

Lucky That I

by

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Kurt/Blaine || AU || NC-17

GKM Fill (see first page)

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GKM Prompt

Original prompt found here:

<http://glee-kink-meme.livejournal.com/30710.html?thread=38182134#t38182134>

Some Game of Thrones season 1 spoilers below

I'd love a GoT AU with Kurt in Daenerys's place: he's the younger brother of an exiled prince/lord/duke (maybe Finn or Sebastian?) who sells him into marriage to the Dothraki king Blaine in hopes of securing Blaine's barbarian hordes to invade the kingdom he was exiled from.

Kurt is terrified and has only heard the worst things about these desert people and expects to be treated just like a slave.

But despite being a rough warrior, Blaine isn't like Drogo in the show - because of the language barrier, he thinks Kurt consents willingly to this marriage and it isn't until their wedding night that he understands what has happened. Unlike what happens in the show, Blaine doesn't rape Kurt or treat him like a slave, but is gentle and respects him, and they don't have sex until Kurt is ready and initiates it himself.

Want:

Kurt and Blaine learning each other's languages so they can communicate in and out of bed

sheltered, innocent Kurt who has been mistreated by his brother, but has a fierce heart underneath his naivete and hurt

Blaine comforting a scared and confused Kurt, and helping him get used to this new way of life

sweet, gentle sex, at least the first time

Kurt eventually standing up to his brother and later getting revenge with Blaine's help

Top!Blaine

Do not want:

scat, vore, waterplay, d/s, anything along those lines

stupid!Blaine - there are differences in language and culture, but he is the king and leader of an army, not an idiot

Chapter One

"It'll be alright, honest," Finn said, patting him on the back. "I mean, what'd he do to you anyway that'd be so bad?"

Kurt didn't answer him. There were a thousand retorts on his tongue, just begging him to let them out, if only to see that dumbstruck look on Finn's face when he'd realised that he'd as good as sold Kurt to slavery.

He didn't use a single one. Not because he wouldn't have wanted to, but because his voice would have trembled so bad his speech might have been incomprehensible.

Finn waved him goodbye with a huge smile on his face.

Kurt looked down at the ground, hoping he'd understand what the royal envoy around him was talking about.

Maybe it was for the better he didn't. The language was rough, coarse even. Like every word in it was an insult, or profanity. If they were talking about him, perhaps it was better that he stayed ignorant of his exact fate, if only for a few more days.

Blaine was pleased.

When the exiled prince Finn of Lima had approached him, he had been ready to extend his helping hand without further prompting. Little did he care if Finn lived in Lima or not; he'd already begun making plans for invasion before Finn's arrival.

Then Finn had said he had a brother who'd be more than willing to take Blaine's hand in marriage in exchange for Blaine's alliance. Two birds with one stone, Blaine had thought.

Handsome like a young stallion, Finn had said. Delightful as summer's flowers, with a wit like the sharpest knife and a voice that could hurt the angels.

His interpreter had admitted he hadn't quite understood the meaning of the last phrase, but it had seemed like a good bargain, nonetheless.

It was, there was no way of arguing that. Prince Kurt of Lima on his new throne, dressed in the best that Blaine's kingdom could offer, eyes demurely lowered to the carpets, was frankly the most pleasing thing Blaine had laid his eyes on in quite a while. He'd got a glimpse of those eyes when he'd lowered the crown on Kurt's head and pulled him up to stand at Blaine's side, as his consort. It had taken all his force of will not to get lost in them there and then.

He could hardly wait till the night, when he'd get Kurt all to himself, away from the court, in their private chambers. He'd get lost in Kurt's eyes then, gently pull up his chin and show him it would be fine to look anywhere he wanted, run his fingers on Kurt's skin and make him smile.

Yes, Blaine was very pleased indeed.

Chapter Two

The feast was pleasant, Kurt supposed. There were performers, jesters like back in home, and the King of the Desert let him eat the same food as the guests. Maybe he wouldn't be immediately made a slave.

But he couldn't help the feeling of thread in his very bones. He looked out the window as the sun was beginning to fall on the sky, and he knew that no matter how graceful, how kind, the King looked now, offering him caramel apples from a silver tray, he would take Kurt out of this room, come nightfall, and force him wherever the King wanted.

Eventually, a servant came and whispered something in the King's ear, and the King stood up from his throne, applauded the juggler currently in front of him and then reached towards Kurt.

Kurt sprung up from his seat before he would be subjected to the humiliation of being pulled up and followed the King away from the hall into the corridors. A few of the King's guards trailed after them.

They walked, up some stairs and along a corridor, turn to the right and then down a few steps before walking yet one corridor. The King had taken one of his hands and his grasp was firm; even if it hadn't been, there was no escape.

Finally, they reached a door. The King pushed it open, escorted Kurt in and stayed behind to say some words to the guards.

Hesitantly, Kurt took in the room. It was clearly a fine room: all furniture was made of wood as opposed to the stone the rest of the castle's furniture seemed to be, and there were fine draperies hanging from the walls. The bed, when Kurt gingerly sat on it, was the softest he'd ever felt.

The door closed, and in seconds, the King was sitting on the bed with him.

Kurt willed his heart beat slower, afraid the King might hear it, but it didn't.

He hadn't given much thought to what exactly would the King do to him. He wasn't stupid - he knew there was going to be sexual relations. But he didn't know how. Was the King going to push him down on the bed, force kisses on him, tear off his clothes? What- What would he want with Kurt's naked form?

The King reached for his hand and gently brought it to his lips.

Kurt looked down at his lap.

This wasn't- What did the King want?

Then there were fingers on his chin, and it was lifted up so that he was staring right into the King's eyes.

They were hazel, a bit brown, a bit green. And they looked so- Had Kurt ever guessed at how a barbarian king's eyes would look like, he would have thought them less warm. Less generous. There was not a touch of cruelty in the King's eyes.

They were clouding, though. There was a frown on the King's face that hadn't been there when their gazes had met. He'd looked at Kurt's eyes, at all the fear and horror that Kurt was sure was evident there, and he was not pleased with what he saw.

The King dropped his hand from Kurt's chin. Kurt expected him to punish him, slap him, maybe, or worse. They said the King of the Desert had no rival inside the boxing ring.

Ever so gently, the King took his hand and held it. Kurt stared at it - them - for some time before he risked glancing up at the King's face.

He was watching Kurt with a soft, perhaps sad smile, like he didn't even realise for a few seconds that Kurt was looking at him now. Snapping out of it, he yelled something, like a command, and the guards opened the door but did not come in. The King said something else, and Kurt heard footsteps go down the corridor before the door was closed again.

The King turned to look at Kurt once again. Slowly, he brought up his other hand, the one that was not holding Kurt's, and pointed at himself.

"Blaine," he said before turning to point at Kurt. Kurt swallowed.

"Kurt," he said, voice almost breaking.

Chapter Three

Wes was away for longer than Blaine would have liked. He needed the interpreter now. Kurt was- He seemed to be better now than when they'd come, when he'd been restless like a dyne in the desert, shifting away under Blaine's touch. But he certainly wasn't relaxed and happy, and nothing less would do.

Blaine didn't know what was going on, but a willing groom did not look his newly-wed husband in the eye looking like he was expecting a blow.

Finally, there was a knock on the door and the interpreter stepped in.

"Your Majesty?"

"It appears," Blaine said, fighting to keep his cool, "that we've had a slight misunderstanding. Would you mind repeating Prince Finn's offer of my marriage to his brother once again?"

"Certainly not, your highness," the interpreter said, bowing low. "Prince Finn offered his brother's hand in marriage to you, your highness, in exchange for your invading the kingdom of Lima."

Blaine took a deep breath and braced himself. "And had he, at the time of making this offer, his brother's approval?"

The interpreter's eyes were wandering the room, settling anywhere except Blaine's eyes. "I must admit, your highness, that my knowledge of the nuances of the language does not allow me to answer your question, your highness. He did not mention his brother's view on the matter."

Blaine felt his hands clench into fists, and had to force them to relax, trying to give a reassuring smile to Kurt, who looked afraid. Even more afraid than he'd been until then.

"And would you mind explaining to King Consort, in his language, that I had no idea his opinion had not been consulted in the matter?"

The interpreter looked surprised at the request, but began talking in that curious language, addressing his words to Kurt, who looked like he understood them. He looked perplexed, then sad, then, dare Blaine hope, like he might smile, and then scared again.

"And tell him that I do not intend to hurt him in any way," Blaine added.

Kurt blinked when the interpreter told him that, looking down on the covers and biting his lip.

Then he spoke. Blaine had always thought the language of Kurt's people frivolous and wasteful, adding unnecessary twirls and having too many syllables to its words, but from Kurt's lips, it was beautiful. No other words, just beautiful.

"The King Consort wishes to know," the interpreter said, "what you intend to do with him, your highness."

Blaine looked down at their joined hands to buy a bit of time. He looked up at Kurt's face, catching his eye, linking their gazes. He knew exactly what he wanted to say.

"I intend to honour the bond that has linked us today," he said, smiling at Kurt, hoping that, although he couldn't understand the words yet, he wouldn't be afraid of them so much. "To have him stand as my esteemed royal consort until either one of us is no more. And, provided he does not oppose, to attempt to gain the love and trust I thought I already had received."

Kurt seemed to listen to the interpreter's words intently, but his eyes, the way they evaded Blaine's and didn't seem to find rest anywhere, gave away his nervousness. At the last words, his eyes went wide, and he glanced quickly at Blaine. Then he said something, voice barely above a whisper.

"The King Consort says," the interpreter repeated, "that he does not oppose."

Chapter Four

Kurt woke up to a knock on the door.

It took him a moment to remember where he was, and another to realise that he was alone.

The events of last night rushed back to him. All his fears, the surprising gentleness of the King, the interpreter's explanation (Kurt had no doubts as to its truthfulness; the whole misunderstanding had Finn written all over it), the King wishing him goodnight and closing the door after himself, leaving Kurt alone.

He hoped his obvious relief had not offended the King.

"Come in!" he shouted at the door, and then promptly chastised himself. No one would understand the invitation, of course not.

"Good morning, your majesty!"

Kurt stared, non-plussed, as the young woman let the door close after herself. He'd have assumed her one of the servants, by her easy-going attitude, but her dress was too well-tailored.

"You understood me?" he asked dumbly.

"Of course," she said, still smiling. "We're from the same family of unicorns, your majesty. But then I met Santana a few years ago, and she said I'd love it in King Blaine's service, and I do!"

Kurt didn't quite know what to make of her words. Perhaps it was better to not question her further about them. "What's your name?"

"Brittany." She shuffled the wardrobe in the corner and came up to him with a clean shirt. "I like introductions. I would introduce you to Lord Tubbington as well, but King Blaine told me to ask you to come down for breakfast." She looked away as Kurt began self-consciously fiddling with his shirt. "Or he said that if you didn't want to come down, I should have a tray brought up to you. But the hall is so pleasant at mealtimes; surely you wouldn't want to miss it!"

Kurt found himself incapable of challenging her and making her doubt her beliefs. In due course, he followed her through the hallways and corridors again, eventually finding himself in a hall similar to the place of last evening's festivities, but somewhat smaller in size.

The King was sitting at the middle of the long table, on a throne-like chair, and Kurt felt an odd sense of relief when he saw that the seat next to Blaine's, similar in structure, was free. Brittany led him towards it, chatting away as she'd done ever since they left the room. She'd been telling him of her duties in the castle, listing all the people she'd have to check on once Kurt was with the King and what they were supposed to be doing.

Maybe it was Brittany's voice, maybe something else, but the King looked up before Kurt and Brittany reached his place. His face lit up at the sight of Kurt, and Kurt felt himself smiling back.

Brittany said something to the King in his language, and the King answered. He then motioned for Kurt to sit down, and offered him food, an odd type of pie that Kurt had not seen before. Glancing around, he noted that everyone was eating with their fingers, and hesitantly, he lifted a small bite to his lips.

It tasted like nothing Kurt had ever eaten before, but it wasn't bad. The dough had a curious flavour to it and Kurt couldn't name the animal whose meat had been used, but he smiled at the King who'd been watching him and took another bite.

"Do you find the food satisfactory?" someone from the other side of the table asked.

It was the interpreter from the night before. Kurt wished he could have just turned to Blaine and thanked him for the courtesy of gathering people Kurt could actually speak with around him, but of course, the thought was paradoxal.

"I do," he said. "It is very delightful."

The King said something, and the interpreter answered. Kurt supposed he was passing on Kurt's words. A man to his side added a comment, and the interpreter turned to talk to him. Blaine resumed a conversation with the handsome woman next to him.

Kurt had not had the presence of mind to truly listen to the King speak the previous night, much too afraid of what he might be saying, but now, his most dreadful fears assuaged, he could just concentrate on his voice. It was remarkable how the language, on the tongues of other men, sounded so coarse when from

the King's mouth, it assumed more of a precise, commanding quality to it. It was like nothing Kurt had heard before, but he found it pleasing to his ear nonetheless.

Chapter Five

After a while, the interpreter turned back to him with questions of his home country. Kurt answered him to the best of his knowledge, having to admit that his brother had not thought it necessary to educate Kurt in the matters of state sufficiently for him to answer the interpreter's questions. The conversation took a natural turn to literature and music, as those were fields Kurt was well-acquainted with. He asked the interpreter questions of the King's dominions and court as well, eager to know at least something of his new home.

The King had abandoned his conversation with the woman, who the interpreter said was the royal treasurer, and seemed to be content listening in to the conversation.

"How should I address the King?" Kurt asked.

The interpreter looked slightly unsure, glancing at the King and then looking back at Kurt, before giving Kurt the formal form of address in the desert language.

Kurt turned towards the King, repeating the words, hoping he hadn't bludgeoned the language as bad as he felt he had.

The King frowned slightly, shook his head with a glance at the interpreter, and took Kurt's hand.

"Blaine," he said with emphasis.

Kurt couldn't help the pleasant feeling spreading in his chest.

"Blaine," he repeated.

Over the next few days, Blaine found himself wishing he had insisted on a clause that allowed him to enjoy the company of his new husband for at least a few months before embarking upon preparations for war.

Surely a man who was despicable enough to marry off his brother without consultation or second thought would have understood the need for such a pause. Or at least thought he understood.

However little Blaine thought of his new ally, though, he had to admit Finn had not been lying about his brother. Quite aside from Kurt's handsomeness, Blaine found himself absolutely enamoured by Kurt. His voice, his request for needles and thread so that he could tailor his own outfits, the way he sat next to Santana for the entirety of dinner without flinching or showing signs of fear. They knew regrettably little of each other, but every new thing Blaine learnt of Kurt made his affection for the man grow.

They conversed mainly through translations, which Blaine found he hated. He'd got quite used to the method in negotiations with rulers, but it was quite a different matter to tell his interpreter to recite facts about body counts or trade surplus than let someone else in conversations which were supposed to be private and tender in nature.

Moreover, Blaine just wished he would have had more time to spend with Kurt. They saw each other at meals, and when he could spare a minute or two and Kurt was in his room, available. Sometimes, in one of his more selfish moods, Blaine entertained a notion of asking Kurt attend meetings with him, but he did realise it would have been foolish. With only a few days' learning, Kurt would not understand a word of the affairs at hand and would merely be bored, and Blaine had no right to demand a share of his time just so that he could appraise Kurt's form from the corner of his eye.

Time, Blaine told himself firmly, looking up at the ceiling of his room, trying to will himself to sleep. In due course, they would be sufficiently fluent in each others' languages to hold a conversation, and then, maybe, he could see what he could do about gaining Kurt's love.

Chapter Six

The room was warm. Kurt's language tutor (He had a language tutor! The King - Blaine - wanted him to be able to understand conversation, to understand him, not just be there, like a dummy) had said it was because the royal rooms were above the kitchens, to keep them warm. Kurt had heard the nights in the desert were cold, but so far, he'd seen no evidence of that inside the castle.

Then again, he'd also expected not to spend them alone, but so far, that was precisely what he had done.

Following the example he'd set the first night, Blaine had not shared a bed with him but instead slept in an adjacent room. He hadn't touched Kurt either, aside from holding his hand. He asked questions about Kurt and told him about himself, and even if most of their conversation went through a third party, he always made sure to acknowledge Kurt.

