple of the bunch, but carried the weightiest meaning.

Kurt looked back up at Blaine, "They're beautiful... thank you." He looked around the room for somewhere to put them or something to put them in, settling on the empty glass he had used for a drink of water earlier. "No one has ever gotten me flowers before..." He tucked the flower stems into the glass and set it in the centre of the table.

Blaine kept by the door, “When you didn’t come for supper... I thought it might have been because you were busy... and then...” He turned his head away and Kurt realized that now he had rejected Blaine twice, and all the strength he had gathered to push him away this evening cracked under the weight of his heart.

He stepped over to Blaine and put a hand on each side of Blaine’s face, turning it towards his own and seeing the hint of water ready to break from his eyes. “I’m afraid.”

Blaine blinked and the tears in his eyes washed away, “What? Of what?”

“Of you. Of falling for you.” Kurt admitted quietly, his hands running down over the stubble starting to grow on Blaine’s cheeks as he moved his hands onto his shoulders.

Blaine’s mouth turned up into a slow, delicate smile. “Well can you not? I’d be a lot less of an emotional wreck right now if you could man up a little bit.”

They both erupted into laughter and Kurt took Blaine’s hand and led him to the table where they both sat.

“I had this whole wonderful speech planned out about how I couldn’t stay here and how you needed to be a strong independent leader and now I have nothing... You just had to go and get me flowers...” Kurt smiled and reached out to take one of Blaine’s hands.

Blaine laced his fingers with Kurt’s and smiled, “You told me the reason you could care for others is because your family took care of you. If that’s true then being an independent leader would be detrimental for me... I need someone to care about me and I need someone to care for.”

Kurt smiled softly and looked at their hands together, fitting together so perfectly. “I’m the one who’s supposed to be teaching you things....”

Blaine brushed his thumb over Kurt’s palm slowly.

Kurt continued, “You need to know that I need to go slowly... I obviously don’t know what I’m doing and it’s just not in my nature to jump headfirst into things without looking and planning.”

Blaine’s face lit up and he squeezed Kurt’s hand gently, “Does this mean you’ll stay?”

Kurt squeezed back, but his smile was more sombre, “It means I don’t know. I can’t promise you anything based on two weeks of knowing you.”

Blaine exhaled slowly and nodded, “Well it’s a good thing I got that flower that means hope then too...”

“I know it’s late, but since I’m clearly not following my usual plans anyhow tonight, perhaps we can sneak off to the kitchen and get a late supper?” Kurt suggested.

Blaine stood up and kept Kurt’s hand in his, “It would be my pleasure.”



## 18. Going Under

The next two days were blissful. Blaine had never enjoyed himself so much. Sure the other nobles he had met with weren't as warm and friendly as the first one. One of the nobles had even gone so far to pull a knife on him which Kurt quickly and skillfully disarmed before the man even knew what was going on. That meeting had ended early on official account of 'inability to reach a compromise'. It worried Kurt, noticeably so, but whenever they had a moment alone they found themselves relieving the stress with small, chaste kisses.

So even though he had his work cut out for him in impressing the nobility, and his father was still at large, Blaine was intoxicated with Kurt and that balanced out his world.

Now he was preparing for dinner. Rachel had stopped by earlier and let him know they could expect Emily to arrive at suppertime and Burt agreed to meet with her at dinner to reduce the intimidation she might feel in a more formal setting.

Blaine was checking to see what Trent was making in the kitchen, eagerly tasting the samples offered to him. He wanted Emily to have a good evening. He wanted his sister to feel safe. Blaine was going to introduce her to some of the women warriors and female specialists like Quinn and Rachel. He desperately wanted something more for her than an early marriage and spending her life in the shadow of a husband.

Burt entered and smiled warmly over to Blaine. "All ready for a family reunion?"

Blaine walked over to Burt and nodded. "So very much so. I had them set up the meeting chamber as great dinner table. We should have plenty of room for everyone there. I invited Quinn and Rachel as well. I would really like Emily to see women who use their voice."

Burt laughed at that and slapped a friendly hand down on Blaine's shoulder, "I don't know. Rachel uses her voice a little too much if you ask me." He glanced over his shoulder and then looked back at Blaine with a wink, "Just don't tell her or Finn that I said that though alright?"

Blaine laughed and nodded in agreement. He led Burt down to the meeting room where some of the servants were already setting dishes down in the centre of the table. Quinn was already there, along with Noah beside her. They stopped speaking as soon as Burt and Blaine entered and it was evident a private conversation had been interrupted.

“Evening gentlemen.” Quinn nodded to the both and Noah nodded as well without speaking.

As they took their seats, Blaine sitting at a centre spot at the table so Burt could take the head of the table position, Kurt, Rachel, and Finn entered, still engaged in a conversation.

“You can not tell me that is stylish in any realm. Do you have a mirror in your room at all?” Kurt spoke towards Rachel.

“I am merely expressing my unique personality through my attire and if you can not appreciate that then you are obviously not as open minded as I thought.” Rachel’s clothing looked fine in Blaine’s opinion, though a little bit grandmotherly for her age.

Finn was purposely not getting into the middle of it and went to greet his mother when she came in. Kurt threw his hands up as if to surrender to Rachel and immediately went to sit by Blaine which created a small, but noticeable rise in Burt’s brows.

They were keeping their romance to themselves so Kurt hadn’t told his father. Kurt kept telling Blaine that he wasn’t sure what was going to happen and he didn’t want anyone making a big deal of it or giving their input when he didn’t want it. Blaine had felt like a dirty secret that Kurt was keeping, but whenever Kurt looked at him, those beautiful glasz eyes begging him to understand, Blaine forgave him entirely and reconciled himself to be happy for what they did have.

Finn led his mother to sit between Burt and Quinn, while he took up the spoke on Finn’s other side. A place had purposely been left empty beside Blaine for Emily. Blaine felt the excitement in him welling up and was having a hard time staying still in his seat as they waited.

“Man... just relax. You look like a puppy that has to pee.” Noah stated, pointing a fork at Blaine as he spoke

Blaine didn’t get a chance to engage Noah in response as one of the soldiers came in, a female one with blond hair and a happy smile. She had Emily’s hand and led her into the room. “Here you are Emily. I hope you have a nice supper.”

“Thank you Brittany.” Kurt nodded to the woman and she left, Blaine noting the odd skip in her step.

“Oh Emily!” Blaine stood out of his seat and knelt to hug the small female version of himself with much longer locks of hair. She was stiff in his grasp and his heart sunk a little when she didn’t return the hug. She must just be tired... stressed... overwhelmed. That’s it.

He pulled back and stood up, pulling the chair out for her which she stiffly sat at and allowed him to push back in. Her amber eyes scanned the group and then looked back down at her plate.

Blaine sat back in his seat and turned his head to her, “Can I get anything for your plate?”

The rest of the group had started filling up their own plates, watching the interaction quietly. It seemed no one wanted to jump on her right away with questions, which Blaine was thankful for.

“No. I don’t want to eat the food of a traitor.” Her small voice was heavy with the implication.

Blaine blanched and sat back in his seat. She thought he was a traitor. She wasn’t happy to see him.

Carole cleared her throat and looked over at Emily, “How was your journey sweetheart?”

Emily continued to stare at the table in front of her, not making eye contact with anyone and not responding to the question. Everyone at the table was noticeably uncomfortable and glances were exchanged all around.

Blaine felt a hand under the table on his thigh. It took him a second to register that it was Kurt’s hand trying to reassure him. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He needed to make this right. He needed to try.

“Emily.. I know our father has probably said some things about me, and about these people... but they’re not the bad guys here. They’re here to help, and I want to do the right thing so I’m helping them.”

“You’re a traitor.”

“This is crazy...” Burt mumbled and looked down the table at Emily, “Listen to your brother. He knows what he’s talking about. He spent the past two days so happy to have you back with him and you’re treating him awfully for no reason.”

Once again, Emily refused to respond.

“Emily please. They’re going to want to know what you know about father and then you’re going to get the chance that so many of our sisters haven’t. You’re going to get a real education. You can be like Quinn or Carole here...” he gestured towards them but Emily didn’t look up, “and learn about the sciences, or like Rachel...” another unwatched gesture, “And become a master in speaking and writing. You could even become a warrior like the girl who brought you in here. You don’t have to be what father decides.”

Blaine was fully turned to Emily and had his hands out, palms up and open as he spoke to her. When she again refused to respond, Kurt put a hand on his shoulder and spoke over Blaine to Emily. “Your brother is trying to help you. Who are you trying to help?”

The girl turned her head up finally and glowered at Kurt, “Myself.”

Blaine opened his mouth but a squeeze on his shoulder stopped him as Kurt spoke again, “And how are you helping yourself?”

“By minding what I say around people who could use it against me.”

Kurt nodded and Blaine felt his brow furrow up. He wasn’t understanding what was going on here, but he knew it wasn’t good. Everyone at the table was watching silently and he wished now that this conversation had occurred in a private room with fewer people.

“That’s very wise... you won’t let yourself get hurt and will be able to claim innocence no matter which side wins.”

Emily shook her head, “No.”

Kurt stood out of his chair and pulled it over to Emily so he could sit beside her, “No?”

The small girl repeated. “No.”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand Emily. Can you tell me what you’re saying no to?”

“No. I’m not wise. No. I can’t claim innocence. If you don’t win then my father will kill me. I already picked my side.”

Blaine shook his head and spoke up, having been trying to let Kurt lead this unusual conversation, "Emily.... what are you talking about? What side?"

Emily's glance shifted from Kurt to Blaine and he could see the ice in her eyes, "Theirs. Not yours and fathers."

Kurt shook his head, "No Emily. Blaine is helping us. He's not on your father's side."

"Then why hasn't he told you where father is hiding?!" She stood straight up and pushed her chair back behind her, "HE KNOWS."

Suddenly the room went very still and all eyes were on Blaine. He could feel the heat crawl up the back of his neck. He looked to Kurt pleadingly, "I don't...."

Quinn looked to Carole who looked back. "Well I think I need to deal with some matters in the infirmary...." They left with Rachel also excusing herself and following after.

"You could have saved me and gotten me out of there - but you didn't. You're conspiring with him! You let him try and sell me to all sorts of disgusting people." Emily spat her words out loudly and angrily to Blaine.

Kurt looked lost in his own mind and Blaine looked back and forth between them. Finally he looked to Burt who seemed to be waiting, hands crossed in front of him and watching intently. When he caught Blaine's glance his eyebrows arched up and spoke.

"Noah.... can you escort Blaine to his room until further notice and put a guard on the door. I'm afraid we're going to have to cancel this dinner." Burt spoke, keeping his eyes connected with Blaine's the entire time.

Blaine felt his heart sink into his stomach and he stood up, letting himself walk in front of Noah in a stupefied state. He cast one glance back before leaving the room, catching sight of Kurt who had shut his eyes and was shaking his head down at his lap.

Blaine's heart formed another crack.

## **19. Leader of the Broken Hearts**

Kurt excused himself as soon as he and Burt were convinced they had gotten all the information out of Emily that she would give. She went to what had been her room and packed up some of her things, then left with Brittany and Santana who were taking her off to her new home for the time being.

He had found himself in the courtyard with his sword, stabbing at a dummy frantically. He was well aware that his father had come up behind him a few paces away but he kept lodging his sword into the dummy again and again and again, until finally he knelt to the ground, out of breath and sweat dripping from his brow onto the ground below him.

His father came up then and stood behind him, putting a hand on his shoulder. Kurt reached up and put his hand on his fathers, "I was foolish."

Burt sighed and gave Kurt's shoulder a small squeeze. "You've been fooling around with him...."

Kurt nodded and used his sword to push himself up to standing. "More than that. I was allowing myself to fall for him."

Burt obviously didn't want to respond to that and changed the subject. "You know, nothing she said actually incriminates him. We still need to talk to him."

Kurt rubbed the back of his arm over his forehead to clear a pool of the sweat. "I let my guard down and he took advantage of me."

The last thing Kurt expected at that moment was for his father to laugh, but he did. "Oh come on Kurt. We both know you better than that. NO ONE takes advantage of you. You wouldn't let them. Letting someone see that you have a heart is not being taken advantage of."

Kurt looked up at his dad, who despite all this was smiling at him. "What if he got information out of me that could hurt us?"

Burt patted him on the back, "If that's the case, then we're all at fault. We were all too willing to trust in him and put our hopes in him. We all weren't careful enough."

Kurt shook his head. "I'm sorry I let you down dad."

Burt had a hand on each of Kurt's shoulders rapidly and gave him a little shake. Kurt blinked and looked steadily at his father as he spoke. "You have not let me down. You have every right to want to be loved and to love someone. You want to know how I knew about you two?"

Kurt nodded slowly and Burt continued, "You have been genuinely HAPPY for the past two days at least. It hasn't been forced at all. I'm your dad. I may not be as good at reading people as you are, but I can at least read you. You gravitate towards him without any thought about it. I may have said that I wanted you to not fall for him before, but I was wrong."

Kurt spoke softly, "But what if he is giving his father information and using us?"

Burt shook his head, "Then we deal with it. But don't you dare feel guilty about it. And if he hasn't been supplying his father with information?"

Kurt smiled weakly, "Then I may need to reevaluate my retirement plans."

They both let out a small laugh and embraced. "Thanks dad." Kurt said, resting his head on his father's shoulder.

When they pulled back from each other, Burt looked at his son solemnly, "I suggest we wait to interrogate him until the morning. Let's get all our wits about us first. It's late anyhow. He's probably fallen asleep."

Kurt nodded his agreement and they walked into the castle, purposely going through the kitchen to get a small snack to make up for the aborted dinner. As they went up the stairs, Burt groaned and put a hand to his chest and started stumbling forward. Kurt caught him before he completely fell and yelled out, "MEDIC!"

"Oh dad. Oh dad....." Kurt held onto his father for dear life as several troops and a medic ran to him and Burt. Kurt clasped his hand around Burt's as he was put on a stretcher and walked with him to the infirmary, tears rolling down his face openly. It wasn't until Quinn ordered him back and then had him forcibly held back by two soldiers that Kurt was separated from his father. He allowed himself to be taken

to the main hall where he alternated between pacing the floor and sitting on a bench and tearing up. Finn had joined him and then Noah as well. The trio held their breath anytime anyone came out from the infirmary, but it wasn't until dawn that Quinn came out and spoke to them.

"He has had a heart attack. He's alive, but the toll on his body is big."

Kurt jumped up from where he had been sitting, "Can I see him?"

Quinn's lips pursed and she looked over to Carole who had now joined them.

Carole's face was streaked with tears, "He's in a coma.... his body is trying to repair itself... but we don't know when or... if.... he'll wake up."

Kurt made a pitiful cry and Quinn quickly moved forward to hold him as he cried into her shoulder. Finn was doing the same for his mother while Noah kept his head bowed in quiet thought.

They went to visit his father, who laid so still and quiet in a secluded cot. Kurt told him how much he meant to him and how he needed him there before going out into the main hall where everyone was now gathered, quietly working on their assignments. As he stepped in, he felt the eyes on him and the already low murmur of voices still to silence. He looked at Finn as he reached the war table and shook his head, "What are we going to do...?"

"What are YOU going to do you mean. Noah and I are great at hacking and slashing, but you're the one who needs to take over while he's recovering. That's why everyone is looking at you. They're expecting you to say something... make them feel like everything is alright."

Kurt's eyes rounded with shock as he looked up at Finn. The idea was ridiculous. He couldn't replace his father, even if it was temporary.

Noah nodded to him across the table, "It's you man. Whether you like it or not."

Kurt put his palms flat on the table and leaned over it, taking a breath and trying to keep himself together. "I think you're both selling yourself short...."

Finn reached out to put a hand on Kurt's back, "No. We just know how much more you're worth. You need to lead."



Kurt stuffed his emotions down within him. With everything that had happened in the past twelve hours, pretending to be commanding would be easy.

He went to the stairs and took a few steps up, turning to face the sea of faces who were watching him the entire time quietly.

“My father, Marshal Hummel, had a heart attack last night. He is in recovery, but until he is ready to lead us again, I will be stepping into his shoes. I know I have a lot to live up to, but I also know how dedicated, and passionate all of you are. I know you will help me, and in turn, I will do whatever I can to help you.”

A symphony of clapping erupted throughout the hall and everyone resumed their work with more energy than they had previously. Kurt felt a couple hands pat him on the back and he turned to Noah and Finn.

“That was perfect man.” Finn nodded.

“Now I suppose comes the time for some dirty work....” Kurt sighed and continued up the stairs, walking down the hall and dismissing Mercedes.

He opened the door without knocking or calling ahead and found Blaine inside, awake and sitting on the edge of his bed. His clothing the same as the night before. The gorgeous dark-haired angel looked up at him with eyes ringed in dark circles and murmured, “Kurt...”

Kurt didn’t have to try to be cold. Everything that had happened had drained him of any emotion at all.

“Get up. We’re sparring now.”

Blaine choked back a breath and got to his feet shakily Kurt turned and walked out, Blaine on his heels, “Kurt, please, I didn’t...”

“Not here. Outside.” Kurt asserted as he kept up a quick walk and Blaine bowed his head and followed him out quietly, into the training area.

Kurt dismissed all the troops who were keeping up their skills by practicing in the area and pulled a sword from the rack, handing it to Blaine. He drew his own sword and stood across from Blaine, waiting for him to get into a ready position.

Blaine tested the weight of the sword in his hand and then crouched, looking to Kurt and waiting for him, "I didn't get any sleep last night... you'll have me outmatched based on that alone."

Kurt huffed, "I didn't sleep either."

With that Kurt jabbed forward and Blaine jumped back, swinging at Kurt. Their swords crossed in an angry clang and they pulled them away from one another, circling each other and striking out, each of them matching the other. Blaine's skill was clean, finessed, and trained. Each movement Kurt made resulted in a very calculated counter action by Blaine. Kurt on the other hand had no formal training. His training had been the battlegrounds. His arm moved on its own with it's own instinct and memory separate from Kurt's mind.