Altogether, he'd been better to Kurt than Finn ever had.

There was a knock on the door, and Kurt shouted what his language tutor had told him meant 'Come in!' Apparently, life in the court of the Desert King was very easy if you just knew a few simple phrases.

It was Blaine. He stood by the door with a bouquet of flowers in his hand, hesitantly, as if asking if Kurt's invitation applied to him as well, and Kurt smiled, gesturing for him to come in. Blaine came, sat down a yard away from Kurt on the bed, and offered him the flowers.

"Wes say they from your home."

Kurt had to smile at Blaine's speech. He hadn't expected to be taught the language of the desert people, but even more, he hadn't expected Blaine to start learning his language. He was bad, about as bad as Kurt was in Blaine's language, but he could make simple conversation. Kurt took the flowers, smelling them.

"Thank you," he said, slowing down his speech just a tad for Blaine's benefit.

Blaine obviously knew the expression; he ducked his head, just for a second, before looking at Kurt with a bright smile.

Finn had rarely looked so happy at Kurt's pleasure, let alone thought to attempt to please Kurt at all.

That thought alone was enough to make the tears fall. Combined with the flowers, and Blaine's friendly eyes looking at him, it shouldn't have been a wonder that Kurt found himself sobbing mindlessly.

He'd half-expected Blaine to leave him, just get up and go. He'd never cried in front of Blaine before, had managed to hold his tears that first night when he had thought- But now he was crying, and suddenly he was pulled into Blaine's arms as Blaine gently laid them down on the bed, letting Kurt bawl against his chest, keeping Kurt's body close to his.

"You are so good to me," he muttered to the crook of Blaine's neck, once he could contain the sobs for a few seconds. "So good."

Chapter Seven

Blaine stroked Kurt's side carefully. Kurt's hands were hiding his face, which was tucked almost inside Blaine's jacket anyway. And he had clearly not been initially upset by Blaine touching him, so his face would not have told Blaine what he wanted to know. He had to just trust the feel of Kurt's body against him, trembling but not tense the way it had been the night of their wedding, and the fact that Kurt hadn't tried to pull away or push Blaine away in any way. He'd been pliant when Blaine had arranged them into their current position.

Eventually, the sobs seemed to get quieter and die away. Kurt moved a bit, let his hands fall away from his face to lie at Blaine's sides, holding weakly at Blaine's jacket.

Blaine didn't really understand what Kurt whispered to his neck. He did his best with Kurt's language, but given his limited spare time, there was always the beautiful temptation of ditching his tutor and going to Kurt instead.

He now cursed all of those times he'd neglected his studies. There they were, in the middle of a private moment, and he didn't even have a way to ask Kurt what had caused his sadness, or if he needed something. Shouting for the interpreter was not an option; he couldn't just bring a third person to the situation without consulting Kurt first.

"Okay?" he asked tentatively.

Kurt looked up. His brow furrowed, just slightly, but then he nodded and smiled down at Blaine.

"Yes," he said, in desert language. They looked each other in the eyes for a few seconds, and then Kurt continued, "You are" he looked at Blaine questioningly as if to check his grammar, and Blaine nodded, hoping it was encouraging, "you are wonderful."

He- Blaine didn't know what to say. Kurt's accent was heavy, he put emphasis on odd syllables of 'wonderful' and spoke even that simple sentence slowly, like he almost had to rehearse it in his head to get it right. And yet, Blaine was at a loss trying to find something he'd rather listen to.

He settled for rolling them so that Kurt was lying on the bed rather than on him, all the while maintaining eye contact.

"So're you," he said.

Kurt looked at him, clearly not understanding. His "Excuse me?" just confirmed it.

Blaine cursed himself.

"You too," he said, trying to speak slower, the way Kurt had thanked him for the flowers earlier.

He was rewarded with a bright smile. Blaine could get used to seeing that on Kurt. It lit up his whole face and made him, if possible, even more attractive.

"Flower?" Kurt said, raising one eyebrow. "In desert?"

Blaine couldn't help laughing. It was not often that someone thought it suitable to make fun of the Great King of the Desert to his face. Blaine found he quite enjoyed it.

He wanted to answer with something witty, make Kurt laugh in return, but he couldn't find a joke he trusted Kurt to understand.

"You *are* wonderful," he said instead, taking great delight in Kurt's slight blush at his words.

Chapter Eight

Kurt's head was going to explode. There was no way it was going to be able to contain both his confusion and general insecurity about his position and situation and his exuberant joy at- Well, Blaine. His joy at Blaine.

Blaine was *wonderful*, and Kurt was seriously starting to fear that the word was not complimentary enough. His tutor had used it as a way to answer the question "How are you?" on a very, very good day, and Kurt had to only hope there were no hidden meanings that could take away from what he meant to convey.

Judging by Blaine's reverent gaze, though, he guessed not.

He raked through his regrettably small vocabulary for things to say. There wasn't much; most of the questions he could have asked Blaine he knew the answers to already.

"How are you?" he asked finally.

Blaine said something Kurt didn't understand.

"Excuse me?" he said, and then thought to add, "Good, bad?"

"Good," Blaine answered, and the word from his tongue almost left Kurt shivering. "Very, very good."

It struck to Kurt that even if they couldn't talk much, they could still make good use of their time. If only his tutor had thought of that and taught him how to ask 'Could you please repeat that word you just said so that I could learn it?'

"Repeat?" he tried.

"Very, very good," Blaine repeated dutifully.

Kurt shook his head. "No." He made a poor imitation at what Blaine had said.

Blaine let out an 'oo' sound and his face lit up with comprehension. He said, considerably slower than earlier, "Fantastic."

"Fantastic," Kurt repeated. "How-" he hesitated. "How write 'fantastic'?"

Blaine said something, Kurt didn't catch what and didn't want to ask, for the fear of distracting him, got off the bed and went for the small chest pushed between the wardrobe and the bed. He emerged with a piece of parchment, a quill and ink. Settling the ink carefully on the bed, he sat next to Kurt, starting to write.

Kurt sat up, not wanting to be the only one lying down, and leaned forwards to see what Blaine had written.

Blaine kept looking at him as he repeated the word a few times, feeling a bit foolish.

"Thank you," he said once he was sure he'd remember the spelling.

Blaine gave him a smile, pulling his feet onto the bed and fully facing Kurt. "How are you, Kurt?"

His hand was fiddling with the quill, and without even properly realising what he was doing, Kurt reached out his hand and took Blaine's hand in his. Blaine looked down, as if a bit startled, but he didn't stop smiling.

Chapter Nine

"Good morning," Blaine said to him as Kurt sat down next to him.

"Good morning," Kurt answered, and nodded in acknowledgement at the interpreter on the opposite side of the table, who smiled at him.

Offering Kurt a bowl of porridge, Blaine said something, so quick or so complicated Kurt could not understand.

"His royal highness asked if your highness has slept well," the interpreter said before Kurt could ask.

Kurt gave him a quick smile and turned to Blaine. "Very good, thank you. You?"

Blaine swallowed his food. "Very well."

He offered Kurt a bowl of something that looked vaguely like ground cockroaches.

Kurt glanced around. He wasn't worried about the looks of the food - by now he'd grown accustomed to judging by taste rather than look, as the desert people really did not seem to have proper appreciation for the aesthetics of nutrition. But there was only one plate, the one he'd just filled with porridge, and he had absolutely no idea how he was supposed to eat the other dish.

Blaine noticed his uncertainty, grabbed the spoon in the bowl and put a small dollop of it on Kurt's plate.

"I don't eat it," he said, deliberately slower, "but maybe you-" The rest was incomprehensible to Kurt, and he turned to the interpreter after giving Blaine an apologetic glance. Blaine didn't seem fazed or offended, just gave Kurt's hand a quick squeeze.

"His royal highness does not enjoy jam in his porridge," the interpreter said, "but he hopes your highness may find it pleasant."

Jam? Kurt was glad he wasn't proficient enough in desert language to have voiced his initial impression of it. He took a spoonful of porridge and dipped it into the jam a bit before bringing the spoon to his mouth.

It wasn't bad. In fact, after he'd eaten some more of it, he got over the initially bitter taste and quite liked it. It had to be made of berries Kurt had never tasted, though, since the taste was completely foreign to him.

"Good," he said to Blaine, who'd been watching him.

Blaine smiled and said something.

"Delicious," the interpreter translated. "I assume his royal highness means that it is the word to describe good food."

"Delicious," Kurt repeated in desert language, and if that wasn't enough to bring a smile to Blaine's face, Kurt squeezing his hand under the table certainly was.

"His royal highness would like to request," the interpreter said towards the end of the meal, "provided it is not too much trouble for your highness, that you spend the morning in his company."

Kurt's brow furrowed a bit - Blaine usually spent his mornings in meetings - but nevertheless, he turned to Blaine, nodding. "Of course."

Soon, it became apparent that Blaine's morning meetings were still on the agenda. However, with the help of the interpreter, he started them by introducing Kurt to each of his ministers. They bowed to him respectfully and, from what Kurt could gather, called him 'his highness'. Kurt tried to keep his face impassive at the face of it, but he couldn't help glancing at Blaine every once in a while, fiddling with the armrest of his throne and imagining it to be Blaine's hand.

He'd supposed- The interpreter had always been respectful of him, but then again, he was one of the major reasons why the poor man was in Blaine's employment at all. Brittany had certainly been kind, but Kurt had a sneaking suspicion she was kind to everyone, and she'd certainly been less than formal with him, despite using a title. He had not met many other people from the court; he would not have shared a language with them, and none of them had particularly searched for his company. And he'd definitely never expected the formal respect from the important people of society: even the treasurer, a commanding figure by the name of Miss Zizes, and Santana, the highest-ranking army officer, who only had short business with Blaine, spoke to him as if he was above them in rank.

He didn't know how to articulate any of it to Blaine, not even in his own language, so he did not address the subject. Blaine didn't look like he was doing anything out of ordinary, anyhow; in between the interviews, he chatted pleasantly with Kurt as if they were not in the grand throne hall at all but on Kurt's bed.

Chapter Ten

The following day, Blaine was meant to see off an ambassador and once again, he extended an invitation to Kurt who accepted it with puzzlement.

Kurt had barely been outside the castle since he'd entered it for the first time; it had seemed more important to concentrate on the language and not making a fool of himself in court than on the world outside the castle. He'd only vaguely paid attention to the surrounding town as he'd passed through it on the day of his wedding; he'd had other worries then, worries that now seemed so far away, with Blaine's hand brushing against his as they walked among guards.

The houses by the main road were made of stone, but he only needed to glance towards the smaller alleys to see coarse bricks made of clay. The buildings seemed solid, though, nothing like the easily broken mud huts Finn had often went on about with his soldiers. Kurt didn't understand a word the crowd kept shouting, but they sounded more cheerful than aggrieved to his eye.

They ended up at the market square, where he and Blaine were led to wooden thrones. From what Kurt gathered, the ambassador and his convoy stopped in front of them on their way out of town to pay homage to them. It didn't take long; their walk to the market square had probably been longer.

Instead of leaving after the ceremony, however, Blaine stayed put and Kurt followed his example, slightly unsure of what was to follow. The guards seemed to be organising a queue and after one of them signalled at Blaine, Blaine stood up. Kurt did the same, and Blaine nodded at him encouragingly. One of the guards that had been standing behind them came to his side, holding a basket full of roasted nuts.

The guards started letting people come forward, mostly kids, but there were a few older people as well. Blaine said something to them as they bowed before him, and then, as they bowed in front of Kurt as well, the guard with the basket shook it somewhat. Hoping he had understood correctly, Kurt took a handful of nuts and offered them to the first person on the queue, a small girl with dirty blonde hair and fierce eyes. The girl's eyes lit up, she exclaimed what Kurt supposed was 'Thank you' in a slightly colloquial accent and danced off.

This went on for some time, Kurt lost the count of people and eventually of the baskets. Finally, though, the guards stopped letting people approach the thrones.

Kurt might have imagined it, but the crowd seemed significantly louder and even more cheerful as they walked back to the castle.

"They loved you," Blaine said, once they were alone, sitting on Kurt's bed. "The people today."

You allowed me to be lovable to them, Kurt thought, but they had no common language for such complicated thoughts.

"Thank you," he said instead, and hoped that Blaine understood what he was referring to.

Chapter Eleven

"Are you waiting for the show tonight, your majesty?" Brittany asked him a few days after, having come to bring his newly-washed jacket and pants.

"Show?"

Kurt hadn't heard of such a thing. Then again, it probably could have been the only topic of discussion among the nobility at meals and he still would not have known. He could hardly wait for his vocabulary and listening comprehension to get better.

"Every year, King Blaine hosts a terribly beautiful show for the court," Brittany explained. "We all like to watch plays."

He couldn't help smiling at her excitement. "It sounds amazing," he said, "although I can hardly expect to get the full experience, seeing as I'm wont to not understand most of the dialogue."

"Lord Tubbington can translate for you," Brittany offered. "I do hope he hasn't been drinking too much again, though. He'll slur his words if he has."

Kurt did not see Brittany's cat that evening in the audience. He wasn't looking for it either, since the mime performance Blaine had ordered was so captivating he could hardly look away from the actors. He did, however, manage to shift his gaze on Blaine for a split second, almost surprised at the desperate urge to throw his hands around Blaine and hug him close, to never let go.

He wasn't surprised, though. Not really.

The end of the evening was eerily similar to their wedding night, with Blaine standing up and waiting for Kurt to do the same. This time, though, Kurt could hardly wait to jump up from his throne and walk up the long route to his room.

Blaine came in to bid him goodbye, leaving the guards on the other side of the door. That was the moment Kurt had been expecting. As Blaine stepped closer to take Kurt's hand, Kurt took a step towards Blaine as well, bringing his hands to Blaine's waist and pulling him in until Blaine was close enough to kiss.

It took a few seconds for Blaine to get on with the programme, to raise his hands to Kurt's face and kiss back, but with their lips against each others' and Blaine's thumb caressing his cheek, Kurt could not feel too sad about that.

Chapter Twelve

Kurt's kiss took him by surprise. Blaine had not expected it, had repeatedly reminded himself that Kurt's life had recently undergone a huge change and that he needed time to adapt. He'd set out to be more of a friend than a suitor, trying not to imply anything romantic with his actions and doing his best to help Kurt adjust to life in court. He'd properly woo Kurt later, Blaine had thought, after conquering Lima and fulfilling his obligations to Finn. Kurt would have grown more comfortable with his new life by then, and Blaine would have more time to devote to him.

He had not expected such a rapid flow of events, but with Kurt's arms around him, he could not be anything but thankful for them.

When they eventually pulled apart, they didn't go too far; Blaine could still feel Kurt's breath against his skin. His eyes sought Kurt's, and judging by Kurt's look, he'd done the same.

Kurt's cheeks were flushed and his eyes were shining.

"Okay?" he asked, fingers tightening on Blaine's jacket.

He needn't have worried.

"Better than," Blaine said, leaning forward to bump his nose against Kurt's. "So much better than okay."

Kurt averted his eyes, letting go of Blaine's waist and instead taking Blaine's hands in his and pulling them down, away from Kurt's face. Blaine might have feared he was regretting his actions, were it not for the small smile at Kurt's lips that he didn't seem to be able to control.

"I see you tomorrow?" Kurt asked, looking up at Blaine again.

"Of course," Blaine answered, bringing their joined hands up to his lips so that he could kiss Kurt's knuckles. "Are you free in the evening?"

Kurt nodded. "Why?"

"I just want to spend more time with you."

Kurt ducked his head, but Blaine could see he was smiling.

"Treasurer," Blaine said, playing with the hem of Kurt's shirt.

"Treasure," Kurt repeated hesitantly.

Blaine couldn't help smiling. That word certainly applied to Miss Zizes as well. "Treasurer. You never say the last sounds."

Not that he had much grounds to chastise Kurt. Had Kurt not insisted they speak in desert language ("It is good of you, to speak my language, but I need to learn"), he would have been humiliating himself by stubbornly pronouncing all the letters of each word. He'd already made Kurt giggle and blush once during the evening, and he'd only said a few sentences.