"Aren't you going to ask me?!" Blaine shouted, directing a swipe at Kurt's midsection.

Kurt bounced Blaine's sword off his own and hopped back, bracing himself for the next swing, "I trusted you!"

Blaine gasped and his eyes fell over Kurt, his eyes devising a plan. "You still can!" He made another swing and Kurt blocked it easily.

Kurt's body ached from the tension. He could feel a cramp in his thigh, and his hair was quickly becoming plastered against his head once again from sweat. He wasn't going to let Blaine win this though. "How? You haven't been truthful with us."

Blaine took a couple steps back to give himself some space as he took a moment to spoke, "I told you I don't know where my father is. I don't know why she thinks that."

Kurt took advantage of the situation and rushed forward, drawing his sword against Blaine's who fell under him with Kurt straddled over him as they fell together into the dirt. "Then tell me about the passages."

Blaine gasped, first with the shock of the impact and then with the realization. "The.. they're under the castle...." Each of them was still pressing their sword against the other. Kurt was not wearing armor and neither was Blaine, any wounds they might get from this could be lethal.

"And?" Kurt growled down. The sweat from his face was dripping onto Blaine and mixing with his sweat.

“And what?! They were used by kings from long ago to send messages out of the kingdom and bring whores in!” Blaine put both hands on the hilt of his sword, trying to increase the strength he could use against Kurt.

Kurt searched Blaine’s eyes with his own. Watching as he spoke. He had to grunt as the force against him was increased and he pulled a leg up and hooked it around one of Blaine’s arms to force it away from the sword. He may not have the power of Noah or Finn, but he was agile.

Blaine gasped and his sword clattered onto the dirt as his hand was jerked away, leaving him exposed to Kurt’s sword. Kurt touched the edge of his sword to the side of Blaine’s neck, “A win for me. Now tell me truthfully. Did you know your father was under the castle this entire time?”

Blaine’s eyes rounded in surprise. He made a small gasp and shook his head up at Kurt who continued to look into his eyes for signs of deception. “No... oh god.... it never occurred to me that anyone could be down there.”

Kurt threw his sword to the side and held his head over Blaine’s “You’re going to take a bath and change your clothes. You stink. You will come to the war table as soon as you’re ready.”

Blaine shut his eyes and murmured curses to himself for his idiocy while Kurt stood up and walked away. He also needed a bath and a moment alone with his thoughts.

## **20. Bricks**

Blaine approached the war table nervously, finding it surrounded by Kurt, Finn, Noah, Puck, and a couple soldiers he didn't know. The hall was bustling more so than usual and everyone seemed on edge.

"Where's Burt?" he asked as he came to the table. Kurt looked up at him and then looked back down at a new map laid out on top of the geographical map. It looked like a mess of random lines.

Finn turned to Blaine, "He had a heart attack last night. He's recovering. Kurt's in charge."

Blaine felt like he received a punch to the gut and choked out a feeble, "S-sorry. I didn't know."

"Yah well, it's been a wonderful night of surprises for us all." Noah pitched in and put a hand on the paper everyone was examining, "This look familiar?"

Blaine shook his head because it honestly didn't.

An dark skin woman wearing full armor came up beside him and went right past his comfort zone as she went nose to nose with him. Blaine tried to hold his ground, but was so tired and feeling so defeated that he didn't know how long he could stay in place.

"Look here pumpkin. I lost two friends in that maze last night and you're honestly telling me that you have no idea what it is?"

"No Unique he actually doesn't." Kurt's voice snapped and the woman pulled back, though kept an angry stare on Blaine.

"Those are the maps we have made, so far, of the tunnels under the castle. When we talked to Emily last night she told us that your family has been hiding right under us the entire time. She described the exit she came through when she was shipped out in trade and we found it. We don't actually know if our troops are lost in there, or dead, because it's an awful maze with booby traps."

Blaine looked down at the paper and followed all the interwoven lines. He trembled a little and sunk into the chair beside him at the table. "I'm so sorry... I was never privy to the information... I always thought they were just a short and linear little set of passages for quick access. I didn't know they were this extensive."

Finn tapped at one of the random connections on the paper, "We're going to send squad six in and have them disperse in a star formation. We should be able to find out more that way."

Rachel and Finn began talking about the strategy for fully mapping the labyrinth below and Noah and Mercedes started talking about it as well. Blaine remained silent and watched Kurt. The last night had been awful. He hadn't slept and became sick with worry. He was convinced that Emily was going to have him incriminated with something after her outburst. He thought he would be executed, and it wouldn't be the worst of it. He thought his sister hated him, and he thought Kurt did too. He still wasn't sure if Kurt didn't hate him. Blaine had been a total fool. He had never thought of the passages before and it made so much sense. There would be no better place to launch an attack than from below.

He was still lost in thought when Kurt's eyes caught his own and they found themselves looking at one another, unspoken questions between them. Blaine hoped Kurt would see the hope in his eyes now.

When he thought of sparring with Kurt before today, he thought of it in a playful, amorous manner. This morning had been rough and completely unromantic. Kurt had used sparring to make sure Blaine couldn't focus on controlling his expressions in order to make him completely honest, he knew it. It didn't matter though, Blaine would have been honest anyhow. All he had to hide was that he was an idiot - and it wasn't a secret anymore either. But wait...

Blaine looked at Kurt and snapped, "There's a drop point."

Everyone stopped speaking and looked at Blaine, who tried to scan over the map, "I'm not sure where it drops on here... but it's in my father's room. Cooper showed it to me. It drops into the passages somewhere. I thought it was just like a pick up point but if the passages are really so big, then maybe there's a major point where it falls."

"Show us." Kurt said coolly.

After showing them the drop point with the loose brick in his father's room, Blaine returned to his room where he spent the rest of the day. He tried to read but couldn't focus. He instead found himself looking out the window and watching the movements of people below. Blaine could have napped, he certainly needed it, but his mind was still a flurry of activity and thoughts, most unwelcome.

As the sky turned from blue to orange to black, he remained in place, no longer really looking at anything in particular, but looking past it.

He heard the door open behind him and then close. He didn't look up. He didn't need to. Kurt smelled of lilacs and mint.

"Can we have dinner together please?"

Blaine turned and looked to Kurt. Kurt held a tray in his hand filled with random foods from the kitchen. Blaine hadn't eaten at all today and his stomach gave him away with a loud growl.

"Alright." He went to sit at the table. He still felt defeated, and not because Kurt had beaten him in swordfighting in the morning.

Kurt set the tray down but didn't go to sit across from him. He went around the table and crouched in front of Blaine, now looking up into his eyes "Please forgive me..."

Blaine took in a shaky breath and moved a hand out to run down Kurt's cheek, "You didn't do anything... I should have known. I should have told you about them."

Kurt rested his cheek against Blaine's hand and exhaled softly, "No. Not for that. For not trusting you."

Blaine moved his other hand out and ran the fingers of that hand over Kurt's soft straight locks of hair. "Can we just put it all past us? It's been a really awful night and day and now that you're here... all I want to do is be close to you."

Kurt shut his eyes and nodded, "I can agree to that."

Blaine ran his fingers in and out of Kurt's hair, "How's your dad?"

With that, Kurt lost all composure and burst into tears. Blaine dropped from the chair and knelt on the floor, wrapping his arms around Kurt and rubbing his back. Kurt became unwound, sobbing with great heaves into Blaine's chest. "It's going to be okay, it's going to be okay." Blaine repeated over and over, rocking Kurt gently and laying soft kisses to the top of his head.

When Kurt had spent all of his tears, his chest trembled and he burrowed as much as he could into Blaine's arms, "It's not going to be okay. I can't run an army. I can't solve this. I can't imagine my life without my dad."

"It will, you are, and you can." Blaine took Kurt's chin in his hand and tipped his head back so that Kurt was looking up at him, "Your dad will be fine. He wouldn't leave you behind like this."

"You can't know that..." Kurt's voice was cracking as he spoke and even though he had used up his sobs, tears still were streaking down his face.

Blaine brushed the tears away with his thumb. "I'll help you. I know you probably don't want my help given that I'm clearly a fool when it comes to the real world, but I won't let you deal with this alone."

Kurt sniffled and then meekly asked, "Am I too gross right now to be kissed?"

Blaine smiled and suddenly all was right with the world again. Kurt's face was red and splotchy, sticky with tears and probably some snot too, but he looked beautiful to Blaine. He pressed his lips to Kurt's gently and after a moment pulled back away to breathe.

Kurt let out a deep exhale and rested his head on Blaine's shoulder. "Before his heart attack, we were talking about you..."

Blaine flinched, "It couldn't have been good..."

Kurt rubbed his fingers along the small of Blaine's back, "Actually, he suggested that if you were really just as naive as you've been proven to be today, then I should just let myself fall for you."

Blaine suddenly loved Burt. No wonder that man inspired his troops so well. "Well I guess I'm the luckiest fool alive then."

Kurt sniffled. "Just don't forget it."

Blaine let out a small chuckle and pressed another kiss to the top of Kurt's head.

Kurt pushed himself away after that and went to the wash basin, leaving Blaine knelt on the floor. "I've probably already stayed too long. We still haven't figured out those passages and we can't let them get the edge on us with them."

Blaine stood up and walked over to Kurt as he washed his face off. "You need to rest. You were up all night...."

Kurt shook his head and looked sadly at Blaine, "I would love to stay and have a relaxing dinner with you and maybe even suggest that you, Cat, and I all cuddle in the bed where we might happen to fall asleep together... but when you're a leader, you don't live for yourself."

Blaine frowned and nodded, "Then I'll stay up with you."

Kurt put a hand on top of Blaine's and squeezed gently. "There's going to be those who are still suspicious of you despite my efforts to put them at ease. I need you to sleep so you can be your usual charming self tomorrow and convince them of your good nature."

Blaine tugged Kurt's hand and Kurt along with it, meeting their lips together, which resulted in the most erotic whimper out of Kurt. "Please..."

"For you. Anything and the world." Blaine replied once the kiss was broken.

Kurt left, taking a danish with him from the ignored tray of food. Blaine had a quiet and brief supper, then curled up in his bed with Cat who had been especially antisocial in the past day and now seemed to want to make up for it.

That night, Blaine had good dreams.



## 21. Miracles

Kurt kept a fairly regimented schedule over the course of the week. In the morning he would grab something from the kitchen and go check on his father, always ensuring the Quinn was doing everything she could. He would then get the morning reports from all the generals and captains and plan out the objectives of the day before checking in with different assignment stations to see if they had any concerns or ideas. At lunch he took whatever was brought to him to eat and worked on writing letters to allies in nearby towns to appeal for troop support and offer trade for supplies. After lunch he was joined by Blaine and they would have formal meetings with nobles as well as citizens who wanted to bring their concerns to his attention. By supper he was again meeting with the generals and captains to determine how the day had gone and determine how they needed to alter strategy. By the time he got to his room, it was often well after dark.

He had become hooked on coffee. He had a cup of it on him at all times.

This evening he dragged himself into his room to find Blaine asleep in his bed. It looked as though he had been sitting up and reading a book waiting for Kurt to return and nodded off, the book resting on his chest with his hands still clutching it. Blaine had his head rested against the headboard and was making little snores. Kurt smiled and pulled off his boots as quietly as he could before crawling into the bed and very carefully pulling the book out of Blaine's hands. *The Wager of Kings* it read on the cover. Kurt set it on the nightstand, making a mental note to ask Blaine about its contents later.

Kurt crawled over Blaine so he was over top of him, but not in physical contact. He watched him breathe, every so often a little grunt and snort so delightfully escaping him. Kurt had insisted that Blaine get a regular sleep, if for no other reason than so Kurt had one less thing to worry about. He leaned down and brushed his lips against Blaine's after having taken time to capture the sight of him resting.

"Mmm..." Blaine pressed into the kiss and rumbled gently as he awoke.

"You looked so peaceful. I hate to wake you." Kurt said after pulling his head away.

Blaine dopily smiled up at Kurt, "Well that's the best way to wake up.." He wrapped his arms around Kurt and with an unexpected burst of energy, Blaine had rolled them both over so Blaine was now looking down at Kurt.

A small gasp escaped Kurt's lips, followed by a chuckle. "Come on now... I just want to sleep and you were taking up so much of the bed space."

Blaine murmured something incomprehensible as he moved his mouth in small kisses up Kurt's neck to the bottom of his ear, causing Kurt to moan and whimper as his body trembled without his consent.

"Blaine..." he gasped as Blaine nuzzled his neck and simultaneously nibbled his earlobe, "Please. Too much..."

Blaine huffed and rolled himself back off of Kurt. "Well you can't straddle me like that and wake me with a kiss and expect me to let that go."

Kurt chuckled and turned to rest his head on Blaine's chest where a hand was wrapped around him. "Were you waiting long?"

Blaine rubbed his hand up and down Kurt's back, "Since supper... but it's alright. I needed out of my room. Cat tore up a pillow while we were at meetings today."

Kurt laughed and then snuggled himself closer into Blaine, "You have the most ridiculous problems you know."

Blaine leaned his head over to press a kiss to Kurt's forehead, "I know. Now I want to hear about yours. Get them out so you can sleep."

Kurt sighed. Blaine had quickly become the one person Kurt could release the day's stress on and he found he needed that release in order to fall asleep. He hated having to burden Blaine with the problems, but Blaine already knew most, if not all, of what was going on. When Kurt was telling him it though, it was find his own mindset, his own frustrations about the situation coming out. It was venting.

"Well with several more troops getting lost below, I couldn't risk losing anyone else. Noah and Finn think we should still be searching the passages... caverns more like it if you ask me.... But I made the call today.

We're keeping guards at all the entrances we know about and no one is going in. At least we'll know if they go out though..."

A hand brushed over Kurt's cheek and he shut his eyes, enjoying the contact. If Santana was here he would tell her that he had left his stick at the door.

"It's the right call. For all we know my father has them captured or worse. If he got those troops, he would do anything to get information out of them..." Blaine spoke softly and Kurt wondered, as he regularly did now, how he would have turned out if his father was the spawn of a demon and not the hero he did have.

"I can't believe how those men treated you today Blaine. It's as if they don't see you there...." Kurt was talking about how the nobles had ganged up on Blaine in a meeting earlier today, citing that even if he got the city out of ruins and fixed all the problems, there was no way they could ever trust him.

Kurt looked up at Blaine who was biting his lower lip gently. For as much as Blaine tried, he would have a lifetime of trying to prove himself to people because of his father. "Some of the nobles spoke to me later about hiring on some of our troops permanently to stay in the city and train new soldiers for Westerville."

Blaine seemed thankful for the change of topic, "That makes sense. Your troops are the best they've probably ever seen and some of your people might like to be able to stay in one place after all the fighting they've done and places they've been."

Kurt nodded against Blaine's chest, "I thought so too. I let my troops make their own decisions though. Some of them actually love the road and the fight.

"Do you?" Blaine asked quietly.

Kurt lifted a hand and began tracing it along Blaine's stomach lazily, "No. I never have."

"Then why have you been at it so long?"

Kurt sighed and let his hand rest on Blaine's hard belly, "For my dad. When my mother died, he wanted to fight to get the anger out of him. He kept at it because he was good at it and it gave him a purpose. I toughened up for him, to help him."

“But what about you? What do you want?”

Kurt thought for a moment. What he thought he had wanted didn't seem right anymore and what he felt he wanted couldn't be right. “I don't know.”

Blaine asked, as he did every night, and Kurt felt himself bracing for it as it came out of his lips, “Do you think you could want to stay here with me?”

Another sigh expelled from Kurt and he lifted his head to look steadily at Blaine, “You're nothing if not persistent you know that?”

Blaine reached up and laid a hand on Kurt's cheek tenderly, “And you always deflect the question.”

Kurt rested his head against Blaine's hand and kept his eyes on Blaine, “Please... let's just sleep. I need to get my rest and I need you to keep me warm.”

Blaine nodded and slipped out from under Kurt to take off his own boots and belt before crawling back into the bed with Kurt.

“You know, when we met, I never would have figured that you were as much of a snuggle whore as you are.” Blaine teased as he pulled a blanket up over them.

“When we met, I never would have figured I would ever let you in my bed.” Kurt responded and pulled himself against Blaine who in turn wrapped his arms around him.

It didn't take long for Blaine to fall back asleep, if there was one thing Kurt had learned about him it was that Blaine could probably fall asleep in a thunderstorm, under the rain if he wanted to. They had taken to sleeping together in the past few days, but it had been completely chaste and fairly innocent, not including the stolen kisses and tender touches. Kurt was well aware that he had his guard down around Blaine, but still never spoke about anything that Blaine didn't know about, or wouldn't hear about anyhow. He trusted Blaine, but he knew that some individuals wouldn't trust Blaine with certain information so he never volunteered it around Blaine.

Besides, he never really wanted to linger on the drudgery of the day once he got the frustrations out of his system. More and more Kurt wanted to talk about the future, and about everything else besides the

situation. The problem was is that he didn't know what kind of future he wanted and Blaine was making it increasingly difficult to decide.

He didn't want to fight anymore once this was done. He knew this with conviction. He couldn't keep doing it, keep pretending, keep everything pushed down inside him to be someone he didn't really like. But to stay with Blaine meant keeping up part of that facade, and as much as he wanted Blaine he knew it would kill him to keep up the image of a leader he had been trying to present. Besides, he had only known him for a few weeks. You couldn't base a lifetime off that right?

A knock came at the door, "Sir!"

Blaine whimpered his eyes opened blearily. Kurt sat himself up, "What is it? Finn is supposed to be covering all problems right now."

Jake opened the door and bowed lowly, "Sorry sir! I thought you'd want to know! Your dad is awake!"

Kurt nearly jumped out of the bed and without going for his boots was out the door, leaving Jake and Blaine behind him as he ran through the hall, down the stairs, and to the infirmary.

He had to grab the wall to make sure he turned with the speed he was going and nearly hit Quinn in the process. She just smiled and held a cup of fresh coffee out to him.

Kurt let a small pant out and took the cup, "Thank you." He moved at a much more decent speed to his dad's bed where Carole was there, talking to Burt and holding his hand.

Kurt set down his coffee on the stand beside the bed and sat on Burt's other side, taking his hand, "Oh dad."

Burt turned his head to look at Kurt and smiled weakly, "Hey son. I hear you've had a fun week."

Kurt let loose a little laugh and some tears escaped without his permission. "I was so worried..."

Carole stood up and gave Burt's hand a squeeze, "I'll be back." she whispered and left Kurt and his dad alone.

Burt squeezed Kurt's hand and Kurt noted that his grasp wasn't as strong as he was used to. "I'm fine son. Quinn says I'll be good as new with some rest and good food."

Blaine at this point arrived and bowed his head to Burt, "I'm very glad to see you awake sir."

Burt looked down his bed at Blaine and Kurt gave his dad's hand a gentle squeeze.

"I'm glad to see you're not actually a traitor." Burt chuckled and Kurt and Blaine joined in.

"I'll leave you two to talk, but I wanted to let you know that I hope to see you out and around soon." Blaine smiled and as soon as he had arrived, had left.

Burt's eyebrows lifted and he looked to Kurt, "So should I start saying my goodbyes now?"

Kurt blinked, "What?! Dad you're fine. You just said so yourself."

Burt laughed and shook his head, "Oh no. That's not what I meant. If I have anything to say about it then the world will be stuck with Burt Hummel for a good long time yet. I meant saying goodbye to you. I saw how you looked at him when he came in. You're absolutely smitten."

Kurt shot his dad a steeled glance, "First of all... smitten is a word that sounds absolutely ridiculous out of your mouth. Secondly, yes I do like him... but I don't think I can stay here and play politics all the time. I have no idea how you do it."

"Lots and lots of coffee son...."

And they both laughed.

## **22. Better Off**

Blaine pressed fingers against each of his temples and rubbed them in, trying to alleviate the ache growing in his head.

“This is unacceptable! I will not accept an Anderson in a position of leadership in Westerville. What am I supposed to tell my daughter when she asks what the difference is between this curly haired Anderson and the last one?!” Noblewoman Sue Sylvester spoke over voice over other nobles. The only female member of the nobility and the one with the biggest voice.

Kurt snapped back, “He is not the same! His father left him behind for a reason! They do not share the same views!” He stood beside Blaine’s chair at the table where he and the most prominent of the nobility were meeting to discuss the same situation for the umteenth time. The transition of leadership to Blaine.

“This is absolutely ridiculous porcelain boy! I demand to speak to your father!” Sue snarled and pointed back at Kurt.

“He will be back on duty tomorrow. Until then you are stuck with me, and may I also remind you that once the threat of Elias Anderon’s army is dealt with, it will be Blaine in charge. We will be gone.” Kurt’s hands were balled into fists and Blaine knew he had let Kurt fight for him for too long now and spoke up.

“What am I supposed to do to prove to you that I’m worthy of taking over the throne and caring for the citizens of Westerville?”

Different ideas were shouted in the room. Did the nobility have any sense of volume control?

“Kill yourself!”

“Marriage alliance!”

“Kill your father!”

Blaine narrowed his brows and looked down the table, slamming a fist on the table, “Enough!”

It was the first time he had raised his own voice in one of these meetings and the stunned silence that it resulted in was exactly what he wanted.

“I will not be killing myself - that would leave you with no one. I wasn’t born for the throne, I’m not the first born, but since none of you will rise to the occasion, I am your best bet. A marriage alliance is out of the question. I will not have the interests of another nation weighing us down when we need to focus on restoring our own people to prosperity, which is exactly what an alliance would entail. And don’t you think I would deal with my father if he had the balls to show himself?”

His rant was met with more silence and the nobles looking between each other, having silent conversations until Sue Sylvester spoke again, though to her credit, a lot more calmly this time.

“I will be petitioning Marshal Hummel tomorrow. We have collected a fund between all of us to keep his army here. We want him to remain in charge.”

Blaine sighed and leaned back in his seat. “Fine. We will discuss this tomorrow since we’re, once again, not going to find any resolution today.”

The nobles left in rapid succession, leaving Kurt and Blaine alone in the meeting chamber.

“At least if your father agrees to stay there’s a better shot at convincing you to stay.” Blaine said quietly, mournfully. As their relationship had progressed, so too had the contention over what would happen when it was time for the army to depart. Kurt had given him no commitment and still spoke as if he would be going, much to Blaine’s heartbreak.

Kurt sat himself down in the chair closest to Blaine and reached to take his hand in both of his. “You know my father will never agree to staying. He wants to retire with Carole more than anything now. His brush with death has left him even more adamant about that.”

Blaine nodded. He knew. It was a futile hope.

“I can’t believe they suggested that you kill yourself....” Kurt added, shaking his head in disbelief.

“I am a representation of everything they’ve grown to hate. It doesn’t help that I look like him.”



Kurt lifted Blaine's hand to his mouth and left a small kiss on his palm. "You look nothing like him. Your eyes carry hope, and innocence, and joy. In all the pictures I've seen of him, he has hate in his eyes. He has frown lines and you have laugh lines."

Blaine murmured, "Do you think... if we could convince Cooper that he could come back and rule instead? Instead of me? Then I could go with you..."

Kurt dragged his chair closer to Blaine using his feet, released his hand, and put his hand on Blaine's shoulders. "You see how you're treated by the nobility? Imagine how it would be for Cooper who fled with your father. Cooper may not get out of this alive given his choices."

Blaine made a small whimper and Kurt immediately leaned forward to kiss him and wrap his arms around his shoulders. He was doomed to this life, this existence of living yet not. In the past few weeks he had experience more than he had in the entirety of his life. He felt more real, more alive. However that came with the politics and juggling of everyone else's interests above his own.

"I'm sorry." Kurt stood and reached out for Blaine's hand which Blaine gave him and stood up beside him. "Let's go have supper. This is my last day of having to be the big boss and I'm more than ready for it to end."

Blaine was led by Kurt out of the room and through all the halls and stairs to Blaine's room where supper had just been dropped off on his table. Cat was also on the table, trying to paw off the serving tray cover and steal some of the food within.

"Get down Cat!" Blaine shooed Cat down with his hand and stepped ahead of Kurt to pull out his chair.

Kurt smiled and sat, "My gentleman."

Blaine pushed in the chair and went to his own seat, "Always."

They ate, quietly. Blaine avoiding asking Kurt about staying again and Kurt avoiding saying anything that might upset Blaine further. Finally Kurt did speak up.

"Your brother's armies are still scattered, although all are quite close. They're either not united or their intent is to hit us on all sides."

Blaine nodded and mused, "Maybe they know ways into the passages that we don't."

"I thought only your dad and Cooper knew the mappings of the tunnels." Kurt asked, pushing his plate away as he finished off his meal.

"I thought I knew a lot of things before. What I've learned is that I don't know much of anything." Blaine responded and took a sip of his cider as he finished his own meal.

Kurt put his elbows up on the table and rested his head in his propped up hands as he smiled at Blaine, "Like what?"

Blaine looked at Kurt lovingly. He wanted to say how much Kurt meant to him, how much he loved him and also hated him for planning to go. He didn't dare say anything because he didn't want to give up that last bit knowing that it wouldn't change anything.

"Just... nothing. I'm tired. I think I may go to bed early tonight."

Kurt stood up and covered the remnants of their meal with the lid of the tray. "Well then come on. I'll tuck you in. I'm going to see my father and Quinn yet before I come to bed and make sure he's really ready to come back to duty."

Blaine chuckled and went about pulling his boots off and setting them neatly by his bed. "Tuck me in? What am I? A child?"

Kurt came up behind him, wrapping his arms around his waist and kissing the back of his neck. "Sometimes, but I'm sure you're a man where it counts."

Blaine released something of a mixture between a chuckle and a moan. "Kurt... you're such a tease."

He felt Kurt's head rest against his back and Blaine wrapped his arms over Kurt's hands. They stood there a moment when Kurt whispered, "I'd better go... I'll be back when I'm done, but don't stay up for me." He pulled away and Blaine felt immediately incomplete without the contact.

He sighed and sat on the edge of the bed to unbuckle his belt and pull it off as Kurt left the room. Their intimacy hadn't really progressed but Blaine was alright with it in actuality. He didn't want to give, or take, something more only to have it taken away later. He was having a difficult enough time coming to

terms with Kurt's eventual departure. He wasn't sure he would be able to keep it together if they become more intimate and then Kurt left.

Blaine leaned over to blow out the candle beside his bed, leaving only the fireplace for light. He pulled the covers up over him and drifted off, hoping that Kurt would wake him when he came back.

A touch did wake him and Blaine tried to stretch but found he could not fully move his legs or feet. Panic swept over him and he fully opened his eyes, greeted with the sight of Sebastian staring down over him. "Wakey wakey pretty little prince."

Blaine tried to yell for help but found his mouth was taped over. How the hell had they done this while he was sleeping?! He was a heavy sleeper but not that heavy! He struggled against the bindings on his feet and hands. He was still in his bed, but couldn't move or talk.

"Oh no, no, no. We don't want to have to use the ether again!" Blaine looked to his other side and saw Hunter there, waving a rag close to him. Well that explained it.

Blaine calmed himself a little, not wanting to be put under if they were going to do something. How the hell did they get in? Had they overtaken the castle while he slept? Was Kurt alright?

Blaine wasn't given much time to worry because he was suddenly overtaken by a sharp pain in his abdomen as Hunter punched him. "The king didn't like your message little prince."

Sebastian grabbed Blaine's hair and stared down at him, "So we're here to send a message back." A slap against his face, followed by another punch to his stomach.

Blaine tried to gag, but the tape over his mouth limited the air he could control. His eyes were watering and he was desperately trying to figure a way out of this between the radiations of pain that were going through him.

Hunter and Sebastian took turns hitting and eventually Blaine lost count. He was just trying to stay conscious now. That was his purpose now. He needed to know if Kurt was alright.

“Not everyday that you get an order from a king to kill a prince. We need to make this last.” one of them whispered.

Blaine’s eyes went as wide as they could, both of them already swelling from punches received. He was going to die here, in his bed, and Kurt would never know how he felt. His father would retake everything and everything he had been working towards would be undone.... and Kurt. All he could think of was Kurt.

Suddenly the quiet chuckles of Hunter and Sebastian were interrupted by a loud yowl and a hiss. Someone screamed and the other yelled out. Blaine hadn’t realized how quietly they had been beating him until he heard them fight off something he couldn’t see. He heard a flurry of feet run into the room and more screams and yelling as he faded into black.

## **23. Give Me Novacaine**

Kurt heard the screaming and the clash of swords as he was walking back to his room. He drew his sword and ran, not knowing what he was about to face or who. Voices both familiar and unfamiliar were yelling at one another. He could hear Jake yell to hold someone down and Finn cry out for support.

He followed the voices which led him into Blaine's room and fear shot through him. Jake was holding down a man whose face with bleeding from parallel scratches running across it, who was flailing under him trying to escape. Finn was toe to toe with another man, swords slashing at one another. And Blaine, dear Blaine, was a bloody, swollen mess on the bed. He was just lying there and Kurt felt panic run through him as he thought the worst. Blaine was dead.

Kurt let out a scream and lunged forward with his own sword at the man Finn was fighting who was barely able to counter the attack with his sword. Finn took advantage of the block and shoved himself forward into the open space left by the counter and the man fell to the floor.

Kurt wasted no time and jumped on top of the man, throwing his sword away and grabbing the man by the collar, "WHO ARE YOU?! WHY DID YOU DO THIS?!"

A laugh escaped Blaine's assailant, "A message from the king. This is what will happen to you all if you stay here."

Fury overtook Kurt and his mind went foggy as he slammed the man's head back onto the floor and starting laying punches to his face. Finn had to pull him off and have several soldiers hold him at bar who had answered the call for support.

Kurt crumpled to the floor and began sobbing as soon as his senses came back to him and as Mercedes knelt down beside him and reached over to draw him to her, he pulled away, "No... no.." She knelt there for a moment, having retracted her hand and then stood up and just stayed and watched over him.

The room had filled up with troops and medics, escorting the infiltrators away and tending to Blaine. Burt had been called at some point and consulted with Quinn for a moment before finding Kurt sobbing still, sitting on the floor with his back against the wall.

"Kurt... Kurt..." His dad went to pull him into a hug, which Burt had to force because Kurt tried again to pull away. When he found himself trapped in his dad's arms he continued to sob and just let his limbs go limp.

"It's not fair... what happened? Why did they kill him?" Kurt had to force the words up with his choked sobs.

"Son. He's alive. Quinn's having him taken to the infirmary so she can treat him, but he's alive." Burt kept a firm grip around Kurt, cradling him and allowing him to cover his shoulder in tears.

Kurt's heart did a flip and he choked back the sob that was about to escape, "What?" He lifted a hand to rub off his eyes, "There was so much blood and he wasn't moving and.... and..."

"Kurt. He's alive. Go to him. I'll deal with what happened here. You take care of him." Burt patted his son's back and helped him stand up.

Kurt nodded and did as his father asked, the quickest face washing he had ever had. He noted as he washed his face that his knuckles were bruised and bloody and he wondered the extend of the damage to the intruder that he had committed.

He ran to the infirmary for second time in the time he had been here, ignoring everything else around him. Nothing else mattered right now and all he could do was hope Blaine stayed with him. At least long enough for him to hear what Kurt needed to say.

He didn't know what bed Blaine was assigned to, but he didn't have to know. One bed near to the entry was surrounded by medics, some of whom were rushing to the bed to get supplies or from the bed to take things away. Kurt saw that one of them had cut off Blaine's clothing, or at least what he thought was his clothing as it was bloodied all to hell. He saw ropes and tape also being discarded and realized that Blaine hadn't even had the opportunity to fight back. He felt the rage rise in him.

Carole came up to him and gently pushed him back a few steps from where he was trying to get a better look and determine how he could get to Blaine. "Sweetie. The only way you can help him right now is to just stay back and let us do our job."

Kurt whimpered and tried to speak but Carole piped up again.

“I know all you want to do right now is be with him, but we won’t be able to help him if you’re taking up space we need to work. I will let you know what’s going on and when you can come see him.”

Kurt’s shoulders sagged and his eyes darted past Carole to the drama unfolding behind her, all centered on Blaine. His heart ached at the thought of being away from Blaine’s side right now, but he let his head take over for the moment and navigate his body to a cot a little ways away to sit and wait.

And he waited, watching at Quinn yelled and ordered her people about. He watched as the rags they discarded became less bloody and casting materials were brought to supply. The longer he waited, the more hope he had, and the more he worried as well.

He had spent more time in this infirmary this past month than he had ever spent in an infirmary over the course of his lifetime altogether. If he had his way then he would have Quinn move the infirmary somewhere else or just have it reduced to a skeleton infirmary until the army left. This place seemed to attract his pain and while he wouldn’t call himself superstitious, he would not discredit the idea of bad luck either.

Kurt waited for about an hour, shifting in position, having a difficult time staying still and calm. He was grateful when Noah came over and sat beside him.

“Hey man. Your dad wanted me to let you know what happened...”

Kurt nodded to Noah, happy for the distraction and eager for information about where to direct his anger.

“The men were from the king’s elite guard. Some of the Warblers came and identified them. They’re both alive but the one guy was attacked by Blaine’s cat and is going to have some serious scars, and the other guy’s face is totally purple and he’ll have a hard time chewing since you beat a lot of his teeth out of him. Holy hell man... I never knew you had it in you....”

Kurt looked down at his hands and flexed his fingers in and out, revelling a little in the pain that went through his bruised joints. It was a good pain because it allowed him to enact some revenge for Blaine.

“Anyhow... there was a door in Blaine’s wardrobe. Not the usual door - that was there. But a hidden door in the back. Finn’s leading a team into the space behind but it looks like it leads into those passages. Burt’s willing to bet that Blaine didn’t know about it given how much stuff was blocking it. Anyhow, they

managed to push through that stuff and tie up Blaine, and well... you saw the rest. They used some ether on him to keep him out while they tied him up. We found it in the room."

Kurt kept flexing his fingers and nodded in acknowledgement as Noah spoke, letting him continue without interruption.

"If it wasn't for Blaine's cat they could have killed him and we'd have been none the wiser. Jake heard a hiss and a scream and went to investigate. They were damned quiet about what they were doing to him."

Kurt murmured, "Cat is getting a medal from me if Blaine gets through this..."

Noah laughed but stopped when he saw that Kurt wasn't laughing along with him. He shifted uncomfortably and stood up, "Anyhow... we'll let you know what else we find. Let us know too if you need anything."

Kurt nodded and just stared towards the bed where Blaine lay. There were only a couple people working on Blaine now, Quinn one of them. He glanced around for Carole and saw that she was approaching him with a fresh cup of coffee.

"Here sweetie." She held it to him and he took it, but didn't drink, looking expectantly at Carole.

"He's stable. A couple ribs were broken and his face is pretty banged up. They used some knuckles on him or something when they were hitting his ribs because he's cut up there. That's what all the blood was from, but it wasn't too deep and easily stopped. He's going to be fine Kurt."

Kurt let out a sigh of relief he didn't know he had been holding in. "Thank you Carole...."

Carole patted his thigh gently. "Once Quinn is done, you're allowed to go see him. He's still out, but I know you'll want to still be there."

Kurt nodded and looked back to the bed to watch for Quinn to leave. Carole patted his back and then got up to tend to the other patients who had been ignored while she was helping with Blaine.

Not much longer Quinn stepped away from the bed, caught Kurt's eye and waved him over. He shot over and was about to go past Quinn when she put a hand out to stop him. "Wait one second."



Kurt stopped in his tracks and looked at Quinn impatiently.

“Be gentle when you kiss him. His face is all bruised up and it will hurt.”

Kurt gawked for a moment and Quinn smiled sweetly and stepped away with an all too mischievous grin across her face. Kurt knew then that it wasn't going to be as bad as he feared if Quinn could joke about it.