"Treasurer," Kurt said, the final R so weak Blaine probably wouldn't have heard it had he not been listening so closely. "Miss Zizes is the treasurer of His Royal Highness, King Blaine IV of the Deserted Lands."

Blaine couldn't help throwing his head back and laughing. "Who taught you that?"

Kurt leaned down, placing a kiss on Blaine's forehead. "I ask my tutor."

Blaine looked up at him, finding Kurt's hand and caressing his wrist. "Why?"

Kurt looked down at the pillow behind Blaine's head, and his voice sounded somehow smaller. "So that I know it if I need it."

At that moment, he wanted nothing more than to pull Kurt down and kiss him till he was smiling at Blaine again. That wouldn't solve the problem, though. Or what Blaine thought might be the problem.

"You are His Highness, King Consort Kurt of the Deserted Lands," he said, intertwining his fingers with Kurt's. "No one in this castle has the right to challenge your choice of words."

Kurt's lip quirked upwards. "Not even you?"

Blaine made a motion to pull Kurt down against him, and Kurt came willingly. "By law, I command a kingdom," Blaine said, giving Kurt's lips a quick peck. "By no law do I command my husband. Even in the matters of court etiquette."

Chapter Thirteen

Kurt laughed, the most beautiful sound Blaine remembered ever hearing, and then his lips were on Blaine's, still slightly hesitant after a few weeks but ever so delightful.

"I must read your law some day," Kurt said once there was a few inches of space between their faces. "See my many rights I do not know yet."

Blaine made a note to have a copy brought to him. It reminded him of Kurt's lack of education as lamented by Kurt once upon a slightly awkward getting-to-know-you discussion, which reminded him of Kurt's family, which-

"I forgot to tell you," Blaine said. "I received a letter from your brother today."

Kurt's brow furrowed. On a whim, Blaine darted forwards and placed a kiss between Kurt's eyebrows. Kurt's hands, now in his hair and on his back, respectively, tightened their hold of Blaine.

"What does Finn want?"

"He is coming to visit me. We will discuss our conquest of Lima."

Kurt tensed. Blaine trailed his thumb along the muscles of Kurt's arm in what he hoped was soothing manner. Finn hadn't enquired after Kurt in his letter, not even the perfunctory mention in his greeting or farewell. It didn't seem like Kurt would be much surprised by this, but Blaine didn't want to hurt him by bringing it to his attention either.

"You will lead the army, of course," Kurt said very slowly and carefully.

Blaine nodded, nonplussed as to what Kurt was getting at.

"Will you- On the front..."

Oh. That- Blaine hadn't given it any thought, hadn't even realised Kurt probably would not know and it might worry him.

"Not the front," he said, holding Kurt's gaze. "Not in this battle."

It was unlikely there was going to be a large battle, anyhow. The kingdom of Lima had an outdated army, relying on manpower they'd once possessed in excess but had gradually lost, one bad king after another. Moreover, Blaine's scouts told him there was little by a way of modernisation undertaken in the army. There was a reason Blaine had had his eyes set on Lima even before Finn's proposition came.

Kurt still looked restless, though.

"I won't risk my life," Blaine told him seriously. "I like it the way it is now."

"Is it dangerous?" Kurt asked quietly.

"It is a battle," Blaine said. What else could he say? "I will go to Lima only after it is over, if that helps you."

Kurt gave him a smile, still somewhat pained but genuine nevertheless. Blaine had the time to think that maybe he should urge Brittany to talk with Kurt, as she seemed to have found peace with Santana's position (and Blaine would have wanted to see the tactician that suggested she wouldn't be at the very frontlines, both before and after Santana had expressed herself on the matter), but then Kurt kissed him again and Blaine found it hard to think of war or kingdom for a very long time.

Chapter Fourteen

Kurt closed his eyes and let the frustrated sigh escape his lips. Leave it to the language of nomads and vagabonds to have its own mood for official writing, complete with multiple tenses. It was making his head ache, and he spared a moment to mourn for Blaine's sanity when he'd eventually get around to 'if I were you'.

He'd already spent an hour trying to understand words from the collection of laws, and he still didn't know if he was currently on punishments for murder or special rights of the eldest son. Clearly continuing reading would do him no good at all, so Kurt slammed the book shut.

Just as he'd settled comfortably on the bed with his fabric and needle, someone knocked on the door.

"Hey," Blaine said, walking to Kurt and sitting at the edge of the bed.

"Hi," Kurt answered, nodding towards the law collection. "Worst present ever."

Blaine laughed softly, playing with the fabric pooled on Kurt's legs. "At first, it is horrible. It will get easier, though."

Kurt wanted to ask how difficult the official writing had been for Blaine as a little kid, but then he looked at Blaine properly and changed his mind.

"Are you okay?" he asked, bringing his hand to Blaine's face. "You look more tired than usual."

Blaine leaned into his hand. "Okay," he said. "My" something Kurt didn't understand "ambassador-"

"I don't understand what you're saying," Kurt said, pulling Blaine properly to the bed. Blaine laid down next to him, head almost buried to Kurt's side and hands clutching at Kurt's waist.

"This ambassador," he said. "I have never liked him. He has become worse."

Kurt leaned down to lay a gentle kiss to Blaine's hair. "He sounds horrible."

"He is."

Blaine didn't say anything after that, and his breath steadied, so Kurt supposed he'd fallen asleep. He started his sewing, being careful not to elbow Blaine in the face.

Blaine woke up just when Kurt had come to the realisation that he wouldn't mind it at all if Blaine didn't.

He positioned himself on the side of the bed warmed by Blaine's body, and imagined the blankets around him were Blaine's embrace.

In the morning, Blaine greeted him with his sunniest smile and a quick kiss to his knuckles. Right in the middle of the busy dining hall. (Santana pretended to vomit into her porridge and Kurt was pretty sure Miss Zizes muttered, "Your Royal Highness obviously does not need any extra" when taking the sugar.)

He squeezed Blaine's hand, concentrated on spreading butter to his bread and told himself he was stupid for not just asking Blaine for what he wanted.

"Brittany?" he asked once he was sitting with her, trying not to comment on her embroidery. "Can I ask you something?"

"Of course," Brittany said, pushing her needle through the fabric at - Kurt didn't want to say it was the wrong point, but it definitely was the wrong point unless she was attempting to make a very hairy desert snake.

"How do you ask - I mean, what's the correct expression - for asking someone to sleep with you? In your bed?"

He was still hesitant about physicality, but he wanted that so, so bad. He'd imagined it sometimes, lying on the cold floor of his tent, when he was still with Finn, how it would feel to hold someone and be held in return.

Brittany's usual smile widened, if that was even possible. "You're going to ask him to?" she exclaimed, dropping her needle and clapping her hands. "That's wonderful! King Blaine will be very pleased that you want to share your bed with him."

"Shhh," Kurt pleaded. He knew of castle gossip even if he usually failed to understand it, and he did not want Blaine's kitchen maid to know before Blaine himself would. "Please, Brittany, do not talk of this to anyone, I want-"

"Of course," Brittany said, nodding her head. "Do you want the straight question or some way of rounding it? Santana hates all of the roundabout ones, she says they make it sound like shopping at a market, but I think the one with chickens is so cute."

"Um." He had not considered that there would be so many. "Just the straight one, please. I don't... I don't want to be misunderstood."

Brittany gave him an expression, corrected him as he repeated it multiple times and then, showing surprising tactfulness, excused herself so that Kurt could go off in search of Blaine.

Chapter Fifteen

He found Blaine in the throne room, conversing with Mike Chang, his Master of the Ceremonies. He hesitated on the doorway, not wanting to interrupt them if they were talking of something important, as opposed to the newest style of dance Sir Chang would have heard of. With Finn's visit, he was sure Sir Chang was kept busy.

Blaine noticed him, though, and beckoned him to join them on his throne. Kurt sat down and tried to concentrate on understanding. They had slowed down considerably, but he didn't recognise most of the words. He was rather certain he heard Sir Chang say 'Prince Finn of Lima', though, so they had to be discussing the visit.

Eventually, Blaine turned to him, taking his hand without seeming to even realise what he was doing.

"We have planned your brother's visit," he said in that slightly slower and clearer voice he always used with Kurt. "There is to be a welcoming ball and we must share the first dance. It is traditional."

Kurt's stomach lurched. He quite enjoyed dancing and was familiar with the basic court dances, but he didn't dare to think that a traditional opening number in the Deserted Lands would be among them.

"I am not quite sure-"

"I will teach Your Highness," Sir Chang said, smiling easily at Kurt. "His Royal Highness has reserved this evening for practice. There will be more," he assured, probably reading something from Kurt's expression, "if Your Highness needs it."

Kurt smiled at both of them, muttered his thanks at Blaine and let himself be led to the centre of the floor.

Blaine didn't let go of his hand.

Sir Chang left them as the night began to fall, praising Kurt's progress and promising to organise another practice with the music players. Blaine had one of his guards fetch them refreshments, and they sat down for a while, letting their heartbeats go back to normal after the exercise.

"You were wonderful," Blaine said, pushing a sweaty lock off Kurt's forehead.

Blaine's curls were almost thoroughly wet with his own sweat, and Kurt imagined it would be pleasurable for both of them to get rid of their jackets and boots.

"So were you," he said. "Should we go to sleep?"

He'd almost forgotten what he was going to ask, what with his head being full of 'turn right' and 'clap your hands' and 'don't let your hand fly while he twirls you, you don't want to almost slap his cheek'. Now, though, he remembered again, and the pleasant anticipation made the ache in his arms and legs fade.

The guards followed them until midway through the last corridor, and Kurt didn't want to ask in their presence. It was a private matter, even if it would become the most interesting gossip of the week by next morning, and Kurt didn't want it to become public knowledge any sooner than it had to.

Luckily for him, as soon as Blaine closed the door to Kurt's room behind them, they were completely alone. Blaine kissed him, as usual, his hands on Kurt's waist, and Kurt responded, throwing his arms around Blaine's neck and pulling him closer. He pulled away, hid his face at the crook of Blaine's neck, and asked the question.

Chapter Sixteen

He had just been saying goodnight to Kurt, as usual, enjoying the last moment of the day he'd see him. He hadn't expected Kurt to say that.

But he had a very good hearing, and Kurt had whispered, "Have sex with me" to the tendons at his neck.

Was it a bit unexpected? Yes. But so was everything about Kurt. Blaine really loved that about him.

He nudged at Kurt's head until he looked up, at which point Blaine whispered, "Of course" before putting his lips to Kurt's yet again. He brought his hands to Kurt's front and played with the lapels of Kurt's jacket.

"We should get rid of this," he whispered, gently pulling the jacket off Kurt's shoulders. Kurt let him lay the jacket on the desk before helping Blaine out of his. Blaine couldn't help kissing Kurt again then, enjoying the feel of Kurt's relaxed muscles under his fingers. It took them a while to get to the bed, but eventually they got there, having even managed to kick off their boots. Blaine let Kurt push him into the mattress; he seemed a bit nervous, and having that much more control would probably help him feel more at ease.

They made out for a long time, Kurt's hands carefully mapping out Blaine's torso through the shirt, and if the occasional feel of his hips against Blaine's thigh was any indication, he was at least as hard as Blaine.

His hands were at Kurt's waist, and it seemed more natural than anything to pull Kurt down against Blaine, finally letting their hips touch.

Immediately, Kurt scrambled off him and further away from the bed, leaving at least a foot of space between them. He glanced quickly down at Blaine, and then back at his face, looking almost frightened. Not the terrified out of his mind look of their wedding night, but definitely uncomfortable.

"Hey," Blaine said, reaching for his hand. "What's wrong?"

"I-" Kurt seemed to swallow, and Blaine had to tell himself to not look at Kurt's neck. It wouldn't be conducive to their current situation. "I don't want that."

"It's fine," Blaine said, forcing all signs of disappointment out of his voice. "Can I hold you?"

Kurt nudged his upper body slowly closer, keeping his hips almost on the same spot, and Blaine embraced him in a hug, laying a soft kiss to his forehead. Kurt was still fiddling though, glancing at Blaine restlessly. Perhaps he wanted more space, Blaine thought. He hoped he hadn't made Kurt very uncomfortable, but his lying on Kurt's bed (and the bulge in his pants which was smoothing down slower than he willed it) probably did not help matters.

Kissing Kurt's hair one more time, he sat up. "I should probably go, before the guards start talking."

Kurt didn't laugh at his joke, but he didn't try to resist as Blaine got up, fetched his jacket and went for the door.

"Good night, Kurt," he said softly.

Kurt's response was a bit mumbled, his head being already on the pillow.

Kurt willed himself not to cry. He had- No, he had enjoyed the kisses. In fact, he had enjoyed them very much, in the knowledge that they would eventually stop, lie down on the bed for a while, talking of anything, and then Blaine would pull Kurt against him, or cuddle to his side, and they would sleep.

He had not anticipated... that. It was- He supposed he couldn't fault Blaine for what he'd done, it wasn't like it was that bad, and Blaine hadn't tried to push it at all. He just...

He just wished Blaine hadn't left, leaving Kurt alone with a bed that, once again, only held the ghost of Blaine's warmth.

Chapter Seventeen

Kurt didn't wake up sad. He woke up angry.

Sure, he had turned down Blaine's unexpected advances, but it wasn't like he'd withdrawn his initial offer. He'd still very much wanted to sleep in the same bed with Blaine.

Apparently, Blaine was only in it for the carnal pleasures.

And he'd left so flippantly, too. Not quite interrupting Kurt mid-sentence, but just at the moment when Kurt had gathered up the courage to ask him why he'd tried it, because Kurt couldn't come up with anything about his behaviour that he thought would have implied it, and he needed Blaine to understand that Kurt needed more time before he could even think of him and Blaine that way.

Kurt marched to the dining hall with the anger giving a spring to his step. Blaine was at his usual place, having a conversation with Santana, and he smiled his usual smile at Kurt, like nothing had happened. Kurt took great pleasure in covering his 'Good morning' in with cool cordiality instead of his usual warm joy at the simple pleasure of seeing Blaine's face, and when Blaine finished with Santana and turned to him to ask for his plans of the day, Kurt very much enjoyed answering in short sentences that he knew were completely correct, judging both by grammar and by etiquette.

As people began slowly filing out of the room, Blaine turned to Kurt, still smiling, although this one was softer, more private. "Can I talk to you for a moment?"

"You must excuse me," Kurt said, getting up. "I have a meeting."

As he walked away, he couldn't shake the feeling that there was something about Blaine's conduct that was out of ordinary today.

It was only in his room that he realised Blaine had not taken his hand like he usually did.

Kurt did not leave his room for the whole day, alternating between a novel he was trying to understand and his needlework.

Blaine did not come and knock on his door when he was done with his duties, and Kurt cried himself to sleep once again.

Blaine was pacing, and the knowledge that he was doing it was not helping him to stop.

Hell, he even knew why he was pacing and *that* didn't help him to stop, either. Far from it.

He'd underestimated. He'd realised that Kurt was uncomfortable with his presence, but he'd quite failed to understand how truly uncomfortable. Kurt, usually so open and ready for discussion, had been so closed off and downright cold during breakfast, and had withdrawn to his room after.

Blaine hadn't dared to disrupt him.

And he didn't dare to bother Kurt now either, should the reason for his snappishness be- Well, the fact that he was uncomfortable *with* talking to Blaine.

If he could take it back... He would, a thousand times. He couldn't, though, so there had to be another way to see if his apologies would make the situation better or worse.

Blaine stopped pacing right in front of his door. It was late, but he supposed it wouldn't much matter. He was a king after all, and he did not take advantage of the fact needlessly.

It could wait until the morning, but he really did not want to.

He stepped into the corridor, motioning the guards to stay in their positions and not to follow him.

Chapter Eighteen

Kurt could barely sleep. His self-imposed isolation had two distinct drawbacks: firstly, he had far too much time for his own thoughts, and secondly, he didn't know even that little of the gossip that was usually filtered through the ever-thinning language barrier. In his head, he constructed elaborate scenes where the whole castle knew how Blaine had left him to cry alone and was discussing all the things he was found lacking in. His imagination picked a handsome young stableboy who he'd seen taking care of Blaine's horse and placed him in the role of Blaine's second choice, had Blaine bring him to his rooms under the ever-watchful eye of the guards, who'd soon spread the story to all of the court. In his mind, he saw Miss Zizes nod approvingly upon hearing that she need not be courteous to the stupid foreign king consort anymore, and Sir Chang commenting how he had more time for his actual duties now that the stableboy was taking over Kurt's official role.