Blaine lay still in the bed and Quinn was right, his face was a mess of bruising, and all swollen too. Kurt swallowed nervously and went to sit at the side of the bed, looking down over Blaine. Blaine had a blanket over the lower half of his body, but his torso was exposed insomuch as it was wrapped in a cast. His hands lay at his side and had rope burns around the wrists. And his face, his gorgeous face, all purple and blue and puffy.

Tears came to Kurt's eyes once again and he took Blaine's hand gently in his own. “I'm sorry I left you there alone. I'll never leave you alone again...”

The implication of what Kurt had just said came to him after the words came out. He felt his heart swell and continued.

“I mean. I'll stay. I'll figure it out, but I don't think I could survive being away from you, even if it means having to deal with that Sue Sylvester all the time. I'm going to want some better clothes tailored though if I'm going to be hosting balls and leading parades and all that... but I'll stay.”

Blaine continued laying there still and Kurt continued to speak to him despite it, finding himself calmed by being able to get it all out.

“I mean... you'll have to figure out the whole heir to the throne thing since I can't help you with that... but I don't really want to think about that. Honestly the whole idea of female anatomy scares the hell out of me. Don't tell Santana though because I wouldn't put it past her to flash me just for her own amusement.”

“And I will need to leave now and then to visit my dad wherever he ends up. We can figure that out later of course. Now that you've seen Westerville, you should travel a bit with me... maybe not in the beginning. You need to get the city into order. But once things are settled you can take a break and we can go somewhere.”

“Also... I didn’t want to tell you this before, but I’m not really a cat person. I’ve always wanted a dog. I don’t know what you’ll think about that, but I also want to let you know that even though I’m not a cat person, I officially love Cat. I think we should make Cat a member of the royal guard. Is it weird that I don’t know if Cat is a boy or a girl yet?”

Kurt continued rambling on like that until he felt Blaine’s hand squeeze his back accompanied by a murmur.

“Damn it Kurt. Would you just be quiet already?”

Kurt jumped in spot and stood up, not letting go of Blaine’s hand. “You’re awake! How do you feel?”

Blaine squinted a little and Kurt realized that he couldn’t fully open his eyes with the swelling, “Like you’re going to ensure I go deaf before I’m king.”

Kurt laughed and leaned down on instinct to kiss Blaine, but stopped before he reached his lips recalling Quinn’s reminder. “You know... I love you.”

Blaine lifted his free hand up and placed it on the back of Kurt’s head, “Well I obviously love you too.” and Kurt’s head was pressed forward by Blaine’s hand so the kiss happened whether Quinn liked it or not.

When they separated, Kurt had to wipe tears from his eyes. He sat back down in the chair and smiled at Blaine like a giddy little school boy.

“So... tell me again about how you’re going to stay with me.”

And Kurt was caught.

## **24. Another State of Mind**

Blaine awoke to Quinn looking over him. Everyone on him ached and his head was throbbing in pain. He could barely open his eyes and could feel every centimeter of his face in great painful detail. His chest felt numb and he tried to turn his head to look down at it from where he lay but stopped short as a sharp pain raced through his head when he tried to move it.

"Here. Drink this." She tipped a vile liquid into his mouth which he choked back obediently.

Once his mouth was free again he whimpered, "Kurt?"

"He's fine. He's been waiting for me to let him see you now for a couple hours."

Blaine tried to smile through the pain. Kurt was alright. Quinn was still here. The attack must have just been on him and for that he was grateful.

Quinn dabbed a cool cloth gently over his face. "That painkiller I just gave you should take effect soon. You poor thing. You look like a rejected grape."

Blaine inwardly grimaced. He knew he was in pain but hadn't thought about what he must look like until that moment. A small bit of vanity rose up within him as he hoped he wouldn't be permanently disfigured.

"I'll let him know he can see you now. We've patched you up the best we can."

Blaine made a little whimper and Quinn paused in her movements away from him, looking back.

"What if he thinks I'm hideous?"

Quinn smiled gently and went back beside Blaine to smooth a hand over his hair. "Pretend you're sleeping when he comes in.... Then you'll know what he really thinks."

So as Quinn left he shut his eyes and remained still. He stayed that way as Kurt held his hand and confessed to him that he would stay and rambled on and on in quiet nervousness. Kurt did not once mention how he looked. Finally Blaine couldn't pretend anymore and he murmured.

"Damn it Kurt. Would you just be quiet already?"

Kurt jumped in spot and stood up, not letting go of Blaine's hand. "You're awake! How do you feel?"

Blaine squinted a little, trying to open his eyes as much as he could so he could look at the man who was giving him the best gift ever - himself, "Like you're going to ensure I go deaf before I'm king."

Blaine felt a flutter in his heart as Kurt leaned over him, mouth hovering over his own, but Kurt stopped before he reached his lips. "You know... I love you."

Adrenaline surged through Blaine as he heard that and he lifted his free hand up and placed it on the back of Kurt's head. He became quite aware of his heart as it beat against the wall of his chest with renewed vigor. "Well I obviously love you too." and he pressed Kurt's head down so they kissed. His lips tingling with a mix of pleasure and pain from the contact.

When they separated, Kurt had to wipe tears from his eyes. He sat back down in the chair and smiled at Blaine like a giddy little school boy. Blaine focused on his face through his narrowed sights and revelled in the beauty of the man sitting by him.

"So... tell me again about how you're going to stay with me."

Kurt seem a little startled and then snapped, "You were awake the whole time!"

Blaine just smiled the best he could, hoping it didn't come out looking like a frown or something else. He would have to thank Quinn later.

"You little sneak!" Kurt's face was flushing with embarrassment in front of Blaine's eyes. "You owe me for that!"

Blaine reached out for one of Kurt's hands. "What if I got you a puppy to make up for it?"

Kurt laughed, such a sweet and delightful sound, "So long as he's cute then I suppose forgiveness could be arranged."

Blaine spent the next several days stuck in the same place, moving only when he was moved by medics to clean him, change his wrappings, and suffer the indignity of being helped with a bedpan.

Kurt was consistently with him, even when Blaine argued that he should leave when a medic was helping him relieve himself. He refused to go and while Blaine was at first filled with humiliation over having Kurt see him so vulnerable, over time he became appreciative to see the extend of Kurt's commitment to him.

At one point Kurt had Finn bring Cat to his bed and Kurt showed Blaine the paw that Cat used to attack Hunter with. Cat had suffered a couple minor scratches form when Hunter tried to pull Cat off his face, but was otherwise no worse for wear, curling up on the bed beside Blaine.

Blaine heard through Kurt that Sebastian and Hunter were being held in the dungeon with several guards on watch at all times. They refused to speak except to repeat the message that they had been there to kill Blaine. To keep up the act, the guards watching them were not to reveal that Blaine had survived the attack and with relatively minor wounds compared to what the duo thought they had done. Kurt thought that once Blaine was able to move, that he should go to the dungeon and address his attackers to see if the shock of seeing him alive would stimulate their tongues to reveal a little more.

Blaine was also having a difficult time wrapping his head around the notion that there had been a door to the passages in his room. Kurt explained that now a thorough search of the castle was being conducted which had revealed at least two more secret doors. He also noted that it was likely Blaine hadn't been attacked earlier because they were watched and Hunter and Sebastian had purposely waited for a moment when Blaine had been left alone in bed.

"They were... spying on us...?" Blaine stammered.

Kurt shrugged, "We can't know for sure, but we found a supply of goods and some sleeping bags in the passages near your room which indicates that they may have been staying close to you."

Blaine shuddered at the thought. He was disgusted that those two had been so close for who knows how long.

"I moved your belongings into the master bedroom." Kurt noted then, taking a sip of the coffee in his hands as he watched Blaine over the rim of the cup for his response.

“What?” Blaine pushed himself up a little in the cot, pushing past the pain to sit up. “Why would I want to stay in my father’s room?”

Kurt reached out to support Blaine as he sat up, “Because it’s your room now. We haven’t found anything aside from the drop in that room which makes it safer and the wardrobe is big enough for two.”

Blaine found his frown turn into a smile. Anytime he felt himself getting upset, Kurt managed to remind him that he was staying and then everything seemed right with the world.

“Of course I’m going to have to redecorate. The mounted animal heads on the wall are creepy and everything is just so.... brown. I may as well be in a mud hut with that colour scheme.”

Blaine laughed and tugged Kurt closer to him, “You decorate it however you want, and please, get rid of the heads. They creep me out too.”

Both laughed and kissed.

After six days in the infirmary, Blaine was deemed mended enough to leave. He had no trouble walking since his legs weren’t hurt in the attack, but his chest and ribs were still healing and each step he took required him to pause and breath through the pain. His face had mostly deflated and the bruising had gone from blues and purples to yellows and browns. He could at least open his eyes fully now.

Kurt slowly led him through the building, allowing him to break as he needed until they ended up in his new room, their new room.

Blaine smiled. Somehow Kurt had found the time while serving as his nursemaid to redo the room. The bed had been moved to a spot across from the window. The browns and beige colouring had been replaced with warm reds and defining blacks. Kurt had gotten rid of the heads on the walls and replaced them with wall mounted candelabras to allow them more lighting options. The table now had a cloth covering and had a bouquet of flowers in the center, many which Blaine recognized as being the same as the ones in the bouquet he had given Kurt weeks before.

“It looks great Kurt. It truly does. It doesn’t even look like the same room at all.”

Blaine watched as Kurt's face lit up with pride and he was tugged over to the wardrobe. "And look at this..."

Inside the wardrobe were all of Blaine's clothes, neatly put away and hung up on one side. On the other he saw clothing of Kurt's. His heart melted and he turned and pressed a hot, intense kiss to Kurt's lips.

Kurt let out a soft moan and their tongues intertwined as they explored each others mouths. Their arms wrapped around one another and Blaine was temporarily unaware of his injuries until he bumped his chest against Kurt's and felt the air spike out of his chest, wincing in pain.

Kurt pulled back and held his arms to support Blaine on each side, "Come on... plenty of time for that when you're better. Let's get you into the bed."

Blaine whined, "I've had enough of beds...."

Kurt left a quick peck on Blaine's cheek and helped him lay back in the bed. Their bed. "You say that now... but I think you'll feel differently when you're better and we can maybe...." Kurt began to blush and Blaine smiled, knowing where he had been going with that. With this new commitment, there was nothing holding them back from becoming more intimate with one another.

Blaine looked to the side and pointed out a smaller looking bed, almost a replica of their own, "That... is that for a baby?"

Kurt laughed then and shook his head. "No. That's Cat's new bed. Fit for only the kingliest of felines."

Blaine laughed until his chest couldn't take it anymore.

## 25. Too Much, Too Soon

"I guess I don't understand how these tunnels, passages, caverns, - whatever you want to call them, can be so difficult to navigate." Burt was looking across the table at Finn, Noah, and Rachel.

"Well sir, if I may, after gathering information from citizens, apparently the passages were around before the castle was even around. It was an underground system where people actually lived and did business, mostly in illegal ventures such as the human trade. Apparently when the castle was built they just extended some of the passages up to it in order to allow for passage in and out of the palace without having to go through the town. When Elias came to power, he had the people who lived in the passages executed so there was only a small amount of people who knew the passages well enough to navigate them. It is believed he is the one who added all the booby traps and even some dead ends to trap those who entered with the intent of sneaking into the castle." Rachel explained, Finn nodding behind her.

"Well as much as I find the history fascinating, it doesn't help our present situation. I need solutions people. Now. I'm done playing the waiting game." Burt exclaimed.

Noah stepped forward, " It was suggested that we try flooding them. Divert the water flow from the south river into the passage entrance near it and force them out. It could also expose other entrances."

Burt shook his head. "No. As much as we need to deal with Anderson, we can't risk drowning the innocents he took with him, namely the princesses. We don't know if the ground in there is all level or drops and rises to create pools."

"We'll what about sniffing dogs like they use up north for hunting? We could have them track anyone down there." Finn offered.

"We'll have to have them sent in. There aren't many dogs in this region and apparently none that are trained for such a task." Rachel countered. "The same people who gave me information about the passages told me a number of tales about Elias Anderson. Apparently he was nipped by a dog when he was young and has had a standing order to have any dog around killed. A little over the top if you ask me."



Burt folded his arms over his chest, "I think we're stuck with hoping Kurt and Blaine can get something out of those two in the dungeon. I will talk to them and see if Blaine is alright with confronting them as soon as possible."

The trio before him nodded and Rachel added, "We will keep brainstorming in the meantime in case that idea doesn't pan out. I'm sure we can come up with more options."

Burt nodded, "And when I get back I also need a full report on the current positions of all Anderson friendly armies. They should have attacked a week ago based on our original projections but we haven't had so much as a sniff of them."

Again he was met with a series of nods and Burt began the slow walk to Blaine and Kurt's new room, taking care on the stairs as he didn't want to overexert himself and bring on another heart attack. Carole had already threatened to completely revamp his diet into rabbit food if he showed even the slightest indication he was at risk for another attack and Kurt had threatened him with an exercise regiment.

Overall his prognosis had been excellent and aside from Carole and Kurt nagging him constantly about his eating habits and not stressing himself, he was probably feeling the best he ever had. His brush with death had made him more convinced than ever that it was time to settle down and enjoy his life with Carole before he got too old to do so. He wanted his children to feel that they could settle down and relax themselves so perhaps in a few years time he could enjoy grandchildren. He wanted Elias Anderson dealt with so he could move on from this life and enjoy the time he had with the ones he loved.

However that now meant leaving behind Kurt. He had to keep reminding himself that parental love was the one type of love that led to separation. He wanted Kurt's happiness and had seen the love between the two boys, but there was a big part of him that was still having a hard time with the idea of not having his boy around. If there had been one constant in his life over the past twenty odd years, it had been Kurt.

The end of this campaign also meant the disassembling of the army. Some of the troops had already agreed to stay on in Westerville at the behest of the nobility. Others were planning to move to the country or return to places they had close to their hearts. A small contingent insisted yet on staying together as a smaller force to continue to help where they could - those were the ones who lived for the thrill of battle and nomadic life. He admitted to feeling pride in that small group, knowing that his life's work would continue through them.

The nobility was still heated about allowing Blaine to take over the throne, even after being attacked by his father. He had a meeting with their loudest member, one Sue Sylvester later in the day.

Arriving at the door, Burt hesitated before knocking. It seems strange to think of this room as being shared with Blaine, the son of his enemy, and Kurt, his own dear son. It was the first time Kurt had shown any interest in anyone, and for it to be Blaine had originally been hard to stomach.

"Come in." Blaine's voice came from inside.

Burt entered and saw the bed was now position across the door. Burt had been staying in here prior to Kurt's request to move Blaine's room here - both as a preparation for his rise to power and to accommodate the both of them comfortably. It seemed a lot more cozy than before and, not surprisingly, the mounted heads had disappeared.

Blaine had a finger to his lips. He was sitting up in the bed with a book beside him. He nodded over beside him where Kurt was laying, still fully dressed on top of the sheets. His boy was sleeping, and peacefully at that.

Burt couldn't remember the last time Kurt had napped during the day.

"I was reading to him and he fell asleep." Blaine whispered, holding up a book entitled *100 Things to Know About Westerville Wildlife*. Burt mentally acknowledged that it was no surprise Kurt had fallen asleep listening to that.

Burt smiled warmly and quietly asked, "Are you alright to have a conversation privately Blaine or should I wait until he's awake to help you up?"

In response Blaine stiffly edged himself off the bed and stood up. He walked to Burt with rigid movements, and Burt could see he was pushing himself. Burt knew not to call Blaine on the fact that he was obviously still not ready to be moving that much as he had argued with enough troops over the years in similar situations who needed to prove themselves.

They walked out of the room and closed the door to allow Kurt to continue sleeping. Burt noted that as Blaine closed the door, he paused to look at Kurt on the bed and a broad smile covered his face. Whatever doubts he had about Blaine, he knew he loved Kurt, especially in that moment.

"What can I help you with Burt?" Blaine asked, turning towards him.

"I need to know if you can talk to those guys who roughed you up. Try to get some information out of them. We're at a standstill with the passages and we need something, anything, to go on." Burt admitted, trying to gauge Blaine's response.

Blaine pursed his lips and nodded, "I can do it... But I don't want Kurt there so I should do it now, while he's sleeping."

Burt tipped his head to the side asking, "Why not? They're in cells and there's lot of guards. They couldn't get him."

"It's not that." Blaine began, "Kurt said these guys might have been listening into our conversations and waiting until I was left alone before attacking. They'll know about our relationship and might try to say or do things to use that against us. Also... I know these guys, from before. I'm not surprised my dad sent them after me, since they were bent on making my life a living hell when my father was in charge. What I might end up saying to them... Well quite frankly I don't want Kurt around when I express myself. He might try to calm or restrain me and I need to get it out of my system if it comes to that."

Burt found that he was nodding. It made sense. "I'd still like someone else with rank there of course." He needed someone to validate anything that was said.

"Of course. I will go and get myself dressed in something a little more official and you can send someone of your choosing up to get me when you have someone selected." Blaine put a hand back on his door, looking to Burt for acknowledgement.

Burt agreed with another nod of his head and left Blaine then, going back to the main hall. He grasped Noah by the arm as he they passed in the hall and directed him to go with Blaine to interrogate the prisoners. Noah didn't ask a lot of questions and was much better at listening then Finn who might try to ask his own questions out of confusion.

"Sir. A Miss Sue Sylvester is waiting for you in the meeting chamber." Rachel announced, stepping in front of him.

Burt grumbled something inappropriate under his breath and turned to go to the meeting room where he found the tall, lanky woman pacing back and forth in the room. Sue Sylvester had hidden that she was a

woman during Elias Anderson's reign. She had cropped her hair and hidden her body under padded tunics in order to maintain a voice among the men in this realm. As soon as Elias had left, she revealed to everyone that she was a woman and quickly overpowered the other nobles to become their unofficial representative. It wasn't hard, because even under Elias' reign, she was the only noble who managed to maintain her estate and have the respect of the majority of citizens.