When he heard a knock on his door towards the late morning (he did not have much of an appetite and had skipped breakfast), he was almost convinced that it would be a maid, telling him he was to move his things to a humbler room in a poorer location.

He was slightly comforted by the sight of Brittany who came in holding a tray filled with breakfast supplies.

"I saw you didn't come down for breakfast," she said. "You should have. The cook made crepes."

Kurt pulled his feet close to his body, giving Brittany room to sit down on the bed and lay the tray between the two of them. He took the crepe she thrust on him, nibbling listlessly at one end of the roll she'd made of it.

"Are you sick, Your Majesty?" Brittany asked, taking a crepe and spreading jam over it. "I can fetch Lord Tubbington, I am sure he'll have a diagnosis."

Kurt shook his head. "Brittany," he said hesitantly, "can I ask you something?"

"Is it about the same thing as last time?" Brittany stuffed the whole crepe into her mouth at once.

"No, no, no," Kurt answered quickly, and went on, taking advantage of the fact that she couldn't speak for a while, "What are they saying about me in the court?"

Brittany swallowed the last bit and took an apple. "Well, Sir Smythe keeps saying that you're stuffy, but no one listens to him because everyone knows that he's the largest sour grape to even fall off from a tree. Mostly they're just waiting for you to be able to talk to them, because it's tiring to always speak so slowly."

"They're not-" He had to choose his words wisely. "They're not... mocking me?"

Brittany looked at him like he'd come down with boots on his hands and gloves on his feet. "Why would they? You haven't even fallen down the stairs in a funny way yet."

Kurt allowed himself to breathe a little. At least Blaine had not given out the details to anyone. At least he didn't want Kurt to be the laughingstock of all his subjects. It was something.

"And the King?" he asked. "Has he said anything of me?"

Chapter Nineteen

"No," Brittany said, a curious expression on her face. "He didn't tell me anything."

"What do you think, then? What does he think of me?"

"I think you're the two cutest dolphins that ever swam in the desert ocean," Brittany said in all seriousness. "He smiles like you've shown him the Oasis of Happiness."

Kurt looked down at the bedspread and shook his head. "I don't think so, Brittany. He- He didn't just want to do that thing I asked you the correct words for."

"What?" Brittany's voice was deadpan, like she thought he was kidding. "How could he not want to do it? He looks at you like you're so delicious he'd eat you if it didn't mean you'd be gone after that."

Kurt felt the tears at the corners of his eyes. "That's what I mean. He-" He swallowed. Hopefully Brittany wouldn't tell anyone, if Blaine hadn't. "He left when I didn't want to have sex with him."

Brittany's brow furrowed. "I don't understand. Why did you tell him you wanted to have sex if you didn't?"

"I didn't-" Understanding - maybe, please, maybe - hit Kurt like a storm, leaving his eyes wide and his jaw hanging. "Brittany, I wanted to ask him to sleep in my bed and hold me in my sleep. What was the expression you gave me?"

"Well," Brittany said, taking a handful of raisins off the tray, "you didn't want to hear the one about the chickens so I gave you, 'Have sex with me.' You did say 'sleep with'," she added, looking defensive.

"Brittany-" No, he was too relieved to be angry at her. It was not like she'd done it out of maliciousness. "I don't blame you," he said. "It was a misunderstanding."

"So can I tell His Majesty that you want to talk to him again?" Brittany asked.

Now it was Kurt's turn to frown. "Why would you- Brittany! Did Blaine send you here?"

"Santana said she'll lock the door for the night from now on," Brittany said cheerfully. "I didn't mind. He knocked first."

Kurt's heart was swelling. He wondered if that was how his father had felt. He hoped not; he was not ready to die. Not before talking to Blaine first.

Except- He *had* been rather rude. And there was no way he could find the words to apologise if Blaine was standing right in front of him.

He hopped off the bed, ravaging his desk for a quill and a piece of parchment before turning to Brittany.

"Let's do this again," he said. "What's the correct expression for asking someone to sleep in your bed and hold you in your sleep?"

Brittany smiled brightly at him, stuffed the last piece of apple into her mouth and answered.

Chapter Twenty

Blaine was trying. He honestly was. He knew precisely where Santana had placed the miniature troops on the map. He knew they were in good positions.

He just couldn't force his heart to care.

Santana coughed in that very much not delicate manner of hers. "Maybe Your Royal Highness should take a nap. I hear Your sleep was disturbed in the middle of the night." She snapped her fingers. "Oh, wait! That was me. I expect no one barged into your room at the death of night to bother your wife."

"Again, I apologise for the inconvenience." Blaine sat up straighter. "You are dismissed, we'll finish this tomorrow."

Hopefully, tomorrow his mind would not be so preoccupied with his problems with Kurt and so full of anticipation of Brittany's interactions with him.

Santana shuffled the miniatures, masking her plans, ever-paranoid, and Blaine braced himself.

"Have you any knowledge of Brittany's whereabouts?" he asked, hoping he'd come off as collected as he hoped to appear.

"Oh," Santana said, all faux-innocence, and pushed her hand into her jacket pocket. When she pulled it out, she was holding a letter. "I completely forgot." Her smile told Blaine otherwise. "I happened to pass by her on my way here, and she had gave me this."

Blaine would have chastised her for her conduct and for holding onto the letter for their meeting, but it was Kurt's neat hand that had written his name on it. Full title. Blaine wished that Santana would go quickly.

It didn't necessarily mean anything, he told himself as Santana bowed and went for the door. There was no reason to think that because Kurt used the formal address he would be announcing he had left the castle, or that he'd be leaving with Finn, or-

The door closed after Santana, and Blaine unfolded the sheets of parchment so fast it was a wonder he didn't cut his finger.

His eyes scanned the letter. There wasn't much to it.

Dear Blaine,

two days ago, I asked Brittany the expression I wanted to say to you, and later, I told you what she said. Due to a misunderstanding, I did not say what I meant. I meant, 'stay and hold me while I sleep'.

I say that now. Please do.

Yours,

Kurt

Blaine stared at the letter for what felt like an eternity, willing his brain to believe it was actually real.

Then he regained his wits and started for the door, almost knocking over the guards who stood behind it waiting for him.

They ran after him until he stopped them at their nightly vantage point and told them not to follow him further.

He forced himself to stop and knock at Kurt's door. As Kurt's melodic voice called him to come in, he could not restrain himself any longer: he burst into the room and darted towards Kurt.

He would have forced himself to calm down, sat at the edge of the bed and explained himself before hesitantly taking Kurt's hand, but Kurt sprung up and met him halfway, threw his arms around Blaine and mashed their lips together.

"I'll stay," Blaine whispered against Kurt's cheek as they finally separated. "I'll stay as long as you want."

He probably should have felt a small inkling of worry as he pulled Blaine down onto the bed with him, given that just half a day earlier he'd laid in the exact same spot imagining Blaine screwing the stableboy, but he didn't.

They made out shamelessly for a few minutes, before Blaine pulled away a few inches and looked at Kurt, suddenly serious.

"I am sorry," he said. "I shouldn't have-"

Kurt silenced him with a finger to his lips. "I said I wanted," he answered. Granted, unwittingly, but Blaine had had no way of knowing that. "And you stopped immediately when I said I didn't. *I* am sorry," he looked down, away from Blaine's eyes. "I was rude to you, in the morning."

"You had the right." Blaine pushed his forehead against Kurt's. "From your point of view, I asked for sex and left when you did not want it. That was- I'm sorry."

Kurt looked up and smiled encouragingly. "Don't."

"I'll stay tonight," Blaine said, sounding a bit uncertain. "If you want me to."

Kurt leaned forwards to kiss him. "I want you to."

Chapter Twenty-One

Blaine knew what it was like to wake up next to a warm body. He'd had men before Kurt, when he was younger and still allowed to take advantage of it, some of whom he'd enjoyed in his company more than once.

None of them had prepared him for what it was like to wake up next to Kurt. Or not so much 'next to' as 'entangled with'. It had been more than a week, and Blaine still could not believe he was allowed to hold Kurt in his arms through the night. Or bury his nose in Kurt's neck, as the case happened to be this morning.

Kurt was still asleep, so Blaine pulled the covers up to properly warm them both and enjoyed the feeling of Kurt's body against his. After further consideration, he pulled his hips slightly away from Kurt's and proceeded to think of battles and the colour of his father's skin on his deathbed.

They stayed like this for a long while, but eventually Kurt stirred and slowly opened his eyes to blink down at Blaine.

"Morning," he said softly.

Blaine echoed the greeting, trying to contain his smile at the fact that Kurt looked at him like he hadn't expected him to be there either. Not the bewildered way, but the pleased, reverent better-than-any-of-my-dreams kind of way.

"Should we get up soon?" Kurt asked, and added, before Blaine could answer, "I'd like more time with you here."

Blaine let himself close his eyes and lean against Kurt's chest. He wasn't used to intimacy like that, making himself look so vulnerable for another human to see, but these moves, they came naturally to him while he was alone with Kurt. It was almost scary.

"Your brother is arriving today," he said, "but it's only at nightfall. We can have an hour like this, if you so wish."

Kurt pushed some of his curls away from his forehead and placed a kiss on it.

"I so wish."

Chapter Twenty-Two

He had to bid Kurt goodbye for a while after they finally got themselves out of the bed, wanting to give him peace to dress up for the evening.

Blaine was ready within half an hour, being well-accustomed to dressing up in his best, and he spent the spare time loitering in the hall.

Kurt took a while, but eventually, Brittany ran down the stairs, looking very excited.

"Your unicorn is coming, Your Highness, and his horn looks better than ever!"

Blaine smiled at her benevolently, thinking to himself that there was no way Kurt could look fairer than he had in the morning, hair mussed by sleep and so happy. However, as he saw Kurt descend the stairs, he had to use all his royal powers of staying stoic so that his jaw would not fall down and his eyes would not bug out.

The last time he'd seen Kurt in his festival clothing had been their wedding, and he had never allowed himself to revisit that night too much, knowing now that Kurt's every move had been motivated by fear and lack of trust, which had taken all joy out of Blaine's memories. As a consequence, he had forgotten how much he had enjoyed the sight of Kurt in fine clothes. Not that he was dressed poorly on a normal day, or indeed ever, but there was only so much one could do with linen compared to silks and fine furs.

Kurt's clothes were royal blue to match Blaine's, a slightly different shade that he had, Blaine remembered, been very excited about when he first saw it. There were artful cuts here and there, revealing bits of other colours, and the official crown, not the lighter version that Kurt otherwise used (if he did at all; Blaine certainly often opted to leave it on the table rather than let it inconvenience his daily activities), was every bit as ornate and respectable as Blaine remembered.

He reached his hand towards Kurt, and Kurt took it.

"You look wonderful," Blaine said, smiling at the light blush that spread across Kurt's cheeks.

Kurt spent the day almost glued to his side, and Blaine didn't question it. He was probably nervous of meeting his brother again, and Blaine couldn't help but try to ease that nervousness with affection, holding Kurt's hand under the table during his meetings and covering him in hugs and kisses in between them.

Kurt seemed to relax a bit throughout the day, but as a servant came in to announce to them that Prince Finn had ridden inside the city walls, Blaine saw Kurt tense again.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Blaine dropped his hand before they entered the majestic hall and became visible to larger crowds, but not before he squeezed Kurt's hand reassuringly and flashed him a comforting smile. It was almost straight out of one of Kurt's foolish romantic fantasies from when he was an adolescent; walking to the hall where he would be wed, needlessly nervous but being reassured by his future husband who he loved, who'd intertwine their hands, pull Kurt closer to whisper, "I love you" into his ear and squeeze at his hand, reminding Kurt he was, and would be, there.

Oh, how backwards did the reality turn out to be.

Finn was not in the hall when they walked in, as was to be expected, but there were whispers about his horse being on the front yard (at least so Kurt understood). Hoping he didn't look as lost as he felt, Kurt took his place next to Blaine and attempted to look natural as they waited.

They did not wait long. In a matter of minutes, the front doors of the castle were thrown open as Finn marched inside, smiling like he'd finally found the solution to his age-old puzzle of whether to marry Quinn, an influential noblewoman, or Rachel, a celebrated musician although a commoner.

Kurt felt Blaine move a few inches towards him, so that their shoulders almost brushed.

Finally, Finn reached them and stopped in front of Blaine and began speaking.

"We, lawful Prince Finn of the kingdom of Lima, greet His Royal Highness, King Blaine IV of the Deserted Lands, and wish to thank him for his generosity in lending his support for our noble cause to reclaim our kingdom, to which we have a legitimate claim."

Blaine was frowning, he noticed out of the corner of his eye. Kurt would have, too, had he not already so long ago got used to the fact that Finn thought his mother's marriage to Kurt's father had made him the legitimate heir of the crown, as he was two months older than Kurt.

But, he realised as Finn paused to allow the interpreter to translate his first sentence for Blaine and the audience, it couldn't be that. Blaine was probably largely ignorant of the whole issue, seeing that Finn had

acted like the designated heir ever since the marriage, even before Kurt's father's death, and Kurt had never pressed his claim. And more importantly, he knew Blaine only studied the language for Kurt's benefit, to make it easier for them to communicate, and he could scarce believe Blaine had thought words like 'legitimate claim' worth memorising.

"We also wish to greet the people of his magnificent kingdom, with whom we expect to do profitable cotton trade, once the kingdom has been restored to us."

Oh god, he remembered again why he'd written many of Finn's public speeches during the time he'd spent with him, trying to gain public support after the revolution. To his left, he saw Santana raise a meaningful eyebrow.

As Finn droned on, further complimenting Blaine and welcoming the desert court into his future kingdom, Kurt largely zoned out, smiling benevolently and vacantly at the general direction of Finn's voice. He was awoken from this trance only by Blaine's voice, loud and clear and ever so captivating to Kurt's ears.

"I, His Royal Highness, King Blaine IV of the Deserted Lands, on behalf of myself and my husband, His Highness, King Consort Kurt I of the Deserted Lands, son of the late King Burt II of Lima, wish to welcome Prince Finn of Lima to our kingdom-"

Kurt made himself tone down his smile. It would not do to look so happy after he had been so carefully cordial at Finn's words. He had- He did not know how to explain it, to Blaine or anyone else, but he loved to see Blaine assume the role of king, straighten his shoulders, hold his head high and speak like he'd never been interrupted. So he listened to Blaine welcome Finn, offer him the hospitality of his and Kurt's court and wish the new links between the two kingdoms, forged by the alliance and his and Blaine's marriage, would be maintained in the future as well. Blaine spared him a glance as he mentioned the marriage, and for that moment, Kurt let his smile widen.

Chapter Twenty-Four

The official reception was followed by a banquet, which, as Kurt too well knew, would end in a ball. He was certainly more confident in his ability not to accidentally run straight into someone amidst the first dance, but he could not help the small feeling of dread.

Finn was seated across the table from him and Blaine, the interpreter at his side, and Kurt was not quite sure if he should take Finn's ever-full plate as a sign of his brother's repulsive appetite or as an indicator of him being willing to explore new cuisine.

He decided to go with the latter, just because his head was full even without trying to keep up a disdainful look.

"And navigation is so important to every kingdom," Finn said to Blaine. "Don't you agree?"

"Unless the kingdom is bound by landmasses on all sides," Kurt pointed out.

Finn waved his hand at him, eyes trained on Blaine.

"My kingdom is firmly inland," Blaine said calmly. "I am hardly the person to best appreciate the importance of a navy."

As the interpreter translated his words to Finn, Blaine turned to Kurt.

"What'd you say?"

"That what he said did not apply to inland kingdoms," Kurt answered, hoping he did not look as victorious as he felt as Finn's face assumed a look of a petulant adolescent upon hearing Blaine's answer.

"Your Royal Highness," Santana said, appearing next to Blaine. "Sir Chang has requested a private audience. He said the matter wouldn't take long."