"Ah. Marshal Hummel. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me." She stopped pacing when she saw him and stood tall.

Burt sat himself down in a chair and looked to her. She took a moment but eventually she sat down too. After so many meetings, Burt knew that she was more agreeable sitting down than standing up. Kurt had mentioned once that a person was more vulnerable when they were sitting, more exposed, and that certainly applied to Sue.

"What's this about? You should be having your meetings with Blaine since he'll be the one you'll have to negotiate with once I'm gone." Burt said. Having started many meetings off with the same statement.

"So you keep telling me and yet I keep meeting with you to tell you that's simply not possible. However I do have a proposition for you."

"We'll let's hear it then." Burt swung his arms out to each side, preparing to hear another offer to pay for the army to stay.

"Well it has become more than obvious that your son has become rather enamoured with the little Anderson prince and vice versa."

"Yes. And?" Burt wasn't sure he liked where she was going.

"I'm proposing a marriage alliance. Blaine gains nobility support by showing his commitment to what you've accomplished here, we end up having a high ranking member of your army left in power here with him, because you don't represent any specific nation, rather an ideal, there is nothing for any other specific nation to gain from this marriage alliance, and it would put a definite end to Elias' policies of intolerance to have our head of state enter into a marriage with another man."

Burt balked. Sue had thought this through all right. He was ready to say no to her then and there but it was definitely not his choice to make and what she was saying all made sense if he was being completely

rational. But Kurt and Blaine had barely known one another. Then again, arranged marriages were common no matter where you went and they knew each other a lot better than most spouses did before their wedding day. Arranged marriages were especially typical and expected with royalty, and spouses usually didn't meet until their wedding day.

"I understand and respect your idea. I will let them know because its not going to be my call to make." Burt finally said after letting his mind flip-flop back on the idea.

Sue grinned, recognizing that she had made significant headway. "And just think. Your family would be taking their place in the world again. Things will have come full circle. Plus, I understand that it is not expected that you would get a grandchild out of the mix, but I would be willing to offer you some of my personal wine stocks in congratulations."

"Thank you ma'am. Ultimately though it will be up to them and I will support whatever they choose." Burt said, wanting to get this conversation over with.

Sue nodded, "Of course, and so long as they make the right choice, we will have their backs."

## 26. Peacemaker

Blaine had not wanted to leave Kurt. He had wanted to wrap his arms around him, wake him up with loving kisses, and see how far his body would allow him to go; but Burt had come and then Noah, and now he was walking to the dungeons listening to Noah confide to him as if they had been long time friends.

"She wants to bring Beth here to live. She wants to set up her own clinic in town and stay and help Westerville rebuild. And I can understand that and all, our nomadic life isn't great for raising kids, but I'm not good at anything else. I don't have any good trade skills, but how am I suppose to leave Beth behind. She's my daughter and Quinn just thinks she can make all the decisions about her..."

Blaine placed a hand on Noah's back. "I think you have more skills than you realize. For what it's worth, I would be happy to see you stick around here."

"Thanks man." Noah replied and then paused as they reached the entrance. "You go ahead. I will stay behind you and stay quiet unless you indicate otherwise. I think Burt just wants a second set of ears to remember everything they might say."

Blaine nodded as he pushed the door open, looking to the guard there who indicted with a jut of her head that Hunter and Sebastian were in cells to the left of the door.

Blaine walked as smoothly as he could, not wanting them to know the extend of the damage to him. He saw them lift their heads, each in separate cells but adjacent to one another. Their jaws dropped and they looked at one another to see if the other was seeing the same thing - namely that Blaine was alive and apparently alright.

"Gentleman!" Blaine purposely put on a big voice and clasped his hands behind his back to give a show of superiority.

"Lucky bastard...." Hunter snarled and Blaine took special note of the slashes healing up across his face. He would have to give Cat some kind of treat for that.

"You've been beating on me for years. Clearly you're not very good at it because once again, you've left me quite alive again." Blaine said, not looking at either of them directly. "I would suggest going into another occupation at this point because it's quite clear you're not skilled enough to make a simple kill."

"What the hell do you want? To gloat? To kill us yourself?" Sebastian had come up to the bars and held them, as close to Blaine as he could get,

"No. I want you to tell me where my father is and what he's planning." Blaine said coldly, eyes darkening as he stared down his nose at Sebastian.

"Well good bloody luck. We aren't saying shit." Hunter snapped.

"I don't think you're going to have much of a choice." Blaine said, turning his gaze to Hunter, "By the way. How are you going to explain away those scratches? I can't imagine getting attacked by a cat is going to impress the ladies."

Hunter jumped towards the bars and snapped, "Come over here you little bitch! Let me finish what I started."

Noah took a step forward behind him but Blaine raised a hand to stop him. He had expected to rile them up, he had counted on it.

"No thanks. I'm good for little bumps and bruises today." Blaine smirked.

Sebastian had remained much more calm than his compatriot. "Why would we tell you where your father is?"

Blaine looked back at Sebastian, "Because." He took a step towards the bars, "If you don't then I'll have you tied up and put back into the passages. You think my father will accept your failure and humiliation? You have a much better shot working with me than against me."

Sebastian went pale and the cell beside him shook as Hunter rattled the bars, yelling obscenities. It was clear that Sebastian would be the one to appeal to here.

"How, how do you know that you wouldn't kill me... us anyhow once you get the information you want?" Sebastian stammered as he spoke.

Blaine spoke slowly in response, wanting to watch Sebastian squirm a little before he gave him any reprieve. "When you would beat on me, hit me, burn me with pokers, or just tell me once again how worthless I was - did I ever, at any point, ever fight back or try to hurt you?"

Sebastian slowly shook his head, keeping his eyes on Blaine.

"Did it ever cross your mind then that I didn't retaliate, not because I couldn't, but because I wouldn't? I am not my father. I won't stand here and tell you that I will take you back into my home as my own guards if you tell me what I want to know because that will never happen. I will tell you though that I will let you live."

Sebastian backed up a couple steps and sat down on the cot in his cell, he remained pale and his eyes fixed at the space before him.

"You have exactly one minute to decide before I order you to be returned to the passages." Blaine stated.

Throughout all of this, Hunter continued to rattle his cage and spit towards Blaine, who deftly ignored him. He had spent years ignoring Hunter's rage, this was nothing.

"Can I ask you... first... why?" Sebastian looked up through the bars at Blaine.

"Why what?"

"Why did you write that message? It was what set him off. Why not send nothing." Sebastian responded.

Blaine didn't have to look to know Noah was making a mental note of that. Blaine had told no one about the message.

"Why did I write to him that I wouldn't help him? That he should surrender for his own good?" Blaine elaborated, more for Noah's sake than Sebastians since he knew it would be reported.

Sebastian nodded.

"Because he should. Just because I let you beat me for years doesn't mean I don't have courage. If I didn't have courage I would have killed myself long ago so I wouldn't have to face another beating, another



admonishment for wanting to do what was right. I wanted to make sure I gave him the opportunity to do the right thing too, as a final gesture from son to father.”

Sebastian looked down at his hands for a moment and then looked up, “Do you have a scribe? I’ll give you what I know.”

“Mother f--ing cuntbag slut shit....” continued the voice in the adjacent cell.

Blaine felt a lot more at ease in his body on the way back from the dungeon. He had finally done something right. He felt like this is what a leader would feel like. This is what it was to have confidence. He could do this.

In the main hall, he was directed back to his room when he went looking for Burt. Burt and Kurt were no doubt visiting and he hoped Kurt would forgive him for taking this on himself.

He came into the room, all smiles as he saw Burt and Kurt sitting at the table with serious faces. Both looked to him and remained quiet. Blaine realized they were waiting for him to speak.

“Noah has maps and their plan of action. He’s coordinating with Finn right now to storm the passages.” Blaine waited for applause, or at least a clap.

“Blaine... that’s wonderful...” Kurt said, a smile touching his face for a moment before he resumed being stoic and looking to the table.

“I will speak with them about it right away.” Burt said, getting up and giving Blaine a pat on the shoulder as he walked by him and out the door. “Good work.”

Blaine stood for a moment, feeling lost. “Did I miss something...?”

Kurt stood up and shook his head, coming up to Blaine and checking him over, “You better not have opened your stitches pushing yourself this afternoon. I’d be upset but you clearly got results that my father really needed... so thank you.” He gave Blaine a peck on the cheek, his face remaining ever serious.

Blaine reached back to set his hands on Kurt’s waist, “Hey. I’m sorry I went without you. Don’t be mad at me. Please. I don’t think I could take it.”

Kurt's mouth twitched at the corners and he took Blaine's hands from his sides, leading him back to the bed. "I need to talk to you about something."

Oh god. He's changed his mind. He's leaving. Blaine must have looked panicked as those thoughts went through his head because Kurt took his face in his hands, "Hey. Don't worry. It's nothing bad... at least I don't think it is."

Blaine looked at Kurt, watching his face, trying to figure out what was going on in his mind, wanting desperately to feel his kiss and run his hands over his body. He kept himself still though, bracing himself for whatever Kurt said.

"My father met with Noblewoman Sylvester again today...." Kurt began, and Blaine winced, knowing how often Burt had been meeting with the caustic woman to argue about Blaine becoming the ruler. Maybe they had found a way for Blaine to get out of being the king.

"She actually had a really good idea... but my father wants us to decide if it's the right idea."

Blaine nodded with some urgency. Kurt was drawing this out and he just wanted to know what was going on.

"So... Blaine... How would you feel about..." Kurt stopped, and a flush came over his face. "Wait... I can't tell you like this."

Blaine scrunched his face up and followed Kurt with his gaze as he pulled away and walked to the wardrobe, searching through his bins, and leaving Blaine there alone and confused as hell.

"Kurt... just tell me. I'm not good with being patient. You're making me real nervous here..." Blaine slowly stepped towards the wardrobe, trying to see what Kurt was doing.

"Just... just wait a minute. I have to get into the right frame of mind...." Kurt dug through the bins, trying to find something.

"Just tell me please. I'm worried now..." Blaine had stopped approaching Kurt but continued to plead.

"Ahha! There we go!" Kurt had something in his fist as he turned around to face Blaine. "Alright. I can do this now."

Blaine just arched an eyebrow and sighed, "Kurt... come on..."

"Blaine... " Kurt stepped up to him and his entire face was still flushed. Blaine reached out to Kurt, meaning to put a hand on his cheek but Kurt grabbed the hand in his free one and knelt in front of Blaine.

"What....?"

Kurt opened his fist to reveal a simple gold ring. "Blaine Anderson. Would you marry me?"

## 27. But, Honestly

Kurt remained kneeling in front of Blaine, holding his breath as his chest threatened to beat outside of his chest. Blaine was being mercilessly silent, and Kurt watched as his face went from shocked, to awed, to thoughtful in turn. The process felt like forever to Kurt.

Finally Blaine spoke. “I... I don’t understand...?” His eyes searched Kurt’s face for the answer.

Kurt tried to keep himself from trembling as he kept a hand on Blaine’s and stared up at him. It wasn’t a rejection, but Blaine had obviously been taken aback. Perhaps rightfully so. They hadn’t spoken about marriage. Until the past week they hadn’t even talked about the future for them beyond Kurt’s original plan to leave and putting Blaine on the throne.

“My dad, he met with Noblewoman Sylvester today and she said if you and I got married that the nobility would back your claim as king.” Kurt explained, mentally reminding himself to breathe. “We need to ensure we have their support since the citizens follow their lead.”

Blaine grabbed Kurt’s hands in his and kneeled down in front of Kurt. “That’s why you’re asking me to marry you?”

Kurt nodded, now looking straight ahead at Blaine. His dad had come by and explained Sue’s proposal to him while Blaine was interrogating the elite guards in the dungeon, and it made a lot of sense. It was probably the most logical thing that had come out of that woman’s mouth.

Blaine smiled warmly, lovingly at Kurt, “That’s the wrong reason to get married Kurt...”

Kurt’s heart dropped and he turned his head away so Blaine couldn’t see the disappointment in his face. He had originally thought he would have just explained to Blaine Sue’s proposal in a direct manner and then let Blaine know that it made sense. Instead he had exposed his romantic side to Blaine and he felt foolish for it. Kurt, who had barely even considered ever having a romantic partner up until he came to Westerville, suddenly proposing marriage. It sounded ludicrous to him now that he thought about it.

"Oh... Kurt..." Blaine placed a hand on Kurt's face and turned his head back toward him again so they were once again eye to eye. "That doesn't mean I don't want to marry you.. I just want to make sure you want to... for the right reasons."

"It makes sense though Blaine..." Kurt began, on the defensive now. "They wanted my dad's army to stay and continue ruling, which is out of the question, but I'm a symbol of that army and if I was married to you then it would show your support for our liberation. It would even demonstrate the end to your father's homophobic policies. It's brilliant really."

Blaine nodded along with Kurt during his explanation. "I'm not arguing that Kurt. I did just say... in a roundabout way I guess, that I do want to marry you. I just want to make sure you actually want to marry me. Because you love me and want to spend your life with me, and not because some psychotic woman actually had a good idea."

Kurt glanced down at their hands. They fit perfectly together. It wasn't what Kurt had been planning to do, but he had already decided to stay with Blaine after he had been attacked. It was a natural choice. Something Kurt didn't even have to think about. Getting married was just a legal thing as far as he was concerned, for all intents and purposes, he had already committed himself to Blaine by staying.

"I want to marry you Blaine... this just gave me a good excuse to ask."

Kurt looked up from their hands, and back to Blaine's face which was beaming now. "I will absolutely marry you Kurt."

Kurt's breath hitched and a full smile crept over his face. He opened the hand that held the ring he had offered to Blaine. "This was my grandfather's ring. He was the king of Lima before it was taken over by Dalton years ago. If you wore this... then it would mean a lot to me. I don't have much to offer other than that."

Blaine smiled and gingerly took the ring from Kurt, slipping it on his ring finger. "A perfect fit..." He dipped his head in to press a kiss to Kurt and murmured, "You're wrong though."

Kurt hummed into the kiss and whispered back, "About what?"

"You have everything to offer me Kurt. You've given me so much already. Your acceptance, your kindness, your love, and let's not forget those tasty lips of yours." Blaine waggled his eyebrows suggestively causing Kurt to lean back and laugh.

Blaine laughed as well and Kurt protested as he was suddenly enveloped in Blaine's arms, "You're going to hurt yourself!" which was ignored as Blaine began kissing Kurt all over his face.

Kurt felt his heartbeat relax and he pulled his head away from the kiss attack, "Your beard is all scruffy and is making my face itchy."

Blaine smiled and held Kurt in place, letting his fingers roll up and down Kurt's back. "I just wanted to make sure you weren't giving yourself up for me... If you want to marry me, it should be because you want to. You've sacrificed enough in your life for those around you. You deserve to think about yourself for awhile."

Kurt tipped his head onto Blaine's shoulder and let it rest there. "Don't worry. I'll make sure you spoil me properly."

Blaine turned his head to press another kiss to Kurt's forehead and then held his head up to examine the ring on it. "We should tell your dad..."

Kurt blushed. "I suppose we should make an announcement."

Blaine pulled Kurt to him and murmured heatedly, "In a little while. I want to celebrate a little bit in here for awhile."

Kurt felt absolutely elated for the rest of the day. After exchanging kisses until their lips were chapped and Kurt's face was dry from constant contact with Blaine's scruff, they went to tell Kurt's father who had embraced them both at once in full hugs. It was not what Kurt had expected from his father, but it was better than anything he could have hoped for.

Burt helped them announce it to the generals, captains, and brigadiers in the main hall who cheered and clapped. They began to receive a downpour of congratulations and well wishes.

Along with those well wishes though came the questions.

*“When’s the wedding?”*

*“Will you both be kings?”*

*“What about an heir?”*

*“Where will it be?”*

*“Can I be your flower girl?”*

That last question came from Brittany and Kurt acknowledged to her that they hadn’t planned that far ahead yet but he would keep her in mind.

This they acknowledged they didn’t know the answers to those questions, and were actually going to meet with the nobles to decide on some of the details together. Since the nobility would back Blaine if they were married, Kurt had decided that the nobility should decide on certain aspects of the wedding, including the date, to show the citizens of Westerville how they were officially backing the union and Blaine along with it.

Everywhere they went, they held hands and stole happy sidelong glances at one another. Burt had immediately sent for Sue and the rest of the nobility so the planning could begin. However Kurt had to deal with some questions on his own and as Blaine was getting his bandages changed with Quinn, Kurt excused himself to find the person who might be able to answer his questions.

Kurt found her outside, sparring with Noah. Santana was wild in battle and Kurt was sure she was one of the few who would continue on in the army when it broke apart. She was easily beating Noah whose strategy with Santana seemed to include a lot of dodging and ducking. He shot Kurt a grateful look when Kurt called to Santana and asked for some of her time.

They both went to the well for a drink of water before Kurt spoke. “Look. I’m just going to come out and say it. I’m going to be marrying Blaine and, well, I have no experience, in... ah... bed.”

Santana snorted and sprayed water she had just been drinking up in a gleeful laugh. "You have been spending every night together for what, weeks now? And you haven't been locking bodies?! What have you been doing this entire time? Cuddling?"

Kurt huffed, his chest puffing up a little defensively and his face reddening. "Yes actually."

"Oh my...." Santana couldn't finish the sentence as she continued laughing and Kurt's ears went red.

"Look. If you're not interested in helping me I'm sure I can find someone else who's knowledgeable about this kind of stuff..."

Santana managed to reign in the laughter and looked over Kurt. "And here I thought you boys were just good at hiding a limp... Oh my." She shook her head in disbelief. "Well I suppose the first thing you ought to know is that even if you try really hard, you two aren't going to end up with any buns in the ovens."

Kurt rolled his eyes, "Yes. I knew that one. Moving on...."

"Honestly Kurt. I'm honoured that you're asking me and all, but have you even considered for a moment that I'm a woman... who's in a relationship with another woman? I'm sure I know what goes on between two men, but I'm definitely not the expert and from what I've gathered, your prince charming there isn't experience either, so you have that on your side."

Kurt cocked up an eyebrow, "Why is that a benefit? If neither of us know what we're doing -"

"- then you can discover it together without any preconceptions of how things are supposed to be." Santana interrupted and finished off.

Kurt sighed and nodded to Santana, "That does make sense. I'm just..."

"Nervous." Santana finished off for him again and Kurt nodded. "That's normal. You see his special appendage yet?"

Kurt's blush which had just been starting to go away came back in full force and he turned his head away from Santana. "No..."



“I’ll bet he had a fabulous one.” She stated, and whatever bit of Santana that had just been giving him words of wisdom and actually helping was replaced by the Santana he knew - overly inappropriate and shocking.

Kurt coughed a little, trying to physically force the image out of his head. “Yes, well, for someone so disinterested in men, you seem to be overly interested in that.”

Santana laughed again, “Only because I enjoy seeing you blush boy. Look. I know of a book that can help you out. I’ll see if I can find a copy in one of the libraries here and pass it to you. I’ll be discrete about it even.”

Kurt looked back to Santana. “Thank you Santana. For all your crudeness, I know you’re dependable.”

“Oh sweet stuff, you know it.” She winked and walked back to the sparring grounds, yelling at some random troop to get their ass over and play with her.

## 28. Come Alive

Blaine and Kurt sat together at one end of the table in the meeting chamber. The table was full with nobility and others stood around, accompanied by Burt, Finn, Rachel, and Noah. At the other end of the table sat Sue Sylvester, and every time anything was suggested by Kurt or Blaine, all the noblemen turned their heads to her to gauge her reaction.

So far, they had decided on a time. Soon. As soon as possible was what Sue had wanted. She was prepared to marry them then and there and they had to send the officiate off that she had bring with her arguing that for the people to embrace the union completely, it had to be made into a city-wide celebration.

So they had settled for the end of the week. That gave them a few days at least. It was clearly making Kurt panic and Blaine watched as Kurt rapidly wrote down ideas and notes on a pad of paper he had brought in, scrawling at a speed Blaine didn't know was possible. Blaine however felt alright with it. He was remarkably calm in fact. He was no longer fighting against the nobles but working with them on something, and something that meant so much to him too. Things were coming together.

"I don't want to be addressed as king." Kurt was saying now. "Blaine will still be the ruler."

"So you want to be the queen then? You know that doesn't make any sense." Sue was countering.

Kurt shook his head. "There are other titles for royalty. My experience and training have been military based. Blaine's education is better suited to be the main ruler. That's if anyone feels that I need a title at all. I'm just as happy without one."

"Not happening. Fine. You'll be Prince or Archduke then. And military training or not, if something ever happened to Blaine there, you'll be the one in charge." Sue pointed from Kurt, then to Blaine as she made the suggestion.

The idea made Kurt squirm in his seat. Blaine had been keeping a hand on his thigh to try and reassure him, so he felt the movement.

“Noblewoman Sylvester. Let’s focus on my wedding before we plan my funeral.” Blaine spoke, trying to redirect the conversation.

The nobles laughed and Sue nodded in agreement. “Certainly. Just want to make sure he knows what he’s signed on for is all.”

Kurt put his hand on Blaine’s and gave it a thankful squeeze, resuming writing down his ideas. Blaine snuck a peek and saw that on one side of the page was a design for what Blaine assumed was a marriage outfit. On the other side was a list of things that had to be decided and coordinated for the marriage, and it was getting longer by the second.

One of the nobles spoke up, “Excuse me. One of my concerns is just that... lineage. I assume you’ll be taking on a mistress so that you can produce an heir at least.”

Blaine swallowed and felt his stomach turn. He hadn’t even been intimate with Kurt yet, a man he deeply desired and wanted with all of his being, and it was being suggested he get in bed with a woman for the sole purpose of making a baby.

Burt saved them both then. “Blaine has many sisters who have not yet been married off to other nations. Any child they have would naturally be in line for the throne. There are MANY Anderson children to step up if required.”

Blaine exhaled and looked to Kurt then, noticing just how pale that last question had made him. Another reassuring hand squeeze was given. By the end of this meeting, he was sure they would lose all feeling in their hands.

Sue nodded, “That’s agreeable for now. As Blaine said earlier, let’s focus on getting them married and then worry about all the other festivities.”

And so the meeting went on. The nobility had a surprising lot of input on everything from where it would be held (the courtyard), to who would be invited (themselves of course, the high ranking in the army, and ambassadors from neighbouring empires), who would officiate (Sue had decided it should be her as an additional show of progress in Westerville), how it would be decorated (Red and yellow roses to symbolize the Dalton empire and Lima), the route of the progression through the city to present themselves to the citizens, and even what would be cooked.

“Finally Blaine. Since this whole event is going to show how we plan to support you, I think we should also hold your coronation as part of the wedding.” Sue announced and the room looked at Blaine, who had been looking at how Kurt’s design had been coming.

He looked to Sue and nodded his agreement. What difference did it make really if he was coronated the same day? It would save money by holding one event instead of two.

He felt Kurt tense up and his hand was squeezed. Burt spoke up. “You know that traditionally when the ruler is coronated that our army leaves as a symbolic sign that we have completed our job. Elias hasn’t even been caught yet.”

Kurt was tense because if he was coronated, that meant his father left, Blaine realized. He spoke back to Sue, “Perhaps we should delay the coronation then until my father is captured. The army right now is vital. They’re training new troops to take over, but we can’t expect them to be ready in a matter of a few days.”

Sue slapped a hand down on the table, “Well then find him already and end him. This army had no trouble invading the city and defeating the best troops on the continent, but they can’t find a single man. You wonder why the nobility has had doubts about you? It’s because of this. As soon as they found you they suddenly became less effective.”

“That is absolutely ridiculous. We haven’t been able to find Elias exactly because he is ONE man. One man can hide easily. For all we know one of you is hiding him!” Kurt snapped without a moment’s pause.

Murmurs went up among the nobility and Blaine shook his head and stood up. “We had a lead on Elias this very afternoon and troops are following up on it as we meet. I don’t want this meeting to divide us further. This is about coming together and I need all of you united. More importantly, the citizens of Westerville need us all united. We need to progress and move forward so we can truly become an enviable nation for all people.”

The murmurs turned into nods and a small chorus of claps.

Blaine looked to Kurt who smiled sweetly to him and gave him one nod, letting him know he was doing good.

After the meeting, it was insanely late, and Blaine was starving. He asked a servant to bring them a tray of leftovers from supper as he and Kurt went to their room. He knew he would still be up for awhile as Burt was going to stop by to let them know if there had been any progress in the passages.

Kurt went to the wardrobe when they got to their room and began undressing slowly. Blaine turned away instinctively. It didn't matter that they were getting married in a few days, he still felt shy about sex. He didn't know what to do, and was incredibly worried about being horrible in bed when the time came.

He felt a hand on his back and Kurt spoke behind him, "Turn around Blaine. Let me help you get changed."

Blaine slowly turned, looking at Kurt's face inquisitively at first and then realizing that Kurt didn't have a shirt on... or pants for that matter. He only wore underpants. Blaine's eyes couldn't seem to help themselves as they roamed up and down over Kurt's lithe, athletic body. So beautiful toned and creamy in colour.

Kurt blushed, "I... I just want to see you. We're going to be married soon and it struck me that we haven't gone past kisses and cuddles."

"Dear gods in the heavens above Kurt.... you're absolutely gorgeous." Blaine breathed, his fingers reaching out to roam over Kurt's chest. "It's like you were carved from marble..."

Kurt's blush deepened and he pushed back from Blaine. "You're sweet. But you don't get to touch unless I do. I'm feeling a little on the spot right now..."

Blaine nodded and exhaled. He was having a very difficult time taking his eyes off Kurt's body. Kurt reached over to help Blaine pull the tunic over his head, revealing the top of Blaine's chest, the bandages around his centre, and his stomach.

Kurt ran a hand gently over the bandages, "Did Quinn say how much longer it will take you to heal up?"

Blaine shook his head, "I don't suppose it's quite fair. No matter what, I'm still covered up a bit more than you...."

Kurt's eyes wandered to Blaine's abdomen and his hand extended to trace the V-shaped lines of Blaine's abdominal muscles. The sensation of Kurt's fingers alone could have brought Blaine to ecstasy there and then if he wasn't so tense.

“That’s alright... “ Kurt began untying the belt holding up Blaine’s slacks, “It seems I’m going to be here awhile so I’m sure I’ll be able to get to see your chest eventually,” Once untied, Blaine’s slacks fell to the floor and he watched as Kurt looked down over his legs.

The two of them seemed such a mismatch. Kurt was ivory and smooth and streamlined. Blaine felt so dark, and hairy, and square in comparison.

Kurt knelt and laid a gentle kiss to Blaine’s abdomen. His whole body quivered in response, and a moan escaped his lips. “Kurt....”

The angel he was going to marry stood back up and smiled to him, “Don’t worry... I don’t want you to hurt your chest before the wedding.” Kurt took Blaine’s hands and led him back to the bed. “You look like some kind of god Blaine, right out of mythology.”

Kurt gently pushed Blaine back on the bed and then crawled up on top of him. The amount Blaine could feel through Kurt’s underwear had Blaine blushing furiously, and no doubt Kurt could now feel just how attracted Blaine was to him by the bulge in his own underpants.

Each of them let their fingers travel over the body of the other, tracing and mapping, discovering sensitive spots that made the other shudder and moan, or laugh with a tickle. They revealed how they had received different scars and kissed until their lips were swollen.

Neither of them pushed for more right away, the entire act completely sensual as it was. Periodically their manhoods would brush against one another and they would both moan in unison. After that happening several times by accident, they began grinding against one purposely.

Blaine felt desperation rise within him as they continued to rub against each other. The electrical sensation spreading out from his cock to the rest of him intoxicating his system. He began to jerk his hips up and the way Kurt whimpered as he did, motivated him to continue. Kurt began trembling in Blaine’s arms and his moans became louder and more insistent. It took a moment, but Blaine realized that Kurt was close to orgasm. Blaine groaned at the thought and his thrusts upward became more frantic and needy. Blaine came with a low growling moan, while Kurt let out a yell followed by a gasp.

Kurt slumped down onto the bed beside him after a moment and whimpered a little. “Blaine, I’m sorry. I didn’t want you straining yourself...”

Blaine pressed a finger to Kurt's lips, effectively shushing him. "Hey. Don't you dare. That was the best moment of my existence. You. Are. Amazing."

Kurt smiled and gave the shushing finger a kiss, making Blaine tingle in post-orgasmic sensitivity. "I can't believe I've been missing out on that... We could have been doing that this entire time... I would have been so much more relaxed."

Blaine chuckled and began tugging off his now soggy underpants with his fingers. Kurt stopped him and got up, collecting soft linen pyjama pants for them both from the wardrobe. "I forgot my dad is stopping by for an update... Good god. We're lucky he didn't walk in on us."

Blaine took the pyjama bottoms Kurt offered and smiled as Kurt went to the other side of the room to clean himself off and put on his own pyjama bottoms, leaving Blaine to do the same. Despite the intimacy they had just shared, they were still shy about dressing in front of one another.

Just as they finished up and Kurt was collecting their clothing from earlier in the day for the laundry, the door was knocked. Neither of them had time to ask who was there or invite anyone in before Burt burst in with a grin. "Success!"

And then seeing them both in only pyjamas - Burt found himself blushing.

## 29. In the End

The bed sheets had been pushed to the floor, the pillows were scattered, and both boys were in fresh slacks. Burt stopped in his tracks as he surveyed the scene and Kurt turned bright red as soon as he saw the realization on his dad's face. "Dad!" His eyes grew wide like saucers, "We were just... ah.... er...."

Burt, to his credit, shook his head at Kurt to silence him. "No. Sorry for inviting myself in. But we have success in the passages. You need to get... redressed and come to the main hall." Burt turned his head to Blaine who was sitting up in the bed, "Both of you."

With that, Burt's father left quickly, and Kurt looked over at Blaine sitting so peacefully in the bed, looking so relaxed and at ease with it all. In that moment, Kurt despised him for his ability to keep calm. All today Kurt had been nerves - from proposing, to having to sit in on that wedding which was effectively planned for them, to having his first real shared orgasm. Admittedly he was able to relax during that last event, but now he was on edge again, part of him wondering if what they had done was alright, and what Blaine thought of him for it.

He had been so lost in his thoughts that he didn't notice Blaine getting off the bed and walking towards him. "Hey..." Blaine's hands found their way to Kurt's waist and he exhaled sharply as the fingers caressed his sides. "The news has to be good or your dad wouldn't have burst in here like that."

Right. They needed to get dressed. His mind was admittedly focused on what Blaine and him had just been up to and he was having a difficult time turning his attentions over. Kurt nodded and turned to go to the wardrobe with Blaine on his heels. They both threw on tunics over their slacks and Kurt headed to the door when Blaine grabbed one of his hands and pulled him back.

"Kurt..."

Kurt stopped and turned to look into Blaine's eyes. Those honey syrup eyes that revealed everything. Kurt could tell so much about what Blaine was thinking about looking into those eyes. Right now, all they showed was love.



"I love you. You're wonderful." Blaine spoke and brought his face to Kurt's. Kurt closed the gap before Blaine could and they kissed for a moment. Kurt felt the tension draining from him in that instant and when he pulled back he felt much better. Apparently herbs weren't the only thing to ease an upset stomach.

"I love you too." He replied and tugged Blaine's hands to follow. "Now let's go."

It was late into the night. It had been an exhausting and exhilarating day, and it didn't seem to be ending anytime soon. Kurt was ready to fall into bed with Blaine, but he still had responsibilities.

As they reached the hall, they were joined by Finn who gave Kurt a little side glance and simply said, "Nice hair."

Kurt reached up to feel his hair. In his moment of passion with Blaine, it had gotten rather messed up and since it wasn't first thing in the morning and Finn had seen him not long ago, he paled, knowing full well that Finn was subtly indicating that he knew what had just happened.

Blaine reached over to smooth the hair at the back of Kurt's head. "I think he looks adorable."

Red took over his cheeks and Kurt groaned. "I'm doomed to a life without any bit of privacy..."

Finn and Blaine both chuckled and Blaine caught Kurt's hand in his as they made their way down the stairs. As they reached the bottom, Blaine stopped sharply and Kurt looked ahead to see what had him spooked.

A few yards away was Quinn, with a complement of girls around her. Quinn was checking them over and quietly talking to them. All of the girls shared the same mop of dark curls that Blaine had, most tied up into buns at the back of their head. It had to be Blaine's sisters.

"Come on Blaine... It looks like we've found your sisters." Kurt tugged Blaine's hand and it took a moment but Blaine seemed to overcome his shock and bolted from Kurt to go and embrace each of the girls lovingly and joyfully.

Kurt watched from where they had stopped. Blaine beamed as he held the littlest girl in his arms and brushed the stray hairs away from her face as he talked to her. Kurt leaned against the wall and found himself wondering about children in that moment. Blaine would be a wonderful father and while Kurt

wasn't sure about how good he'd be as a parent, it was clear that he couldn't deny Blaine that joy when the time came.

Maybe the one noble at the meeting was right. They would have to think about having an heir, though the idea of how that would occur made Kurt feel sick. He didn't want to share Blaine with anyone, even for mechanical purposes.

He was snapped back to attention by Finn who had stayed at his side. "You zoned out there Kurt..." Finn looked from Kurt to Blaine and back again. "We should see what happened."

Kurt and Finn walked to the group. Aside from the youngest girl, who was maybe three, the girls were very jumpy and reserved. They were in full gowns, which were muddied at the bottom and had dirt scuffs all over.

Blaine turned to Kurt and continued to smile broadly, "Kurt. They found my sisters in the passages. They're alright. None of them gone which means my father didn't succeed in using any of them for trade." He bounced the youngest in his arms who giggled and wrapped her arms around his neck.

Blaine introduced each of the girls to Kurt, and introduced Kurt to them as his fiance. The older the girl, the more shocked she looked at that announcement. The younger ones seemed fine with it. Homophobia was truly a learned behaviour if their reactions were any indication.

Once they had all been checked over by Quinn, she sent them away with Brittany and Rachel to have them fed. Blaine remained with Kurt, though Kurt could tell it tore him up to have to be separated from them again. Blaine however, also needed to be on top of situation.

They joined Burt at the war table where he was moving the markers that indicated Blaine's brother's armies. Each of them had fallen back in position. A map with the passage routes had also been updated with new markers and flags.

"That information you got us this afternoon was good Blaine. Very good. The girls were found in one of the rooms indicated on the map he had drawn up. They had been left there about a week ago with no guards and were almost out of food rations when we got there. The oldest... she gave us some more information about what has been occurring up until that point."

Blaine spoke up, "What about my stepmother? She wouldn't have left her daughters."

“Dead I’m afraid.” Blaine looked down as Burt said it and Kurt gave Blaine a gentle pat on the back. “Apparently she was used as an example to the girls of what would happen if they defied his orders early on. Sorry Blaine.”

Blaine shook his head and looked back up at the map, “Thank you. I will... mourn later. What do we know about his whereabouts?”

Burt indicated the backwards movements of Anderson troops. “When your father fled, originally your brothers moved to assist him, as we saw in tracking their progress. Then they stayed in position for a long time and now we have reports they’re moving back.”

Kurt furrowed his brow, “Why would they do that? There’s no tactical advantage in that.”

“Blaine’s sisters told us that when Blaine dropped his note to Elias...” Kurt blinked and looked at Blaine and back to his father. He was missing something there. “That Elias and Cooper began to have different opinions on the next steps. Cooper wanted to negotiate and Elias wanted to fight. Eventually Cooper left and we now know he is in contact with your younger brothers and ordering them back.”

Kurt felt himself unconsciously rubbing a spot on Blaine’s back in a supportive gesture. Looking at Blaine, he saw the man was at a loss for words and could see in his eyes that thoughts were buzzing through his mind faster than he could deal with them.