Blaine stood up, glancing hesitantly at Kurt. "Do you want-"

"I'll stay here," Kurt said. "Please do not be too long," he added, cursing the fact that he could not reach for Blaine's hand in such a public place.

"I'll be back as quickly as I can," Blaine promised and, as if knowing what Kurt wished for, taking his hand and pressing a gentle kiss at his knuckles. "I trust you have many familial matters to discuss in my absence," he said, addressing his words to Finn, and left to follow Santana out of the room.

"Your services are not needed till he comes back," Finn said to the interpreter as soon as Blaine was out of earshot.

Kurt shot the man an apologetic look as he got up, clearly discontent. The interpreter shook his head.

"I believe his meal was unfinished," Kurt said, turning to Finn.

He never found out whether or not Finn had heard him, for Finn's answer was, "So what'd you think? Can I trust him?"

"Who?"

"The king, of course." Finn laughed like it was somehow obvious. "I'm not stupid, Kurt, I know he's the leader of barbarian tribes and that doesn't generally invite a fellow's trust. So can I trust him not to pull my leg?"

"Is this why you told him I'd marry him?" It was only speaking that kept his mouth from hanging open in astonishment. "So that you'd have a nice little spy right in his household?"

Chapter Twenty-Five

He didn't know why he was so disgusted. He'd thought- It was almost faded, hidden in the same place with all his previous fears, replaced by the tender feelings towards Blaine that he was only now beginning to feel he could name, but he'd thought he'd just been the one bargain chip Finn felt he had, and that it had just never occurred to Finn that not every spouse in the world was treated as an equal.

That he'd not been willing to trust Blaine to keep his word but had put Kurt's life and well-being in his hands anyway...

"Neat, wasn't it?" Finn grinned like he had completely missed Kurt's point.

"Very," Kurt said, swallowing down his anger. It would do him no good. "And I trust him more than anyone, for what it's worth."

He hoped his words stung, just a little, after the years he'd spent trailing after Finn, but judging by Finn's satisfied face, he had not understood any implications aside from the one he wanted.

"Good, that's good."

"How's Carole?" Kurt asked, trying to change the subject.

"Mother's fine," Finn said, waving his hand. "I haven't seen her in a while; I guess she's still in Hudson Castle."

They were silent for a few moments, Kurt desperately trying to think of even one of Finn's followers who he cared enough about to enquire after, but eventually it was Finn who broke the silence.

"Do you think it'd be good for the alliance if I took a wife from here?"

Kurt raised his eyebrow. "Why, has something befallen Lady Quinn and Rachel?"

If Finn intended to marry a desert girl, Kurt would make damn sure that the girl would know what she was getting into before accepting the proposal.

Finn's expression soured. "Quinn got mad at me," he said, spearing a piece of meat on his fork. "She said she's tired of being kept waiting or something. And I told Rachel that, and that I'd marry her, and she said that it doesn't work like that." He pushed the fork into his mouth and spoke through his chewing. "She wrote a song about it and performed it to Quinn, and now they are, like, best friends or something."

Kurt could not summon sympathy, no matter how hard he tried. In fact, Finn should have counted himself lucky that he didn't burst into laugh upon hearing the news.

"It must have been quite a song," he observed mildly, but before Finn could answer, Blaine was back with them. He seemed to take in the situation, and then resolutely turned to Kurt. Kurt saw the interpreter reclaim his seat next to Finn.

"The ball is beginning," Blaine said, a playful smile on his lips and one hand extended for Kurt. "May I have this dance?"

"Yes," Kurt said. "Yes, you may."

Chapter Twenty-Six

The floor had been cleared, and under people's watchful eyes, Blaine led Kurt to the centre of it.

"Has anyone literally died on this floor?" Kurt whispered once he was sure everyone was far away enough not to hear.

"I'll have the History brought to you, you can count for yourself," Blaine said, taking both his hands and guiding him to his initial position. Somewhere far away, one of the courtiers was announcing the dance. "Are you nervous?"

Kurt lowered his eyes, forced out a laugh. "You can judge me."

The music began, and Blaine could not answer as they stepped away from each other. However, as they came together once again, Blaine leaned further towards him than he'd have needed to. "I think it's adorable."

They pulled away again before Kurt could even properly register the words, but as they came together again, this time to join their hands and move around together, Blaine leaned in again. "I think you're adorable."

Kurt was proud to realise that the only reason he had to look down at his feet was to attempt to hide the blush on his cheeks. As his nerves slowly began to leave him in peace, he could focus more on what happened around him. People were looking at them, naturally, but they did not look derisive or point at him like he was failing. A quick glance to the their table revealed that Finn was not even watching.

As Kurt looked on, however, Miss Zizes approached Finn. He could not see what followed, his eyes needing to be in the other direction, but the next time he looked, what he saw was almost enough to destroy his concentration.

Finn was standing awkwardly on the dance floor, not too far away from him and Blaine, and Miss Zizes was close by him, doing the first steps of the routine while Finn, not a great dancer in the first place and certainly not familiar with this one, could only watch.

Kurt kept glancing at them through the routine, noting how Finn finally started to do some small walking movements that did not really help him look less out of place, and trying to keep the smile off his face.

He wondered if it would ever cross Finn's mind that what he was experiencing now was a diluted, watered-down version of all Kurt's fears and problems he'd had when he'd first arrived in the desert court.

Blaine, he wanted to shout. It couldn't be anyone else's doing. He wanted to throw himself at Blaine, laugh against his shoulder, kiss him till they were both delirious and ask him where he had become such a master of small-scale revenge.

He didn't. He danced on, so near to flawless it was impossible for anyone but himself to notice, especially compared with the elephant-steps his brother was doing, and enjoyed the moment. Eventually, other dancers filled the floor, made Finn less conspicuous, but he was still given a wide berth.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Blaine had not thought much of Finn when he'd first met him; after all, his first thought had been that Finn would make a fine temporary liegeman with a somewhat glorified title. He'd thought Finn pleasant enough, though, and it had not been a hardship to negotiate with him.

After some months with Kurt, though, and especially after a whole week in Finn's company, Blaine couldn't wait to get rid of him. Moreover, he couldn't wait for the moment his army would take Finn's in a battle and drive him out of Lima for the second time.

It wasn't so much Finn's company, he had to admit. It was the effect Finn's company had on Kurt. Blaine had followed, with keen interest, the gradual relaxation of Kurt's posture as he grew more certain of his position in court and more comfortable in his new life overall. He'd treasured the change, held a barely cognizant yet pleasantly smiling Kurt in his arms and felt himself the happiest man in existence.

Finn's arrival had put a halt in that progress. Not in private, in their rooms, fortunately, but in public, wherever there was the slightest chance that Finn might round the corner and greet them with his large smile.

No, not them, which was the second reason Blaine had come to dislike Finn so immensely. Finn did not greet them when he met them, he greeted Blaine. Blaine had noticed it already the first night, had meant to take it up with Kurt once they'd have retired to their chambers, but the second the door had closed behind them, Kurt had pinned him against it, kissing him like he'd been waiting to do it his whole life, and the matter had slipped Blaine's mind. Finn didn't act like Kurt was air; no, he acted like Kurt was Blaine's favourite servant, alive and present but ultimately not worth Finn's attention.

How did Blaine long to challenge him to an honest wrestling match, only for the pleasure of getting to punch his face really hard.

They spent a lot of time together, just the three of them. It had seemed natural at first, Kurt being able to translate the informal non-binding conversations amongst them, but the longer the week went on, the more Blaine felt like the arrangement made him partially responsible for Finn's attitude towards Kurt.

("Don't be ridiculous," Kurt said when Blaine confined his fears to him.

"It's entirely possible that it is feeding into his view of you," Blaine had argued.

Kurt had rolled them over on the bed and pinned Blaine down with his weight, smiling down at him. "You could never do *anything* that would make me feel less in any way.")

The first time they'd taken a leisurely stroll around the castle grounds without the interpreter, Finn had said something to Kurt Blaine couldn't understand. He was slowly learning the language, yes, but any time he tried to get Kurt talking it, Kurt tended to switch languages pretty soon as to practice desert language and Blaine did not have the heart to insist. Finn's regular speech was far too quick for him.

Kurt had turned to him, a sugary, entirely fake smile on his face. "Tell the King that the castle is really skilfully built."

Blaine couldn't have helped letting out a laugh. "What?"

"I am merely translating what Finn said." There was a wicked glint to Kurt's eye. "Word by word."

Blaine had smiled politely at Finn. "Thank you, Prince Finn."

Finn had merely looked at Kurt expectantly until Kurt had said (and this, at least, Blaine could comprehend), "He says thank you."

They weren't so much discussions amongst the three of them, he guessed, as they were the pattern of Finn saying things to Kurt, Kurt and Blaine having a short discussion and Kurt telling Finn what Blaine had asked him to, repeated ad nauseum until dinner where, at least, Blaine could just enjoy Kurt's company without feeling he was being rude to a guest.

Official negotiations were easier, thanks to the presence of the interpreter. Kurt spoke rarely, opting to sit ramrod straight on his seat and listen attentively.

After one such negotiation, Finn grabbed Kurt's arm as they were leaving the room for dinner and said something, again too quickly for Blaine to understand. Blaine came to a halt, intending to wait for Kurt and enter the hall together, but Kurt signed for him to go on.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Maybe they'd talk, Blaine found himself thinking, sinking his fork into the meat on his plate. Maybe they'd finally talk like brothers, separated for months, would be expected to talk.

A brief look at Kurt's completely expressionless face as they entered some minutes later told him they had not.

Kurt ate his meal in silence, only exchanging a few words with Miss Zizes and Santana. Trying to avoid glancing at him worriedly, Blaine attempted to engage Finn in conversation to distract himself for the meal. It was rather obvious Kurt did not want to discuss it, whatever it was, in public.

Blaine waited patiently, through dinner, through the evening entertainment, through long-winded goodnight wishes, through the walk up to their rooms.

Then, finally, when he had Kurt sitting on the bed, pulling out his boots, Blaine could sit down next to him, gently lay his hand on Kurt's shoulder, give him a quick kiss and ask, "What's wrong?"

Kurt looked away, down at the floor, before chuckling.

"It's Finn." His eyes found Blaine's; they looked tired. "Before dinner, today, he asked me why I was always present at the negotiations." He shook his head. "He wasn't even being rude, it just... he couldn't think of a single reason why I should be there, or why I'd care to be there."

"If you want, I can-"

Kurt shook his head. "I'd just like to go to sleep, if that's okay."

There was nothing for him to do but to nod. "Of course."

It was almost quiet when he woke up. Usually, they woke up slowly as the sounds from the kitchens below them gradually grew louder and increased in number, but the first thing he noticed, eyes still closed, was their complete absence.

The second thing he noticed was that he was not holding Kurt, and neither was Kurt holding him, contrary to their usual sleeping arrangements.

And finally, the quiet sound of controlled sobs from the other side of the bed registered with his ears, and suddenly Blaine was awake and alert, turning around to see what was happening.

Kurt was sitting up on the bed, knees pulled up and his face buried in them, shoulders shaking as he cried.

Blaine approached him slowly, not knowing whether Kurt had even realised he had woken up or not.

"Hey," he said, putting his arm around Kurt's waist. "Kurt."

Kurt leaned into the touch easily, burying his face in Blaine's shirt and continuing crying into it. With some careful manoeuvring, Blaine got them into a more pleasant position, one that hopefully wouldn't force Kurt to twist his neck quite so much.

Kurt cried for some time, but eventually the sobs ceased and he just laid there against Blaine.

"I feel at home here," Kurt said after a few minutes of silence. Blaine tightened his hold on Kurt, but Kurt went on, "Or I'm starting to. It feels like- Sometimes, I feel like I belong here."

"You do," Blaine said, hoping speaking was the right thing to do at the moment. "As long as you want to be here, we- We all want you to stay here."

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Kurt had never talked much of the life he'd led between his father's death and his marriage to Blaine, and Blaine didn't like to pry. It wasn't like he didn't have his own secrets, things he was certain he'd tell Kurt, some day, but did not feel quite comfortable sharing just yet. They would have time, he always told himself, and he couldn't wait to spend it all with Kurt. That didn't mean he didn't guess, and he'd always thought those years probably were not the happiest of Kurt's life.

Kurt pulled away from him a bit to dry his face into a blanket. "Finn doesn't get it. Not at all. He- he told me he married me off to you to get a spy in your household, he didn't even think that-"

Kurt didn't go on, just pulled Blaine down to hold him, and Blaine went gladly, taking the opportunity to think Kurt's words over.

He couldn't say he was surprised, really, by Kurt's last words. The thought had crossed his mind before the wedding, yes, but he'd discarded the thought of Kurt as a willing spy very quickly after meeting him. Besides, none of the conversations Kurt would have heard were indicative of things Finn did not already know. And soon enough, it had seemed more important to show Kurt that he could be a full member of the court if he only wanted so himself anyway. It was always pleasant to be proven right, he thought now, since it was painfully obvious Kurt had in fact done no spying for Finn.

Furthermore, Blaine could not help rejoicing at the realisation that Kurt trusted him so much it did not even seem to cross his mind that Blaine could, technically, take his words as an admission of treason.

"Can I make it easier for you in any way?" he asked after some time spent just cuddling.

"You don't have to," Kurt said, voice muffled a bit by the blankets. "He's only here for a few more days."

"If you change your mind..."

He let the sentence hang there, and felt Kurt's head nod beside him.

After a few minutes, Kurt cuddled even closer to his side.

"You truly are wonderful, Blaine."

Had he been a bit less self-aware, he might have answered something else, something that he'd been thinking a lot lately but did not yet feel he could say out loud.

"So're you."

"... and naturally Your Majesty will be always welcomed in our castle."

Blaine did wish Finn would quit it with the future talk. It was good for grand speeches in the hall but sounded pompous while they were just waiting for their clerks to finish the documents on their latest agreements. And Finn was not even particularly good at that kind of thing; he just came off ridiculous.

He was so glad Finn would be leaving in the evening.

Kurt muttered something in his own language; it was far too quick and quiet for Blaine to understand, but Kurt was wearing a distant cousin of the expression he usually had when he was teasing Blaine, so Blaine guessed he was making light of Finn, somehow.

Finn's head snapped towards Kurt, something he had never done in such a situation, and he said something sharply, eyes trained on Kurt.

Kurt jutted out his jaw, straightened his posture, and said something that sounded vaguely similar to what he'd muttered earlier.

Finn probably asked him to repeat his words, Blaine thought. He sat up straighter as well. There was a tension in the room that had not been there just a few moments before, and he would not be caught in it slouching, not even a bit.

Finn's eyes flashed at Kurt's words, and he said something angrily. Blaine was about to turn to the interpreter, ask for a translation, when he recognised a phrase in Finn's speech.

"Shut up."

Kurt had used it on him before, one of those rare times Blaine had got him to stick to his language to let Blaine practice. He'd been teasing Kurt, somehow, about one of the courtiers, he thought, and Kurt had blushed, told him to shut up and then pulled him close for a kiss.

From Finn's mouth, it held none of the affection. It was a command, loud and clear, and not one said to an equal.

No.

It sounded like it was said to a disobedient servant.

Blaine realised he'd stood up only after he found himself looking down at Finn with wrath in his eyes.

Chapter Thirty

He hadn't expected Finn to hear his barb about Finn's smalltalk skills.

Had he done that, though, he would have expected the outburst.

And expected or not, Kurt of Lima, last descendant of the house of Hummels, never admitted defeat in a verbal fight. He was tired of bowing down to Finn, tired of his ignoring Kurt's new position, tired of Finn taking him for granted, all those years and still.

He had been so prepared to answer Finn with an insult of his own that he'd barely realised Blaine had stood up before he opened his mouth.

"You do not talk to my consort like that," Blaine said, voice pure ice. "*No one* talks to my consort like that in my kingdom."

Kurt's eyes flashed to Finn. He didn't understand a word, of course, and Blaine didn't seem to stop to wait for the interpretor to help him catch up. But he had to understand the tone, and Kurt allowed himself a second to relish the feeling of seeing Finn afraid for a moment.

"You will leave," Blaine continued. "My guards will see you to your rooms and help you pack, and the documents will be brought to you for signing, and then you will leave immediately." He stopped to smile condescendingly. "Our military plans will proceed as agreed. I don't expect to see you before you control the Hummel Castle."