“This is a good thing Blaine....” Kurt began, and Blaine looked to his side at him. “It means your brother knows what’s best for him and the empire. He’s stopping the fight before it can begin. It means he supports you.”

Blaine slowly nodded as he took that information in, and Burt spoke up.

“As for Elias, we know he’s alone. Somewhere in the passages, but no longer of any real threat.”

“We can’t count him out father.” Kurt said. “He might try something yet.”

Burt nodded in agreement. “He might. But now he’s one man who has lost everything. Anything he tries will be in desperation and won’t be thought out. That ultimately works for us.”

Noah swept a hand above the table, "Rachel has sent out messengers to each of the armies. They will be inviting all of your brothers to a summit, and try to determine Cooper's location as well so he can be included."

"In the meantime. We wait." Blaine said and crossed his arms over his chest. "What about my sisters?"

Burt smiled to Blaine, "Well, since we don't have to worry about invasion any longer, I think that can be left up to you. Although I did ask that baths and beds be made up for them tonight. They are completely worn out and probably in shock."

"Probably. Most definitely." Kurt added, recalling their jumpiness and imagining how it had been for them, seeing their mother killed, Emily shipped off never to be seen, their older brother fighting with their father, and then abandoned with no idea of how to escape. Then to be rescued by the people they had been told were the enemy and finding your brother in league with them. Shock was going to be an understatement. "They're going to have to be reintegrated gently."

Blaine nodded slowly and Kurt saw in his face that he recognized that his little sisters had gone through horrible trauma.

"Alright. So I think between a wedding, a peace summit, and planning for our ultimate departure, we have lots to do and need the energy to do it. To bed everyone. That's an order!" Burt commanded, gesturing with both hands in dismissive waves.

Kurt took Blaine's hand in his own and they walked back to their room, finding the supper they had ordered when they had originally gone to their room after their meeting with the nobility earlier waiting for them. Kurt sat to eat while Blaine went to the window to look out.

"Blaine... " Kurt started, not wanting to eat without him, but not wanting to push him when his mind was clearly trying to sort through it all.

"Kurt. If Cooper is really on our side... he could take the throne. I don't have to. We could go wherever you want to. All of this that we've been preparing for.... we don't have to worry about it anymore." Blaine turned to Kurt as he spoke, watching his reaction.

Kurt sighed and looked down at his lap. Despite how far he had become, Blaine was still obviously not confident about taking the throne. "Blaine. Cooper was in those passages with your father. He left. You

didn't. Whether that was by your choice or not, you're the one who has to take power now. Look how hard it was for us to convince the nobility to back you as it was. Do you really think Cooper will be able to come in and suddenly convince everyone that he's somehow better suited to the role than you are?"

Blaine was quiet. He walked to the table and sat down, picking up a fork to poke at the meal in front of him. Kurt looked up to watch him and eventually picked up his own fork, taking small bites of whatever casserole they had been served. If Kurt was able to describe the food in one word, it would be beige. It even tasted like he imagined the colour beige would.

Eventually Blaine spoke after Kurt had given him the time. "If anything ever happened to you Kurt... I'd be lost. I can't do this without you."

Kurt set his fork down and reached across the table, "Hey. What makes you think anything is going to happen to me?"

Blaine took the hand that Kurt had extended and lifted it to his mouth, "I won't let anything happen to you. My mind is something of a mess right now and it went to a bad place is all. I guess what I was trying to say was that if I'm going to be king, I need you by my side." Blaine kissed Kurt's fingers, one at a time.

Kurt let out a small whimper at the touch. "I'm not going to ever say goodbye to you Blaine. You're stuck with me, for better or worse."

### 30. Lovers' Eyes

If Blaine was to describe the past several days in one word, it would be chaotic. He took care of getting his sisters reacquainted with him and adjusting to the changes. Kurt took care of the wedding preparations. Together they managed to meet daily with Burt to check on the status of the peace summit invitations, although they likely wouldn't receive any response until after the wedding given the distances to his brother's armies. They went to bed late and got up early, and remembered to breathe in between.

At the beginning, most of his sisters were scared to come out of the rooms they had been given. He had spent a lot of time in their rooms talking about the changes that had been made, how the people of Westerville had been living, and how they were changing things for the better. He talked a lot about Kurt and how he had help Blaine. He talked about what they could expect now that Elias was no longer in power, including they would have choice over their destinies. He talked about their mother, and how she had died to help them mourn.

Eventually he was able to coax them out of their rooms and they began talking with others besides him.

Brittany was popular among the girls because she was an embodiment of strength and grace, yet was always up for playing hide-and-seek or tag with them. Santana also made fast friends with them, braiding their hair and giving them style tips. His sisters, who had never worn anything but the most ornate and binding dresses, began wearing slacks of their own, allowing them more freedom in their bodies then they had ever experienced.

Quinn liked to visit with them too, making sure they were adjusting and letting Blaine know if necessary, she could make a tea to help with sleeplessness and anxiety if one of them required it. Quinn acknowledge to Blaine that she desperately missed her own daughter, and once he was coronated, she would be sending for her and setting up a clinic in town. Blaine might have scooped her up in his arms hearing that with a little whoop. Having Quinn around would mean top medical care for him and his people.

Having children around the castle changed the atmosphere that had existed since the army had taken over. Admittedly that probably was also due to the knowledge that Elias was all but beaten, but everything was more relaxed. Laughter and calm had spread and Blaine saw joy in most of the faces he encountered throughout the day.

Blaine had convinced the nobility to allow his sisters to be part of the wedding parade through Westerville. He explained that the girls needed to be accepted by the citizens, especially if one of them would be the mother to an heir to the throne one day. He also argued that acknowledging the girls would show the woman of Westerville that they mattered, to which Sue deftly agreed.

So now Blaine was in his room, wondering what had happened to the past few days, as Trent, Nick, and Jeff helped him get ready to get married. When Kurt had been doodling his designs several days ago in the meeting, Blaine thought Kurt was planning an outfit for himself. He quickly discovered though that the design was for him. Kurt knew what he would be wearing.

*"This marriage. It's a symbolic union. I've already given myself to you by staying here and as much as I would like to have planned it out all myself and wore something that everyone would be talking about for years to come, it's all about the symbolism."*

So Kurt would be wearing his armor, shined up with a cloak he had stitched together that had the crest of Lima on it. Blaine's outfit would be the first his citizens saw him in. He wore a deep purple tunic, with a skeleton set of armor over it - breastplate, fauld, greaves, and gauntlets. Kurt had explained that after the invasion, it was important that Blaine sold himself as someone with military might which is why the armor pieces were included. Over it all Blaine wore a heavy cape, lined with fur from he didn't know what animal. The cape was heavy and thick and he thought between the armor and it, he would spend his marriage sweating.

Blaine had a sword clipped into the scabbard on his fauld. It was completely ceremonial and was probably dull, but it was one of the few items in the castle that had not been traded to improve the lives of the citizens. His boots were not plated, but they too were heavy too.

Jeff was putting the finishing touches on Blaine, the crown of the prince. They had to have it replicated since Cooper probably had the real crown with him, but it was a decent replica and thankfully, light on his head.

"Well Blaine... if I do say so myself. You look like a king." Trent said, having backed up and looking Blaine up and down.

Blaine smiled over to Trent. "Thank you...."

“Are you nervous?” Nick asked while straightening out the cape behind him.

“Actually... no.” Blaine double checked with himself to make sure. He was actually quite calm and alright with what was about to happen.

He was faced with Jeff’s grin as Jeff stood back to admire the sight he must be. “Wow. You know Nick and I were talking...”

He heard a little cough behind him as Nick continued to fix the cape.

Jeff continued. “You and Kurt getting married will mean Nick and I can. I’d be so happy if you guys came to the wedding when it happens.”

Blaine smiled broadly, “That’s amazing guys. Congratulations.... and of course we’d be there. Make sure you save us seats.”

Jeff clasped his hands together and laughed happily when a knock sounded at the door. “Waiting on you Blaine!” came Noah’s voice outside.

Blaine felt a flutter in his chest and he gave one last smile to the guys before heading up, Noah leading the way. Good god this outfit was sweltering.

Noah talked as they walked along the currently emptied out castle, “You look good man. Bigger somehow.”

Blaine chuckled, “Probably because I’ve doubled my weight in this outfit. Kurt has a good sense of style, but I hope he doesn’t expect me to wear such elaborate get-ups every time I need to do something regal because I can barely move.”

Noah led him out into the courtyard and then it all hit Blaine. He saw the people sitting in the benches and Sue Sylvester standing at the top of the platform. He saw his sisters all in a row, wearing beautiful dresses and flowers braided into their hair. He saw Kurt. Kurt standing by Sue with his father and Finn off to one side, all in their armor, shined and polished for the day.

His stomach turned over on itself and for a moment he thought he was going to be sick. He had probably gone pale too. He was getting married. This was it. Was he nervous or excited? He couldn’t tell.



“You have to keep walking man...” Noah whispered beside him.

Right. Right. Keep walking.

Blaine walked slowly, keeping track of his feet to make sure he didn't trip over his feet. As he passed, the people in the benches stood.

Keep walking. Keep walking.

He felt a hand on his and looked up, his eyes catching Kurt's who was smiling somehow knowingly. That touch made him feel a hundred times better and he took Kurt's hand and easily stood up beside him on the platform in front of Sue.

Sue began speaking and everyone sat down. Blaine wasn't listening to her though, he was looking at Kurt who was looking back at him. Everything was okay so long as he got to look into those glaz eyes.

Everything was wonderful in fact.

They held each other's hands as Sue droned on about the greatness of Westerville and the coming together to celebrate. Blaine desperately wanted to just kiss Kurt, and he had to keep reminding himself that they would get to that, hopefully sooner rather than later.

They hadn't gone any further than the day they became engaged. There hadn't been time for more than simple kisses and holding each other in bed as they slept for the small amount of time they could sleep each day until now. When Jeff asked Blaine if he was nervous about getting married that was one thing. If Jeff had asked Blaine about being nervous about the wedding night, Blaine would have responded in the affirmative.

He so wanted to please Kurt, and didn't want him disappointed. People had come up to him and jokingly talked about pleasing Kurt in bed and lasting, and other things Blaine hadn't worried about until they spoke with him. He had laughed and gone along with the joke, but inwardly it made him scared. He was going to be a king, he needed to be confident and knowing.

Sue had said something to which Kurt got down on his knees, bringing Blaine with him. He was glad Kurt was listening. He supposed he would try to pay attention at his own wedding too now.

“With these witnesses before us, do you princes accept one another as husbands under the law of Westerville?”

Both of them said “I do.” with such haste that they had to hold back their giggles as they looked at each other.

The wedding continued with a series of official procedures including dabbing of holy water on their brows, agreement to serve Westerville in their marriage, and acknowledge Kurt’s title as Prince.

After what seemed like forever, during which time Blaine’s legs had fallen asleep, they were finally asked to stand again before the crowd as husbands, princes of the realm, and kiss to seal their union.

About damned time thought Blaine and as he stood on numb legs, he quickly reached out for Kurt, pulling him into his arms and giving the crowd a kiss to talk about as he dipped Kurt’s head back and connected their lips.

A cheer went up from the crowd and Sue announced that they were now Prince Anderson and Prince Hummel of Westerville.

The crowd stood as they walked down the procession route and around the back of the palace where carriages and a litter for them was waiting to parade them through the streets. Blaine received hugs and handshakes from Burt, Finn, Rachel, Carole, and so many others he lost count. His sisters gave them both kisses on the cheeks and giggled. Molly, the littlest, asked which of them had rescued the other since in all the stories that Blaine had read her before, it was a prince rescuing a princess.

Blaine laughed, “He saved me.”

Molly nodded, “I thought so. He looks tougher.”

Finally, they were able to sneak away together for a moment before they were called to get into the litter, and ducked into the stables.

“Good god I thought Sylvester wasn’t ever going to stop talking.” Kurt exclaimed, then jumping at Blaine and pressing his whole body back against a pillar as he kissed him.

Blaine moaned softly and ran his hands up Kurt's back, "I know... and now we need to smile and wave for the whole afternoon..."

Kurt gasped a little as Blaine drew his fingers around Kurt's collarbone. The armor they were both wearing was making it difficult to really get close, but Blaine knew of a couple exposed spots on Kurt that made him make the most enticing of noises.

They were still kissing when Blaine heard the telltale click bow being readied and on instinct he pushed Kurt down and away into the hay.

There, standing across the stall they were in, was Elias Anderson. He was filthy in a worn out and torn tunic, his hair and beard a stringy mess, and he had a crossbow pointed right at Blaine's head.

"Well hello Blaine."

## 31. We Found Each Other in the Dark

Kurt stumbled backward, trying to maintain his balance before falling against hay bale where he steadied himself, not fully standing, but crouched. He looked up, taking in a deep breath to replace the one Blaine had knocked out of him.

He immediately recognized the man from the painting in the hall. Elias looked more aged in person however, his long dark curls had streaks of grey spun through them and they looked oily and in need of a brushing. His once white tunic had streaks of grey and black over it, torn in various areas. He had no belt for the sword he was carrying, instead the scabbard hung on a rope haphazardly tied around his waist. Under the tunic he wore grey legging, also muddied up to the knee with tears along the lines of his legs. He did not wear any footwear and his toes had long gnarled yellow nails growing from them. If he hadn't seen the picture of Elias, he would have thought they had been approached by a random madman.

Elias was a couple of yards away, and had his crossbow aimed at Blaine's head. Kurt looked back and forth between the father and son, trying to judge the best course of action. A good crossbow was not common and Kurt wasn't sure he could trust that it wouldn't shoot if he lunged at Elias. The adrenaline was surging through him and he knew he needed to act, do something, to save Blaine.

"What are you doing here father?" Blaine said coolly, as if having a weapon aimed at his head was nothing to be worried about. If Blaine distracted Elias, Kurt might be able to draw his sword unnoticed.

"What am I doing here? HERE?! I'm the goddamn king of this place you fucking fairy!" Elias shook at his words came out in snarled and spit slinging shouts. Kurt moved his hand to his side, reaching slowly for his sword hilt.

Blaine put his hands up, palms out. "You left. It isn't safe for you here father. The Hummel army is here and - NO!"

Blaine's yell came as Elias turned the crossbow on Kurt who froze in spot. "I know they're fucking here. You've gone and married their little fag prince! What a sham!"

Kurt held his breath and looked at the arrow pointed at him. In truth he was relieved it was now on him and no longer on Blaine. It made him more in control of the situation. He would only have to worry about himself.

“No father. Let him be. Please. You’re mad at me.” Blaine was now rambling, his voice quaking in panic. Kurt could see his face from the corner of his eye, eyes beginning to water and grow wide in fear.

“Damn right I am. Send me a note telling me to surrender and then you go and marry like you have that right.” Elias’ eyes narrowed as he looked down the crossbow, finger gently running along the trigger. Kurt’s best hope if he hit the trigger would be to move quickly in place and hope his armor could take it.

“You left... there wasn’t any hope for you to return. Please father. They’ll just catch you....”

“No....” Elias licked over his lips, keeping his stare on Kurt, “I can escape. But I won’t let you or him take the throne.”

“We won’t. I’ll step down. Just leave him be. Please.”

Kurt wished he had taught Blaine how to talk through situations like these. Begging only infuriated the mad, and Elias has clearly lost it, if there had been anything to lose at all based on what Kurt knew of the man.

“Think I’ll kill him first. Let you watch. Teach you a lesson before it’s your turn.” Elias began to pull down on the trigger and Kurt tensed, bracing himself to jump.

“NO!” Blaine lunged himself at Elias. Kurt heard a ping behind him as the bow shot when Blaine tackled Elias and then crossbow fell a few feet away.

Under Blaine’s force, Elias fell flat to the dirt ground with Blaine landing atop him. Kurt drew his sword in that moment and yelled out for support as he darted forward to put his sword to Elias’ throat in case he had the gall to fight back against Blaine whose whole weight was on him.

Within a moment, troops flooded in through all the entries of the stable and horses who were in their stalls whinnied out at the disruption.

"Get off me! Let me go!" the shell of a man yelled from under Blaine. Elias tried to struggle but between Blaine bracing his body against him, and Kurt's threat of cutting his neck, the struggle was pathetic.

Santana and Brittany were the ones who came closest enough to help first. Brittany drew one of her stilettos and looked to Kurt for orders.

"It's Elias Anderson. He needs to be taken into custody and incarcerated in the strongest cell there is."

Brittany nodded and sheathed the stiletto, taking a length of wound rope off the back of her belt. Between Santana, Blaine, and Kurt, they managed to forced Elias onto his stomach and hold him in place while Brittany bound his hands together. He was still fighting back, but it was more for show than any actual attempt to get free.

Burt pushed his way through the troops who had formed a protective circle around Kurt, Blaine, Elias, Brittany, and Santana. Santana and Brittany pulled Elias off the ground to face him on his approach and Elias' first response was to spit in Burt's direction.

"Goddamn Hummel. Should have come after you long ago and made sure your worthless line was ended properly."

Burt arched an eyebrow but otherwise ignored Elias for the moment. He walked up beside Kurt who was trying to brush the hay and dirt off Blaine who was looking absolutely worn now. Blaine still seemed shocked and kept looking at Elias in a blend of disbelief and sadness.

"What should we do with him your highness?" Burt addressed Blaine and Kurt felt his breath hitch in his throat. His father was giving Blaine the ultimate test of a leader.

Blaine blinked, and his eyes roamed over to look at Burt. Kurt noted he looked lost, and the strength that had been growing in him over the weeks after the invasion had seemed to dissipate. Without responding to Burt, Blaine turned to face Kurt, looking at him for help.

Kurt stopped his nervous fussing over Blaine's clothings and intertwined their fingers, locking eyes with him and speaking softly so only Blaine could hear him clearly. "It's your time to decide what kind of leader you're going to be."

Blaine seemed to consider that for another moment and the silence felt overwhelming to Kurt. Finally Blaine looked back to Burt, took in a deep breath, and spoke with renewed confidence. "He needs to be put in an isolated cell with four guards on him at all times. His fate will be decided at the summit."

Burt nodded and took the lead in the procession the dungeons with Brittany and Santana nudging Elias forward with each step. The mad old man seemed shocked into silence himself and for that, Kurt was thankful. The man didn't seem to know to say anything but hateful words.

Blaine ran his thumb over Kurt's palm. "Come on husband. The people are waiting for a celebration."

Kurt nodded quietly back to Blaine, who was clearly doing his best to be in control right now and refocus on the fact that it was supposed to be a happy day. They walked hand in hand to their litter and sat in their seats.

As the parade started to move forward, Kurt looked ahead and whispered to Blaine, "You're going to be alright, right?"

Blaine gave Kurt's hand a firm squeeze and turned to look at him, a smile forming, "Actually. I think I'm going to be great. I feel like there's been resolution and I don't have anything left to fear."

Kurt gave Blaine an open mouthed smile, that evolved on his face with a little chuckle of surprise. "I think I just fell a little bit more in love with you just now."

Blaine laughed and pointed ahead to the crowd forming outside the gates, "You can show me how much you love me later. Our people are waiting. Smile and wave."

The parade was long and Kurt's arm ached from all the waving. He was sure his face would be formed into a permanent smile as well. Then it was the feast and the endless speeches.

They ate at a head table and Kurt picked at his food. He was never good eating with nerves, and being watched by a crowd of nobles and ranking members of the army wasn't helping. Blaine however ate like he had been starved for days and Kurt took more than one opportunity to remind him to chew with his mouth closed.

Sue was giving a formal toast as the ringleader of the festivities when she made an announcement.

“- and since Elias is now in custody. I propose we use this opportunity to formally coronate Prince Anderson as our choice of regent for Westerville.”

Kurt could hear Blaine stop his chewing beside him and then swallow very slowly. Blaine looked over to Kurt for help once more, and Kurt just smiled and nodded to him. A few days ago Elias was still at large and now he was safely in custody. Things were progressing and there was no longer any need to hold back on the disassembly of the army.

“Lick the meat off your teeth and accept Blaine.”

Kurt could see Blaine’s tongue move from under his lips and he felt himself harden a little in his fault. Giving Kurt a quick peck on the cheek, Blaine stood. “I accept Noblewoman Sylvester.”

Sue Sylvester nodded and everyone went quiet as she walked to the centre of the hall with her servant girl Rebecca following her. Rebecca was carrying a bottle of holy water and a sword for Sue.

Kurt watched with an adoring face as Blaine knowingly knelt before Sue who gave the oath of kings.

“Do you swear to enter into a relationship with the people of Westerville, your people, for their betterment, above all other loyalties, and care for them as their supreme father and ruler?”

Blaine spoke firmly, loudly, so all could hear him from where he knelt. “I do.”

“Do you swear to defend Westerville and it’s people from invasion and fight to preserve it’s honor?”

“I do.”

“Do you swear this before all your countrymen and women, so to earn their allegiance and respect?”

“I do.”

“Then as high noble of the realm of Westerville, I name you, Blaine Anderson, as high king of Westerville. Long live the king!”



Everyone stood in unison and cheered, “Long live the king!”

As Blaine stood, he gave Sue a courteous nod and looked back to Kurt, smiling softly. Kurt returned the smile lovingly.

God he was thankful the nobles hadn’t insisted on blessing the wedding bed as was customary between heterosexual royal couples. Blessing it to produce an heir wouldn’t do a lick of good anyways, at least not tonight.

As soon as they were able to escape the feast, they had gone to their room where Blaine quickly had Kurt pressed up against the back of the door and was kissing him furiously while simultaneously cursing the layers of clothing and armor they were wearing.

Kurt’s breath was laboured as he trying to duly focus on untying Blaine’s cape and pressed back in the kisses with equally heated need. Watching Blaine today, taking the lead, looking so brilliant, Kurt’s nerves were totally lost in the passion he felt. He needed Blaine, and that needed had built up over the course of the day until this moment where he was struggling to untie a simple knot.

Blaine gasped and pulled away for a moment, “Maybe...” he took a deep breath and continued as Kurt tried pull him back on his lips, “We should just take a minute and disrobe.”

Kurt moaned as he realized that would be the quickest route to the lust he needed satisfied. He didn’t want to be separate from Blaine though. His currently limited logic won out though and he let Blaine go.

In a disorderly manner, both the boys unlatched, untied, and threw off their clothing and armor, not caring where it fell, and in a couple instances, armor hit armor resulting in a loud clash of metal. Their eyes stayed locked on one another the entire time and once they were down to nothing, they took a moment to appreciate one another.

Blaine’s body was gorgeous. He had gotten his bindings totally removed the night before and while he would always have some scars along the base of his ribcage, his toned chest complemented his levelled abdominals. Blaine was fully erect and Kurt moaned a little as he looked at Blaine’s dick. That was his. His and his alone. Kurt knew that Blaine was looking over his own body and while that normally would have made Kurt nervous, in this instant, Kurt was animalistic.

Before Blaine could make a move, Kurt had rounded up on him and tackled him against the edge of the bed. Kurt brought his mouth to Blaine's neck and began nibbling there, pressing his body against Blaine's so their cocks were in full contact.

Blaine gasped and dropped a little, falling back onto the bed. He wrapped his arms around Kurt's back and pulled him down on him. "Oh gods Kurt...."

Kurt felt pride well up in him to see, and hear, Blaine's response to him. He reached down with a hand, gently running a hand along Blaine's cock to which Blaine moaned and tilted his head back. "Please Kurt..."

Blaine's hands pushed at Kurt's chest and so Kurt sat up, straddling Blaine's body with Blaine looking up at him with hazy delight. "You're going to make me embarrass myself... Please. Let me make you feel good too."

Kurt smirked. Santana had made good on her earlier promise and while the reading was short, it gave Kurt an idea of what he needed to do. He was glad to pleasure Blaine, and confident now that he had an idea of what to do.

"Please Kurt... lay down for me." Blaine spoke up again from below. Kurt pulled himself off Blaine, but teased his cock against Blaine's in the process eliciting another moan. He laid back on the bed, triangling his knees up and spreading his legs a little so Blaine could see just what he had gotten today.

Blaine turned onto his side and looked at the sight of Kurt presenting his cock and ass for Blaine to see. Kurt could see the wanton lust in Blaine's eyes as he scrambled up and gently touched the frenulum of Kurt's cock, and then it was Kurt's turn to whimper.

"Oh Kurt... you make the best sounds..."

Kurt took a breath as he felt Blaine's hand retreat and then gasped as it was replaced with Blaine's tight swollen lips. He grabbed the sheets in either hands and jerked his hips forward a little. He was trying with every fibre of his being not to come just from that and it was damn hard because it just felt so damn good.

Blaine's head bobbed down over Kurt's member and Kurt could feel Blaine's tongue exploring the base of it in his mouth. More whimpers and even some cursing came out of Kurt's mouth as he fisted the sheets, "Please Blaine, oh god, please."

Blaine rolled his lips off Kurt's cock with a little smack, "You taste wonderful husband." Kurt looked down his body to where Blaine was licking his lips and staring at Kurt with a teasing smirk.

"Can you..." Kurt whimpered, his nerves still on fire and now the cool air was hitting his cock which was sensitive from Blaine's tongue.

Blaine gently stroked his hands up and down Kurt's thighs a moment, "So soft..."

"Can you fuck me Blaine?" Kurt finally managed to get the whole sentence out and looked at Blaine needily.

Blaine's jaw went slack and he looked down over Kurt, and then back to his face, "Yes... I want that. I want you so badly."

Kurt moaned and fumbled a hand up under a pillow where he had left a little container which Quinn had given him containing a lubricant. He handed it to Blaine hurriedly, "Here. I want you. Please."

Blaine nodded and opened the container, dipping his finger into the lubricant and then bring it to Kurt's hole, teasing a finger over it, "Are you ready."

Kurt nodded and tried to relax himself. He was wound so tightly with need right now that he had to remind himself to relax so it wouldn't hurt as bad as he had read about.

Blaine slowly pressed the finger up to the knuckle and Kurt found himself holding his breath, feeling a burning sensation rise up in him, but he begged Blaine to keep going, wanting to give himself to Blaine so badly.

Blaine slowly slid the finger in and out and as the burning eased, Blaine added another finger with more lube and Kurt found himself moaning loudly without any control over it. Blaine had found his prostate when he added the second finger and any burning feeling was negated by the pulsing in his rear.

"Oh god Blaine. Screw it. Screw me. I want you. All of you. Now!" Kurt cursed and shuddered, jerking himself down on Blaine's fingers roughly.

Blaine seemed a little taken aback and withdrew the fingers a little too quickly, causing Kurt to whine sharply at the loss. "No... I want you in me!"

Kurt could see the surprise in Blaine's face through his eyes that were half lidded. Blaine was rubbing his cock with the lubricant, and then had it up against Kurt's ass. "Are you sure...?"

Kurt hissed and pushed himself down, trying to force himself onto Blaine's cock, "Yes. Please. Now."

Blaine put a hand on Kurt's thigh to steady himself and began to slowly push forward into Kurt's hole.

Kurt groaned and once again grabbed at the sheets, digging his fingers into the bed. The burn had returned and Blaine was definitely a lot bigger than two fingers. Kurt could feel himself stretching out to what seemed inhuman size.

Finally Blaine had himself completely burrowed in Kurt's ass and started slowly moving himself back and forth. Kurt whimper below and lifted one of his hands to his own cock to touch it gently as Blaine softly thrust.

Kurt wasn't going to last long. Once his ass got used to the invasion, all that was left was the sharp electrical pulses of pleasure that were going up and down his body. He tried to warn Blaine but found that the ability to speak was lost to him and instead let out a loud cry, feeling his come shoot up on his belly.

"Oh... god... Kurt...." It seemed that was invitation enough for Blaine to come to and he rammed his cock right up into Kurt and moaned as he released.

Once Blaine had finished, he slowly pulled himself out and weakly fell at Kurt's side where Kurt was still panting and staring up at the canopy over the bed in absolute bliss.

"Meow?" Cat looked over at this point from the cat bed.

"Shut up Cat." Blaine murmured into his pillow, shuddering every now and then.

After a couple minutes, Kurt started to find his breathing rhythm again and looked tenderly over at Blaine who was a sweaty, flushed mess beside him. "That... I can't believe I've lived without that."

Blaine laughed into the pillow and then turned his head to face Kurt, "You have to be the most demanding sexual partner ever - not that I know from experience! But I am definitely not complaining."

They both laughed and Blaine pushed himself up and off the bed, collecting a clean hand towel and wetting it so Kurt could clean himself off without having to move.

"You know we're going to have to do that again tonight right? I mean... "

Kurt winked up at Blaine when he spoke, tossing the towel to the side of the bed after he felt clean enough. "We will, and for the rest of our lives too."

## 32. Epilogue

It was a week later and Blaine was laying in bed, head rested on Kurt's naked chest while he drew lazy circles around Kurt's abdomen, marveling in the smooth, creamy skin of his husband. They had just engaged in some rather frivolous sex after having a lazy lunch together and were now a tangle of skin, limbs, and sheets.

"I have a confession to make Kurt..." Blaine spoke softly, watching as the light, fair hairs on Kurt's stomach bent under the weight of his breath.

"Mmm?" Kurt had his fingers nestled in Blaine's hair, where he had been stroking it until his post-orgasm lethargy set in.

"I haven't really felt anything except happy about my father being caught and then sent to live in guarded solitude after the peace summit... And now I feel guilty because of it."

Kurt's eyes cracked open. "Let me see if I can sum up what I'm hearing. Your dad essentially had you locked up for most of your life with a good degree of abuse, and due to his own issues, not the least of which was the homophobia and superiority complexes he took out on you, he has ended up getting locked away for the rest of his life. You are relieved to be freed of your captors hold and away from his abuse, however you feel guilty because he's still your father and you feel that because of that, you somehow owe him better."

Blaine pushed himself up and winced at the sore tenderness in him. He looked to Kurt and shook his head. "How is it you can figure things out just like that?"

Kurt smiled sweetly and brought his arms around Blaine's shoulders to embrace him. "I like to watch you when you think I'm not looking. I watch your eyes, your mouth, the way you move your head.... It's all so telling and beautiful." A kiss was laid from Kurt's lips to Blaine's forehead before he continued. "Love, I think it's natural to want more from your relationship with your father than you do, but I don't think that you are going to get more than what you have, and what you have is more of an enemy than a loved one in him."

Blaine rested his head into the nook where Kurt's shoulder met his neck. "Do you think he can change?"

Kurt let out a sigh and Blaine knew that would be the beginning of an explanation as to why he couldn't or wouldn't. "I think anyone can change.... But I think that to change, someone has to want to change and be willing to put the effort into changing. I don't know if your father is willing."

Blaine's nuzzled his nose along Kurt's collarbone, a thoughtful and also affectionate gesture. "Cooper seemed certain he could eventually change his mind..."

"Cooper also had the approval of him growing up and little of the abuse. He has a lot more to lose in actuality than you do because he actually had something of a relationship with your father." Kurt's hands were sweeping up and down Blaine's back now. They were both such cuddle whores.

"That's why he agreed to lead the guard cycles at the sanctuary where they're keeping my father..." Blaine noted.

It had been a few days now since the summit and Blaine had done well. His brothers, Cooper included, agreed that Blaine should stay on as king because they all would lack any legitimacy and support. Much to Blaine's surprise, Cooper also admitted that he had been dreading having to serve as king ever since he was a boy and he was more than happy to give it up. His younger brothers either continued on as realm protectorates for Westerville or joined the remnants of Hummels army to develop an understanding of their virtues and learn to fight for the right. Overall it had gone off without any concerns, save for one.

While they were supportive of Blaine's marriage and were hesitant at first about Kurt before recognizing how wonderful Blaine knew Kurt was, it was the situation of the heir.

It didn't seem to matter that Blaine had more siblings than teeth, none of them wanted to end up in the role Blaine had taken on. Most were happy on the battlefield and exploring new regions.

It had seemed to be a sticking point until Kurt had an idea. Westerville would be a progressive nation, one that heard the voices of all its people. Slowly, but surely, during Blaine's reign, they would develop a council of representatives who would represent the interests of the citizens and vote on issues according to the values of the groups they represented. The blacksmiths would choose a representative from among them, the soldiers would choose one for them, the farmers, the merchants, etc. Blaine would stay on, but if all went to plan then by the time he was in his late years, he would be a symbolic leader only.

It meant that they would have more freedom too. Kurt was already planning out a summer trip to the plot of land his dad had claimed in what had once been Lima where he was going to build a house for him and Carole which would have many spare rooms for, and he looked at Blaine and Finn as he said this, "many grandchildren". That still left Blaine thinking about children, but if a blood heir was no longer as essential as it had been in a traditional monarchy, this meant he and Kurt could go into the orphanage he had established and maybe create a family with those who really needed one.

Kurt had dozed off while Blaine traversed his thoughts, a gentle snore emanating from his slightly parted lips. Blaine grinned to himself and slowly eased himself out of Kurt's hold, which was no easy feat as Kurt was a Blaine magnet in his sleep. Blaine had happily become accustomed to having no personal space anymore when he slept. It took awhile and Blaine had to hold his breath a few times, but he freed himself.

He slowly snuck to the door, half because he didn't want to wake Kurt, and half because his backside was still burning from their lovemaking earlier. Cracking it open a hair, he softly whispered "Trent, you there?"

There was a muffled reply in the affirmative and Blaine heard footsteps approaching the door. He kept the door only open a little so he wasn't flashing himself to Trent, though at this point, Trent probably knew what had just gone on.

"Here. Take her. She's a wriggly thing and she stole a ham pie. Keep her out of my kitchen." Trent said, with some disdain as he pushed the door open a little more to hold a little golden puppy out to Blaine.

Blaine laughed and took the puppy into his arms, thanking Trent and closing the door. The little blonde girl had just the softest ears which had reminded Blaine so much of Kurt's smooth skin. She was wriggly in his arms and extremely excited with her tail repeatedly bashing against Blaine's chest. He had found her in a box by the stables and Jeff explained that she was the runt of the litter and no one had wanted her. Naturally that made Blaine want her immediately and so now he was creeping back up to the bed with the puppy in his hands, ready to surprise his husband.

He set the little pup down on the bed and she immediately navigated to Kurt where she began whining and licking his face. Blaine had to stifle a laugh as Kurt murmured, "Blaine...."



And then Kurt's eyes opened and his face brightened, hands reaching out to touch the puppy and make sure it wasn't a dream. "Oh! Blaine!"

Blaine laughed and went to collect Cat from the catbed. Cat sniffed at Blaine's hands and mewled angrily, smelling the puppy on him and then seeing the cursed canine as Blaine brought cat to the bed. "Come meet your new friend."

Cat was definitely not impressed with the squirming pile of canine that Kurt was not snuggling and giving little kisses to, but to Cat's credit, no hissing was conducted. Cat curled up Blaine's pillow and watched the dog suspiciously.

"Oh Blaine I love her. She's such a little sweetie...."

Blaine smiled and leaned over to kiss Kurt, "Happy one week anniversary. What are you going to name her?"

Kurt hummed and hahed as he looked over the little one in his hands, "We'll it won't be Dog just so you know. I think... She is..... Joy."

"Joy?" Blaine's queried, reaching out the bed the puppies head who in turn started licking at Blaine's hand.

"Yes. Married for a week to the best man alive, retired from the battlefield, and now with a puppy in my arms... I feel nothing but joy."

Blaine beamed, "Well then. I'm glad I didn't give her to you on a bad day or she might have ended up with an unfortunate name."

Kurt chuckled and leaned against Blaine in their bed, letting Joy nibble on his finger with a playful little growl. "I love you."

Blaine warmed as Kurt drew into him and wrapped an arm around his shoulders, "I love you too."