He signalled at his guards and walked out.

The interpretor stood up, started, "His Royal Highness says-" and launched into Blaine's whole speech, in first person.

Kurt would have accused him of enjoying it a bit too much, but he would have been the pot calling the kettle black

Finn sat there, listening, stupefied. He made no resistance as Blaine's guards escorted him out of the room, but his face was so blank Kurt had to wonder if he was still in shock and unable to comprehend the turn of events.

The interpreter shook his head and smiled at Kurt as the door slammed shut after Finn.

"I presume tonight's ball will lack its guest of honour," he said, obviously trying to mask his delight.

"It would seem so," Kurt agreed. He shook his head. "You must excuse me. I must run after His Royal Highness to express my appreciation and give him a kiss."

The interpreter's smile grew fonder. "You go and do that, Your Highness," he said. "You go and do that."

Chapter Thirty-One

Blaine's first thought, upon closing the door after himself, had been to go to his old bedroom, tell the guards to leave him alone, maybe start writing a letter to Wes to vent his anger, or perhaps wait for Santana to come and snark at him about Finn until he felt collected again.

When he reached the corridor, though, he passed that door without a second thought and instead stormed into his and Kurt's bedroom. There was, of course, no suitable boxing partner waiting for him, so he did in fact pick up a quill and a piece of parchment, settling down by the desk to begin a letter. It had been such a long time since he'd last heard of Wes, anyway; even if Blaine ended up working out his anger in some other way, he should write Wes, ask after his well-being.

He'd barely worked his way through the first paragraphs, trying to tone down his praise of Kurt at least a bit, when he heard voices in the corridor and soon enough, the door was pushed open.

"I told the guards that I didn't want to be disturb-" His voice died in his throat as he recognised the person who'd just stepped in. "Kurt, I-"

He didn't have anything to say, not really. He was not sorry for his outburst, and he rather doubted Kurt wished he was, but he didn't want to gloat about it either, in case the subject was somehow painful for Kurt.

Kurt didn't seem like he wanted Blaine to say anything, though. He crossed the floor, swiftly fell to his knees by the the writing desk and grabbed Blaine's jaw to bring their lips together in a passionate kiss.

"Oh," was all Blaine could say as Kurt finally pulled away.

Kurt, hand tangled in Blaine's hair, keeping Blaine's head in place, rested his forehead against Blaine's, closing his eyes.

"I am so lucky," he said quietly, "to have met you. Blaine, you- *Thank you.*"

"You have nothing to be thankful for." After a moment, he added, "I am so lucky to have met you too."

Eventually, they found enough energy to move themselves over to the bed.

“I really don’t know how I managed to stand his company all those years,” Kurt said into Blaine’s shirt collar from where his head was resting against Blaine’s chest. “It’s not like his men were that pleasant either.”

“You’re strong,” Blaine said, thumb running up and down a seam of Kurt’s shirt. “Strong, and resilient, and wonderful, and all-around a better person than he could ever wish to be.”

Kurt hummed contently and looked up at him. "The ball tonight is going to be interesting."

Blaine leaned down to press a quick kiss to Kurt's forehead. "How so?"

"I don't think many will feel like honouring Finn, especially after your lovely gossiping guards have had the time to spread the story of what happened."

He wanted to say something, point out that the court really didn't need a guest of honour to enjoy a good party, but before he could, Kurt went on, in a wondering tone. "But then again, I don't think most of the court even realised he has been here for a week."

Blaine snorted into Kurt's hair.

Chapter Thirty-Two

“My father was the King of the Desert,” Blaine said carefully. Kurt could practically hear the effort he put into the correct pronunciation. “He ruled already when my grandmother was alive, because she was so sick.”

“Good.” Kurt smiled encouragingly at Blaine from his position on the other side of the bed, but he couldn’t help asking, “Did I sound as awkward as you do when I first learnt desert language?”

Blaine looked up at him questioningly. “Awkward?”

Kurt gave him the desert word, and Blaine groaned.

“No,” he said, in Kurt’s language. “You sounded better than I do. I blame your tutor.”

“I blame your lack of time to study,” Kurt answered easily. “Do you want to practice more or-“

“Some more,” Blaine said. “I will learn the past tense even if I have to get through my whole family history to achieve it,” he muttered in desert language, and Kurt laughed, not pointing out that he would love to hear Blaine’s whole family history, in any language Blaine would want to share it with him.

They had so much time for these things; he could wait.

“My grandmother were a wonderful queen,” Blaine said.

“Was,” Kurt corrected. “Your grandmother was a wonderful queen.”

“My grandmother was a wonderful queen,” Blaine repeated dutifully. “My brother used to-“

“Your brother?” Kurt interrupted, his interest piqued. He had not thought the wait for some important family stuff would be that short. “I did not know you had a brother. Is he much younger?”

“I-” He could see the conflict on Blaine’s face; for the proper words in Kurt’s language or for the things he wanted to say, Kurt didn’t know. Eventually, though, Blaine shook his head and changed into desert

language. "Okay, I need my mother tongue for this." He took a breath. "He's actually some eight years older. He abdicated, some weeks after father died."

Kurt's brow furrowed. "Why?"

Blaine shook his head. "I don't know. He said it wasn't what he wanted. Too much responsibilities, I guess. Cooper was never- I guess he always liked the 'parading around in fancy costumes' aspect of being royalty more than he liked everyday governing."

There was a lot Kurt wanted to ask about Blaine's words, things he was certain were important, but for the moment, he decided to concentrate on the name Blaine had given him. Try as he might, Kurt could not remember anyone from the court ever mentioning a Cooper. "Where did he go?"

"We agreed that it would be best for him to leave the kingdom," Blaine said, his hand reaching for Kurt's. Kurt caught it between his palms and squeezed it reassuringly. "I do know where he went, we are still in touch, it's just-" Blaine let out a humourless laugh. "Ours was not the best brotherly relationship one could imagine."

"I certainly have no right to judge you for any of that," Kurt said. "I mean, you've met Finn."

Blaine smiled and leaned forwards to kiss him, so Kurt counted his attempt at relieving the tension a success. Soon enough, he was pushing Blaine down on the bed, laying down next to him and running his fingers up Blaine's sadly shirt-clad arms, placing kisses along Blaine's well-formed jaw. Blaine pulled him fully against himself, hands settling on Kurt's lower back, and shifted his head so that Kurt's lips were on his.

Chapter Thirty-Three

They made out for a while, Blaine eventually bringing one of his hands up to stroke at the hairs at Kurt's neck, something they had learnt Kurt really, really enjoyed. He was hard, though, and he could feel Blaine against his thigh as well, and- He wasn't ready for that. Not yet.

"Blaine," he said, gently pulling at Blaine's hair to get his face off from Kurt's neck, "can we-"

Blaine realised what he meant without further elaboration and withdrew his hands so that Kurt could roll over to the other side of the bed. His hand found Kurt's, though, and for some time, they just lied on the bed, holding hands and letting their breathing slow down.

"I never imagined I'd get to do this with you so soon," Blaine said into the silence.

As he turned to his side to face Blaine, Kurt couldn't help frowning a bit. "What do you mean?"

"When I realised you didn't-" Blaine swallowed, and Kurt was glad he didn't finish the sentence. "After the wedding, I was sure it'd take you a long time to trust me, so I figured that I'd just be your friend, help you get used to your new home, at least until Lima had been conquered. I never thought we'd-"

"Are you calling me easy?" Kurt teased, unable to help the smile.

"No! I just-" Blaine laughed. Some day, Kurt would have to tell him how gorgeous that look was on him. "Kurt, I had all these plans, about wooing you. They were fairly elaborate as well."

Kurt arched his eyebrow. "Do tell."

"Walks on the grounds," Blaine started. "They really are beautiful in the summer, after there's been some rain. I was going to pick up a flower and give it to you."

It was all Kurt could do not to cry from sheer joy. This man, he- Kurt would never be able to articulate how glad he was it was Blaine Finn had made a stupid, reckless agreement with, he dreaded to think about how

easily Finn could have sought some other monarch as an ally, how easily Blaine could have decided he didn't want a husband he'd never seen, how-

"The library," Blaine went on. "I figured by then you'd be able to read and enjoy the novels, and I'd have refreshments brought there, maybe ask you read out loud so I could just sit there and listen to your voice."

"The fabric merchants of Carmel make an annual visit to the castle around midsummer, and I was going to have them show you their stock, watch you make purchases and then, if you agreed to it, have you teach me some of your sewing skills."

"And then, in the autumn, I had planned a tour of our kingdom so that you could get more familiar with it, complete with courtesy visits to Carmel and Angelland." Blaine glanced down at the bedsheets. "I do believe you'd enjoy the company of their rulers."

"It sounds wonderful," Kurt said, forcing the tears to stay away. "And it would definitely have been effective, too, if you had needed to resort to it."

Blaine reached out his hand and stroked at Kurt's cheek. "I'm glad to hear that."

"Actually," Kurt couldn't help saying, "it would be such a pity to let such a good plan go to waste. I'm sure I can find parts of me that are not thoroughly wooed yet."

Blaine's smile turned devious. "Oh, really?"

"Why, yes." Kurt batted his eyes, faking innocence. "I'm sure it is nothing a well-executed wooing plan cannot overcome."

"Well, Kurt of Lima," Blaine said, inching closer to him on the bed, "consider your challenge accepted."

Chapter Thirty-Four

“So our main force will attack here.”

Santana moved the wooden arrow denoting the army on the map to point squarely at Hummel Castle. Kurt stifled a yawn; he’d slept badly the previous night. He was pretty sure he was *supposed* to feel bad, or just generally something more than tiredness, to see an enemy plan attack on his birthplace, but he found it was quite difficult to not think of the enemy being inside the castle already.

He’d never cared much for William Schuester, anyway.

“And Finn’s troops are here,” Blaine said, pointing at another, significantly smaller arrow placed near the border of Lima and the Deserted Lands. “If all goes according to plan, they will capture the Adjacent.”

“The Hudson Castle is close by,” Kurt said, pointing at it on the map. “Finn’s relationship with the Queen Dowager may be strained, but she will support her son against a regime she never accepted.”

Santana nodded. “And if not... Well, it’s not like we cannot spare a battalion as back-up. *My* army is nothing if not well-prepared.”

“Thank you, Santana,” Blaine said, a faint smile flashing on his face. “I think this is enough for today.”

Nodding in agreement, Santana flicked the wooden arrows to random positions, bid Kurt goodbye and left.

Kurt’s gaze followed her, and as the door closed after her, turned back to Blaine, Blaine was still looking pensively at the map of Lima.

“Is everything okay?” Kurt asked, touching lightly at Blaine’s elbow to get his attention.

Blaine shook his head, as if to rid it of whatever thoughts he’d been having, and his gaze shifted to Kurt.

“Yes,” he said. “I keep thinking that I should ask you that, though. After all, you’re the one who’s just attended a meeting about invading your father’s old realm.”

"William Schuester was Finn's tutor, did you know?" Kurt told him. "He taught Finn everything he knows, 'made him the man he is today' as Finn liked to say."

"Oh." Blaine chuckled. "I take it the tree is not far from where the apple landed."

"They had a fight," Kurt said, "just a few weeks before my father died. A huge fight about something incredibly stupid, I think."

And then, before the corpse of King Burt II of Lima had gone cold, Mister Schuester had staged a coup and become Earl of Schuester, Guardian of Lima, but Kurt could not say that out loud.

"Santana was the last meeting for today?" he asked instead, stepping closer to Blaine and taking his head.

"Santana was the last meeting for today," Blaine said, slotting his fingers in between Kurt's.

Kurt nodded and suppressed a yawn. He enjoyed being part of the everyday proceedings of the court, meetings with ambassadors, reports from Blaine's officials, the ever-quickening war preparations. He felt like he mattered, like he was finally somewhere where his presence would be appreciated. But much as he liked it, he could not hide forever the fact that his sleep last night had been far from peaceful, riddled with long periods of being awake, unable to do anything but hold his sleeping husband and let his head rest against Kurt's chest. It would have been pleasant - No, it *had* been pleasant, so long as he'd stayed in bed, but as the sounds from the kitchens below them grew louder and Blaine began to stir in his arms, he knew the pleasantness would not carry on to the day.

"Are you tired?" Blaine asked, shaking Kurt out of his thoughts, his free hand coming to rest on Kurt's shoulder.

Kurt nodded. "I didn't manage to sleep very much last night."

"Do you want to skip dinner?" Blaine asked, voice full of care. "Or have it in our rooms, if you're hungry."

He *was* hungry, but at the moment, facing all and sundry in the dining hall sounded like something he couldn't survive awake.

"Private dinner sounds good," he said and added, after a moment of silence, "Do you have to go to the hall?"

Blaine smiled and quickly pecked Kurt's lips. "No."

Chapter Thirty-Five

Kurt made himself maintain his composure until the guard who'd brought their dinner - roasted duck and garden peas, crepes and jam for dessert - had left, but as the door closed after the guard, he felt no shame in leaning back against the pillows and closing his eyes.

"Hey," Blaine said, setting his hand on Kurt's knee, "don't fall asleep on me now. I can't eat all of this myself."

Kurt huffed and opened his eyes to see Blaine offer him the plate their main course was on. He took a piece of duck, for once glad that the table manners of the desert people required less finesse than the manners of the Lima royalty.

They ate in comfortable silence. Once the duck and peas were all gone, Blaine began to spread jam on the crepes. Kurt rubbed at his eyes trying to make himself feel a bit more awake but without great success. He stared at the bowl of jam.

"You know," he said, "when I first saw that, I thought it was ground-" What was that word in desert language? He'd have to show a cockroach to Blaine once they were in Lima and ask. "Insects."

Blaine chuckled. "Thanks for the mental image."

After Blaine had put jam on all the crepes and made them all into more easily eatable rolls, they laid down on the bed, Kurt snuggled against Blaine's side, the plate balanced on Blaine's thighs.

"Can I ask you something?" Blaine asked once they were eating their last rolls.

"Always."

"Are you happy here?"

Kurt pulled away and got up to look at Blaine in the eye. He couldn't help the frown. "Yes. Why do you ask?"

“It’s-” Blaine reached for Kurt’s hand, and Kurt didn’t pull it away. “I didn’t mean to put it like that. I meant something more along the lines of ‘I don’t know everything about your past, but I know you’ve had to endure a lot of horrible things, and you deserve only good things so I want to make you happy, and if there is anything that’s making you unhappy, you should know that you can tell me and I’ll do everything in my power to fix it.’”

Kurt’s heart jumped in his chest, and his frown faded away to be replaced by a soft smile.

“You make me so happy,” he said, bringing their joint hands to his lips and kissing Blaine’s knuckles. “Also, if I was not certain that I have never told you how much I aesthetically enjoy seeing you act like an omnipotent king, I would think that you are taking advantage of the fact.”

He loved those little laugh lines Blaine got around his eyes so much. “Are you calling me out on being too commanding?”

“No.” Kurt threw his arms around Blaine’s waist and pulled him in. “I’m calling you out on being a wonderful, caring person.”

Blaine’s hands were at his neck, but fairly quickly his fingers began to trail Kurt’s spine down to his lower back, where they stopped to hold Kurt in place as Blaine leaned in to touch Kurt’s nose with his own.

It was almost shocking how fine Kurt was with the idea of Blaine not stopping there. He almost said it, too, that Blaine could, but just when he was finding his courage, Blaine ducked his head to whisper in his ear, “So that does it for you then, the kingship?”

Any sounds he could have hoped to make were lost in his ensuing uncontrollable laugh.

Chapter Thirty-Six

"I hope Your Royal Highness has not forgotten that our meeting is scheduled earlier than usual."

Miss Zizes's expression made perfectly clear that the politeness of her words was a mere courtesy with absolutely no implications that Miss Zizes would be content to wait, should Blaine require her to do so.

"I do remember," Blaine said and Miss Zizes went back to her porridge. Or her jam, as her plate contained perhaps more of the latter than the former.

Blaine tried to suppress his smile. Ever since Kurt said it, Blaine couldn't help looking at the jam and thinking of insects.

"Do you enjoy your jam?" he asked Kurt in Kurt's language, directing the smile at him once he felt like he could not hold it in anymore.

Kurt snorted. "I do." He swallowed a spoonful of porridge and added, "And you are never going to get over that, are you?"

"No," Blaine said and waved his hand at Santana, the only person on the table able to understand their conversation, who was looking at them like they had gone mildly insane. "You must introduce me to the finest cuisine Lima has to offer," he went on, switching to desert language.

The left corner of Kurt's mouth quirked up in a lop-sided smile. "To give me a chance at revenge?"

Blaine smiled back at him as he picked up his spoon. "To give you a chance at revenge."

The first meetings of the day, receiving messengers, generally from the liegelords' and ladies' holdings and other local government, were usually rather relaxing. More often than not they were about excuses for slight delays in tax payments, boasting about particularly wondrous achieved goals and sometimes even reports that demonstrated developments in petty local grudges that Blaine liked to think of as his most favourite form of entertainment. Kurt shared his enthusiasm for them, and the two of them had even had

to make a pact to not ever look at each other when the messenger for the Chief of Wester was announced, lest they burst out laughing.

Today was no exception. There was no drama hidden in the messages, but neither was there any displeasing news. One by one the messengers entered, read their messages, answered the few questions Blaine had, and left.

"Are there many left?" Blaine asked as the messenger of the ambassador to the kingdom of Carmel left with Blaine's most heartfelt wishes of well-being to Queen Tina.

"One, Your Royal Highness," one of courtiers told him.

His pocketwatch told him he had twenty minutes before Miss Zizes would enter. Just enough time.

"Bring them in."

The messenger, a girl barely of age, stepped hesitantly into the room. She had to be new to the position; Blaine couldn't recall ever seeing her before.

"I come bearing news from the province of Ivy," she said, her voice shaking.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Blaine frowned. He had seen many a messenger doing their debutante visit to the king, and a certain nervousness was to be expected; for all their audiences with monarchs and for all the time they got to spend with some of the most important people of the provinces, messengers had but a lowly spot on the ladder of authority and the post was often the first position of importance they held. But this was worse than that. He couldn't help wondering why Wes had hired this particular messenger; his former tutor certainly used to have higher standards.

"Do talk," Kurt said beside him.

"I'm afraid," the girl said, hanging her head and talking to the floor, "that the news I bring are unpleasant for Your Royal Highness." She paused for a moment, and had Blaine been slightly more impatient, he would have got annoyed. It was Wes's fiefdom; any damage that had happened could not be too serious or he would have received Wes instead of his messenger. "As you might be aware, last Tuesday Lord Wes of Montgomery organised a jousting tournament and-" The girl visibly swallowed. "One of the competitors had sharpened their lance, seeking revenge against his opponent. He- He lost the control of his horse and the lance pierced Lord Wes."

Blaine blinked.

He had been a soldier. He was more than accustomed to his companions dying, and he was certainly no stranger to the more brutal causes of death.

It never got easier, though, did it?

"I assume he is dead?"

His voice was steady. That was good.

The messenger nodded, and Blaine could see the tears in the corners of her eyes. "He lived until the early hours of Wednesday."

Wes had no children. "Had he the time to nominate an heir?"

"Yes, Your Royal Highness. Lady Unique of Adams."

"You will take a message back to Lady Unique that she must present herself before my consort and I at the earliest opportunity."

The messenger's cheeks coloured. "She's perfectly capable! She's the best-"

Blaine silenced her with a small raise of his hand. "I have always had the highest regard for Lord Wes's judgement; I don't doubt his decision. But Lady Unique will have to swear fealty nonetheless."

The messenger hung her head. "I understand, Your Royal Highness."

Blaine wanted to say something kind to her, but he didn't feel like he could adopt a softer tone without revealing too much of his own feelings. Kurt came to his rescue, though.

"You are scheduled to leave for Ivy this evening, are you not?"

The messenger nodded, and yes, at least one tear was sliding down her cheek.

"What's your name?"

"Marley," the messenger said, voice shaking. "Marley of Rose, Your Highness."

"Well, Marley of Rose," Kurt said, "go to the kitchens and ask them to find Brittany for you. When you find her, tell her I told you to stay the night and that she is to take care of you."

Marley of Rose nodded, courtseyed and was out the door. Before the door was closed, however, Miss Zizes stepped in, right on time for her extended appointment.

Blaine didn't need his pocket watch to tell him that the wait for any sort of privacy for him would be long.

Kurt couldn't really concentrate on what Miss Zizes, or any of the people following her, had to say. He kept getting distracted by Blaine, who was going about his duties, unaware of Kurt's glances and as collected as ever.

Except that was the thing. Being collected and in control was something that came naturally to Blaine; it was as effortless as breathing and heartbeats. Now, though, Blaine sat a little too straight, listened a little too carefully, expressed a little too much interest to be natural. Kurt didn't know what it was about that panicked messenger, or her message, but Blaine was shaken. And also, it seemed, determined not to show it. It was working, too; none of the courtiers acted like anything was out of the ordinary.

Kurt just hoped Blaine wouldn't try to keep up the facade once they were alone.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

The day was a blur. That was the only way Blaine could describe it. He knew, from experience, that he could probably recall most of the facts told to him by his officials when he'd need them later, but he could hardly even name the people he'd had meetings with.

Santana cornered him on his way to dinner, waving her hand at Kurt and the guards to go on. Kurt gave him a worrying glance but went, after Blaine's mild 'I'll see you at dinner'. Half of the guards followed him, the other half lingering at the end of the corridor, with a direct line of sight to Blaine but not within hearing distance.

They were not big on physical comfort with each other, Santana and he, but her fingers grazed his arm.

"I'm sorry," she said quietly, glancing at the guards.

"He was older than me. I always expected to survive him."

He couldn't say anything more. He'd have to go to the dining hall, and he was a king, a king about to lead an invasion, nonetheless. This was not the time to show weakness in public.

Without any words, she understood.

"You need a pair of ears, I've got it," she said.

"Thank you, Santana."

He took her arm, and together they walked past the guards.

He avoided Kurt's eyes for the entire meal, for it was difficult to miss the worry in them. Finally, though, their plates were empty, their pudding eaten, and it was time for them to retreat to their chambers. Blaine kept up his smile all the way up the stairs and down the corridors, until Kurt closed the final door after them. Then he couldn't help it anymore, barely making it to the bed, shoulders slumped, face hidden

behind his hands. He wasn't crying, but it wouldn't have made much difference to his appearance if he had.

In a flash, Kurt was there beside him, one hand carefully brought to rub at his shoulder and the other to tenderly hold his wrist. He didn't say anything, although Blaine was sure he wanted to, just stayed there, close.

"He was my tutor," Blaine said when he felt like he could form words. "Lord Wes. I- He was dear to me."

Kurt leaned in closer, his nose touching Blaine's cheek and his body pressed against Blaine's left side from head to toe.

"It's weird, I guess," Blaine continued, after a few minutes of silence. "After my father died, I wasn't- I mean I was sad, but not really that much, since we had both acted like the other did not exist for some years by then, and everyone was just so courteous to me, because they thought that I had to be, you know, overcome with grief. And now no one but you and Santana has even acknowledged that anything is different, and I'm just expected to- expected to not care, because he's been away for years, only visiting, and our correspondance is sporadic."

As he'd talked, he'd slowly lowered his hands from his face to rest on top of his thighs. Kurt ran his hand up Blaine's wrist until he reached the palm of Blaine's hand and intertwined their fingers.

"What was he like?"

A former justiciar, an enthusiastic teacher, a rule fanatic who preferred things done by the book, a little nuts about the gavel he used to carry everywhere in his pocket and had later, the grapewine said, installed on a velvet pillow in his study.

None of those were things he wanted to tell Kurt right then. None of them would explain *Wes* to Kurt.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

"The night of our wedding," he started, a little shaky, "after I'd wished you goodnight, I told him what happened - he'd been one of the honour guard and actually the one who brought the interpreter in, but he obviously didn't know what we'd talked about. He said-" His voice broke. "He said that if some day he fell from grace and all his lands and honours were taken away, at least he could always take pride in the fact that he'd had a hand in the upbringing of one decent man."

Kurt squeezed his hand. "I wish I'd had the chance to meet him. Or to get to know him, in case I accidentally did meet him."

"You did." It felt good to talk about Wes as he'd lived. Blaine was glad Kurt wasn't asking deep questions about how Blaine felt about his death. "And I might have, erm, talked about you to him. A lot." Kurt flashed him a pleased smile. "He liked you."

"He did?"

"He said he looked forwards to seeing us very happy."

Now he never would. Blaine had sent him a letter, though, some weeks after Kurt had kissed him, so at least he had known that they were.

"We are to stay in his fiefdom for some days during the invasion," he said after a pause. "I- Kurt, I don't know how I can just hang about his castle, knowing it's following someone else's orders."

"You're strong, Blaine, you will manage." Blaine closed his eyes and rested his head against Kurt's shoulders, and Kurt placed a quick kiss into his hair. "And if you ever feel like you don't want to be strong for a moment, I'll be there. I'll manage for both of us."

Of course he would. 'I know' would sound stupid, though.

"I love you."

He felt Kurt tense momentarily, and it was probably only then that he properly realised he'd said it. Blaine hadn't been saving the words for anything special, so it wasn't like any grand plans were ruined; in fact, he'd thought he'd say it for the first time in some peaceful, everyday moment between the two of them. Not that the timing during some kind of emotional turmoil soured the words or their intent; Blaine just didn't love Kurt for the dramatic surroundings, and had he got to decide freely, his timing would have reflected the fact.

"I love you, too."

He wouldn't have minded if Kurt hadn't reciprocated immediately, but that didn't mean he wasn't glad to hear it.

"I guess when you think about it," Kurt said, resting his cheek against Blaine's forehead, "we've both lucked out remarkably in this arranged marriage business."

Blaine nodded. He'd thought marrying a foreigner would increase his chances at finding someone who cared for him more dearly than for the kingdom, but even his wildest day dreams could not have come up with Kurt.

"We did." He kicked his boots off. It was not late, but he was exhausted, and just wanted to lay down and be close to Kurt. "Do you want to go to sleep?"

Kurt nodded, and they rid themselves of their jackets and shirts and blew out the lamps.

Once they were under the covers, Kurt scooted closer and wrapped his arms around him like they usually did. "When my father died and I left the castle with Finn, I used to lie awake at night, unable to sleep, and imagine how comforting it would be if someone held me."

"It is," Blaine said. "I wish I'd been able to be there and do this for you."

He had to suppose the quiet noise Kurt let out was a conclusion of some sort, because Kurt's breath evened out and his muscles relaxed, and the conversation was obviously over.

"I love you," he whispered into the darkness.

He'd said it once, and there was no way he was going to stop now.

Chapter Forty

Blaine was a bit subdued the following morning and in the following days. Kurt had never pegged Blaine for a huge crier, though, and he was not wrong; Blaine did wet the front of Kurt's shirt a few times, but his sorrow tended to manifest itself differently. He boxed more than usual, and while physical affection had not in any way been foreign to their relationship before, Blaine seemed to be even more keen on it now, often asking to hold or to be held by Kurt while they were alone in their rooms. He also sang, mostly old desert folk songs with melancholic melodies, and taught Kurt the lyrics to some so that they could duet.

All in all, Blaine seemed to be coping fine. Kurt had to wonder how many people at court were even aware of the situation. Had it not been for Santana cornering him regularly to ask for his opinion on Blaine's well-being, and for her willingness to be his training partner even when Blaine woke up, full of energy, before the kitchen staff, he might have thought himself the only one. People came and went, informing them of the pace of the mobilisation of the army, the expected length of time that the country could support a military campaign, the troops already stationed at the border, the intended placement of the supply lines. Kurt remembered, vaguely, how things had been when his mother had first got sick. Few people had known, and everyone else had just acted the same. It had been a bit eerie and more than scary for his eight-year-old self. The situations were not directly comparable, of course, but Kurt found himself with a new-found respect and affection for Santana.

Brittany had to know, too; Kurt was fairly certain Santana was unable to hide anything from her. She didn't say anything, not to even Kurt, but Kurt had never seen his and Blaine's laundry done so swiftly, nor even Blaine's smallest request obeyed to perfection so promptly. Kurt had tried to thank her for it, but she had just waved it off and said that Lord Tubbington had taken an interest in laundry now that his pocketwatch had been stolen.

It was sort of odd how oblivious the court seemed to be, given the general inclination for gossip. Kurt had to suppose it had to do with Blaine's position and the putting aside of personal feelings it entailed; he remembered how his dad had rarely shown his grief in public after his mother died and how Carole, even only as a widow of the former king, had guarded her feelings carefully, rarely letting them show. And it wasn't like the death of Blaine's friend being public knowledge would do Blaine any favours, so Kurt couldn't bring himself to be too sad about the main source of court gossip being a surprising delay to Sir Chang's return from Carmel where he'd left to visit relatives.

"I hear he's found himself a lover," Countess Sugar said, in her excitement dropping a stitch from the scarf she was knitting. "My father told me his dancing has been much admired by the Queen. Perhaps one of her maids is getting private performances?"

Kurt had to admit that Sir Chang's dancing was indeed very enticing. "I just hope this does not mean that his return is delayed indefinitely."

"Oh no!" Sugar seemed as if the thought had never occurred to her.

Brittany had been remarkably quiet during the conversation, but spoke up now. "Again I see why I am the best and most observant person in the whole court." She smiled like she had a beautiful secret. "If Mike leaves, maybe I can take his place. Santana *loves* it when I dance."

"Your dancing is really very fine," Kurt said.

Sugar nodded in agreement before moving on. "But have you heard from the Earl of Kiehl, Your Highness?" Her demeanor turned a bit feline as she leaned towards Kurt. "The word is he was *very* taken with you when he visited."

Kurt coughed discreetly. As it was, he had heard from the Earl. He could hardly tell Sugar that he'd giggled at the love letter and promptly shared it with Blaine, hoping to give him a laugh as well, though. It was such ungentlemanly behaviour that he was almost ashamed of himself. Or he would have been, had it not been successful in cheering Blaine up and eventually resulted in a very pleasurable hour of kissing and Blaine whispering sweet words into his ear.

Chapter Forty-One

“I understood he enjoyed his visit to Dalton.”

“Oh!” It didn’t take a lot to sidetrack Sugar. “He told me such amusing tales of his previous visits as well. Have you heard the story of the dissolution of the council and the power struggle between Lord Smythe and the Earl of Clarington?”

Kurt had not, as he had done his best not to pay any mind to Lord Smythe in general. He didn’t mind listening to Sugar talk of him, though, especially as she talked of admittedly very hilarious ways in which Lord Smythe had tried, and indeed almost succeeded, in beating the Earl in the competition for the fiefdom.

“I almost felt sorry for him, when I heard the end,” Sugar said. “He was so ingenious with his plans, so detailed, and they were all trumped by the justiciars, because of the Earl’s father. Legitimacy does get in the way of a nice ending, does it not, Your Highness?”

“Sometimes it does,” Kurt said, deep in thought. Sugar had unwittingly shown him the perfect plan. “Sometimes it does not.”

Mr Bamboo the archivist was more than happy to oblige him with the document. Kurt only had to read through three of the paragraphs to know that the wording was precisely the one he had hoped it to be.

He’d never say anything against formal style of writing ever again.

Blaine was on the soldiers’ practice yard, sparring with Santana. The lingering crowd of soldiers that looked like they’d just been beaten and were now watching their victors battle each other made it impossible to say if the match was for practice or for therapy.

“I have a proposition for you,” he said once Blaine had finally managed to hit the wooden sword off Santana’s hand and emerged from the field to greet Kurt.

He realised what it sounded like only after he'd said it, and as he gazed at Blaine's sweaty torso and his smiling face, it was almost tempting to change his suggestion altogether.

"Of what kind?"

No, this was actually something he wanted to get out of the way, unlike the- *personal* proposition which (Blaine would probably agree) would deserve something a bit more special than a crowded field of grossly sweating soldiers and Santana.

He took Blaine's arm. "Of the secret statemanship kind."

Blaine changed his clothes, and Kurt made the proposition. Blaine listened, made a few questions about the details, and readily accepted. Kurt gently ushered him out of the room after that, asking Blaine to tell Brittany he'd be eating his dinner in private.

He had a letter to write, and he intended to get to it as soon as possible.

Chapter Forty-Two

Blaine slowly regained consciousness, first becoming aware of the quiet noises underneath him, from the kitchens, then of the warmth of Kurt's body against his and finally, of the gentle rubbing motion of Kurt's thumb caressing the skin above his collarbone. He made a content noise, brought his hands around Kurt's waist and rolled them until Kurt was lying on him, arms under Blaine's back so that his hands were cradling Blaine's neck and the back of Blaine's head.

Kurt leaned down to give him a kiss, staying close so that their noses almost touched. "Morning."

"Morning," Blaine mumbled, slowly opening his eyes. "Is it early? It feels so early."

"The kitchen staff must begin their work earlier today," Kurt said, sounding too chipper. "Brittany told me."

"Because of the party?"

Truth be told, at the moment the idea of foregoing the party thrown in honour of Blaine and Kurt leaving the castle for Ivy and, after the invasion, Lima, if he only could get a few more hours of sleep sounded very appealing to Blaine.

"Because of the party."

"Damn the party," he muttered as Kurt buried his face in the crook of Blaine's neck. Kurt didn't answer him, and Blaine would have thought he'd fallen asleep, had he not been so obviously awake earlier.

"Had you-" he started asking at the same time as Kurt began, "Have s-"

They both stopped, and Blaine could hear Kurt letting out a laugh. He couldn't help the lazy smile, either.

"You first," he said.

"No, you." Kurt touched his lips to Blaine's neck. "Mine will take some time."

“Fine. Had you been awake for long before I woke up?”

“Some time.” Kurt placed a gentle kiss to his jaw. “I enjoyed the chance to think.”

“Mmm.” He let his head properly lean on Kurt’s hands, exposing his neck better. “And what were you thinking?”

A kiss to the tip of Blaine’s nose, and Kurt shifted, presumably to have a more comfortable position as he looked down at Blaine with a soft, playful smile on his lips.

“Have sex with me.”

—

Kurt felt Blaine tense, his formerly sleep-lax body now clearly alert. He laughed softly at Blaine’s obvious attempt at masking his surprise.

“You-“

“I know what I’m saying this time,” Kurt interrupted. “So unless you don’t-“

He couldn’t help a small touch of insecurity from seeping into his voice. He knew in his heart that if Blaine turned down his proposition, it wouldn’t be due to his not loving Kurt or to any reason of that kind; it would- Well, Kurt couldn’t think of a good reason for Blaine to say no, seeing as he’d, Kurt was sure, been willing already on their wedding night. But *if* he did say no, he would have a perfectly gentlemanly, loving explanation, probably something about romantic wooing plans or the right moment. Kurt wanted him to say yes, though, so very badly. He wanted Blaine, and he wanted to be wanted, too. And in his opinion, both of them were thoroughly wooed already and at the point where any private moment could be the right one.

“Of course I do,” Blaine said, taking hold of Kurt’s jaw to direct him to look into Blaine’s eyes. They were warm and sincere as usual, and Kurt couldn’t help but believe him. “But I want you to be comfortable, so I can be comfortable.”

“I *am* comfortable.” To prove his point, he trailed one of his hands down Blaine’s side, bringing it to stroke the patch of skin in between Blaine’s trousers and his shirt that was riding up.

Blaine guided his face a few inches down so that they could kiss. Kurt had no idea what kind of kisses people who really and truly wanted to make love with the person they were kissing used, but he had to be doing something right, since Blaine's first words after they pulled apart were, "Did you mean now, when you asked?"

Kurt felt a slight blush colour his cheeks. It was more due to what he was talking about in general than to actually talking of it with Blaine, though, and he felt no shame in saying, "Before we leave the castle. If you'd ever lived for years in tents with men far less gentlemanly than yourself, you wouldn't enjoy the thought of someone hearing you either." Remembering the grunting of men in their tents reminded him of one of the unfortunate incidents he'd worked hard to forget, and he hastened to add, "You don't enjoy that, do you? I mean-"

Chapter Forty-Three

It would not be the worst thing Blaine could want, his brain told him, but Kurt just- He was sure Blaine would be very obliging in regards to his first time, he just didn't want to ever-

Blaine laughed at him gently. "No, I don't enjoy the thought of that. I've spent time in tents, too, and I wholeheartedly agree with you. When we make love, it is about us and for no one else to hear."

Kurt ducked his head, resting it contently against Blaine's.

"I have one request, though," Blaine whispered into his ear. "Can we please wait until tonight, after the party? I'd love to hold you after, and I don't think we quite have the time now."

That sounded lovely. Kurt doubted the feeling of falling asleep in Blaine's arms could be much improved on by anything that would happen before, but he was very willing to test his theory. "Gladly."

—

He had not many duties for the day, as he was not responsible for overseeing the final travel preparations and had purposefully done much of his work in advance so that the kingdom wouldn't suffer from his absence from the castle. Kurt had scheduled a session with his language tutor, though, and afterwards promised to stop by some lady to advise her on her new dress, whereas Santana was busy terrifying her soldiers into the proper war mode (her words), so Blaine was left with time to loiter.

He read some chapters of the book Kurt had loaned him, joked around with his guards, challenged a few hapless soldiers to a boxing match, and went through the programme of the night with Sir Chang, who'd arrived just in time to manage the final preparations for the festivities, and Brittany, who'd taken care of the initial plans in Sir Chang's absence. It all helped him to push his and Kurt's conversation out of his mind.

It wasn't that the thought of it was unpleasant to him in the least. Quite the contrary. He had seen Kurt in various states of uncomfortable and fearful in regards to sex, much as remembering those times pained him, and he could therefore say for sure that Kurt had been genuine about his feelings and desires.

He couldn't just spend the day by sitting around and imagining what would happen come nightfall, though. So he had to find something to busy himself with.

He got a momentary distraction in Santana, who entered the practice area in between soldiers two and three.

"Everything's been agreed with the Dowager," she said. "She was most accommodating."

"That's good," Blaine said, half to himself. "Kurt will be very happy to hear that."

Finally it was time for him to dress up for the party. His outfit was waiting for him already, picked the previous day by him and Kurt together, colour-coordinated to complement Kurt's.

He met Kurt at the bottom of the stairs, took his hand and accompanied him to their seats in the hall, doing his best to keep his mind in the moment and not let it skip some hours ahead.

They ate, exchanging quick glances, mostly engaging themselves in discussions with others, danced the traditional first dance, Blaine trying to lose himself in the choreography as to avoid thinking of any other situations that might emerge where his body would brush against Kurt's, and towards the end of the evening, bid their court goodbye and retreated upstairs to their rooms.

With all likelihood, the guards could see that something was different from all previous nights, but Blaine made an effort to act as normally as possible. He was fairly certain the court in general already thought they were making love, and what a waste would it be to have the date of his first time with Kurt be known when they already had such a good cover for it?

They conversed with the guards for a while, commented on the early hour at which they'd have to part, and eventually bid them goodbye as well. Blaine smiled at the few that were on duty for the night, closed the door, followed Kurt as they sat down on the bed, finally alone.

Chapter Forty-Four

Kurt sat on the bed, a bit nervous. Not much; he trusted Blaine and truly wanted to go further with him. But a small part of him knew that he was a complete novice to anything they'd be doing, having just gathered some knowledge from listening to Finn's friends bragging of their love affairs, and that knowledge was somewhat tainted by the very strong wish that no one ever talk of him like those men talked of their partners.

Blaine smiled at him and brought one of Kurt's hands to his lips, kissing it gently without breaking eye contact.

Kurt took advantage of having his hand close by and swung it around Blaine's shoulders, pulling Blaine to lie on the bed with him.

"Sneaky," Blaine said, and Kurt was sure he was not imagining the pride in Blaine's voice.

"I try," he answered before surging in to kiss Blaine.

They ended up making out on the bed, Kurt on top of Blaine, for a long while. As his mouth was kissing up and down Blaine's neck, Kurt's leg shifted to press against what, he realised, had to be Blaine's cock, pressing hard against the fabric of Blaine's trousers. He didn't need to look down to know that he himself had to be in a similar situation.

"How do you-" Oh, no, he was going to sound like such a fool, phrasing it that way, "want me?"

Blaine laughed up at him gently. "How do *you* want me? I have no preference for what we do, so long as it's with you."

"I-" He felt himself blush. It felt sort of pleasant, though. "I doubt any- penetration would be wise." He smirked at Blaine. "After all, we both may have to ride tomorrow." He swallowed, and made up his mind to say it out loud. "I've heard it may hurt, too, and I'd hate for anything to spoil our first time together."

Blaine rolled them over so that they were both lying on the bed, knees and hands touching, facing each other. His hand came to stroke at Kurt's cheek.

"It needn't hurt," he said, "with proper preparation. But you're right; we don't need to start from that. Or even ever get to that, if you don't want."

"Some day." Kurt reached up to still Blaine's hand and intertwine their fingers. "Can we just" what was the word, damn it, he did know it, "rub against each other?"

Blaine smiled at him. "We definitely can."

It felt a bit awkward, shuffling closer to Blaine on the bed, until Blaine's lips found his once again. Kurt melted into the kiss and got lost in the feeling, his hips jerking forwards to meet Blaine's almost without him realising it.

Kurt hadn't spared much thought for how the actual sex would feel; in his head, there had always been a sort of gap in between the flirting that would lead to it and the tenderness he had imagined after, when he was lying alone in his tent, trying to make himself fall asleep. He had touched himself, yes, but he'd always thought sex would feel different.

It did. Oh god, it did. It felt even better, for starters. He moaned into the kiss in a way he probably would have thought embarrassing if he had been able to care. Blaine's response was to kiss him harder as his hands found their way to Kurt's ass.

Kurt didn't know how long they went on, getting lost in the pleasure of their movements. He did realise that at some point he had pulled Blaine on top of him, his hands firmly on Blaine's hips, preventing them from ever pulling too far away. The next thing he was completely aware of was Blaine stilling and burying his face in Kurt's neck, accompanied with a different kind of low moaning sound.

Chapter Forty-Five

Kurt released his hold on Blaine's hips, moving his hands to his waist. He couldn't help bemoaning the loss of the friction created by their movements, but it was rather obvious Blaine had reached his climax. They had almost the whole night, if they so chose; he could wait for a moment.

After a few seconds, Blaine moved his head up so that Kurt came face to face with him, getting an excellent view of his happy, sated expression.

"You're wonderful," he said, moving to get off Kurt to slump against his side. His eyes trailed down Kurt's body to his crotch, and he let his hand follow. "How can I help you?" he asked teasingly.

Kurt arched into the touch, letting out a low whine. "Touch me."

Blaine hummed, moving his hand so that it covered Kurt's cock, only Kurt's trousers between them. "Like this? Or-" He gave Kurt's jaw a quick kiss. "You can say no, and really, I'll do whatever you want, but can I suck your cock?"

"I-" When had Blaine using a word Kurt didn't even know the meaning of stopped being scary or inconvenient, and become intriguing and arousing instead? "I've never heard that expression."

"Of course, sorry." Another kiss. "Can I please you with my mouth? Is that more understandable?"

Oh. Kurt hesitated. Finn's friends had always made that sound so- not disgusting, per se, but degrading, for the one who did it to them. Then again, Kurt couldn't think of degrading Blaine for it, and he had a hard time imagining anything they'd do as degrading anyway. It seemed more likely Finn's friends were just being idiots. Wouldn't be the first time.

"Yes. And yes."

Blaine flashed a wide albeit very quick smile at him, and kissed Kurt as his hand began to work on the buttons of Kurt's trousers. Kurt helped him to pull them down by holding his hips off the bed, and Blaine guided him to sit against the headboard.

Seeing his naked, hard cock on display made him feel vulnerable, especially since Blaine, despite the sticky wetness of the front of his trousers, was fully clothed. The feeling was eased, however, or at least turned into the positive kind of vulnerability, as Blaine slid down on the bed, lowering his mouth to take the tip of Kurt's cock in. Not wanting to gag him, Kurt fought the reflex to jerk his hips up and perhaps Blaine guessed that, because one of his hands came to rest on Kurt's hip as the other wrapped around Kurt's cock and began slowly stroking the base that Blaine's mouth, even as he leant further down, did not reach. Kurt moaned openly and pushed his fingers into Blaine's hair, trying not to force Blaine's head down.

He didn't last long, stuttering a warning to Blaine who nevertheless didn't pull away and guided him through the orgasm, only pulling away as Kurt sagged against the headboard, feeling loose and relaxed.

It didn't take long for them to settle down under the covers, legs intertwined and arms around each other, noses almost touching so that they wouldn't have to reposition themselves for some lazy kisses.

"I love you," Kurt said, pecking Blaine's lips.

"I love you, too." Closing his eyes, Kurt moved a bit closer so that their foreheads were touching. "So," Blaine said, and Kurt opened his eyes again, "it's maybe a silly question, but was that good for you?"

Kurt couldn't help it. He snorted. "You're right. It is a silly question." Blaine was still looking at him, though, as if waiting for an answer. "Yes, Blaine, it was absolutely amazing for me." He couldn't help asking, "Was it good for you, too?"

"Yes." Now it was Blaine who leaned in for a sweet, close-mouthed kiss. "So good, Kurt."

"I don't want to leave tomorrow," Kurt said, knowing he was pouting and probably sounded petulant. "I want to stay here and do that again tomorrow night."

"We could always increase the distance of other tents to ours." Blaine's grin turned lop-sided. "Or I could kiss you to help you keep quiet."

"We should practice that."

He could *feel* Blaine's laugh against his lips.

"I thought we were."

Chapter Forty-Six

Travelling, Blaine reflected after a few days, was a habit too easily forgotten. In his youth, when Cooper was the crown prince and Blaine was just on his way to becoming an extremely able and high-ranking officer, he had been well-accustomed to the daily routine of packing and unpacking, and had felt no discomfort in riding a horse every day for weeks. Now, though, he was very glad for respites in his and Kurt's carriage and his offers of help were more often than not declined by the servants, who all but said that they'd have to redo all of Blaine's work.

"Don't beat yourself too hard about it," Kurt said. "They told the same to me, and it's been mere months since I lived the life of a nomad."

Aside from the discomforts of travel, though, Blaine couldn't be on a better mood. Santana's messengers from the field brought almost exclusively good news, it seemed the backwardness of Lima's army had not been exaggerated, and he could spend almost every moment of every day with Kurt, whose good spirits were not difficult to notice. Their privacy was, naturally, limited slightly due to the tent canvases being of slimmer material than the castle walls, but that didn't stop them from falling asleep in each other's arms every night, which Blaine thought much more necessary for his good humour than the occasional chance to rub against Kurt's hip to get off.

Nevertheless, he couldn't complain when, after five days, they reached Ivy, which held the promise of an actual room, even if it came with the disadvantage of having to face Wes's successor in the same halls he so strongly associated with Wes's presence.

Lady Unique of Adams, it turned out, was a formidable although young-ish woman with a wide smile and a brightly coloured dress. She greeted them unfazed, like a seasoned statesperson, and Blaine did not need to observe her for long to see why she had been Wes's first pick to lead the fiefdom. The castle was well-organised to receive a large party of visitors, and Blaine's brief inquiries to the state of affairs in Ivy were answered promptly and conclusively. She enquired after their travel schedule, and Blaine agreed that although their stay would probably last for some weeks, there was no point in delaying Lady Unique's official swearing of fealty to Blaine.

They were offered baths, which they accepted, and Lady Unique left them in the hands of servants who were to take care of them. The room they were shown was familiar to Blaine; he had been a frequent enough visitor of Wes's that he had been allotted a room of his own. Kurt, however, came to a halt at the door to admire the textiles on the wall and then stepped closer, Blaine supposed, only to examine the skillful woodcuttings on the four-poster bed. The baths were very welcome and probably somewhat overdue, if the speed at which the water acquired a distinctly grey-ish colour was any indication, but Blaine found the moment the servants left with courtseys and assurances about being always at hand far more satisfying, as it meant he and Kurt finally had the same level of privacy as they did at home.

Kurt, clad only in the soft sheets they'd both been given after the bath, was already lounging on the bed, and Blaine gladly joined him, sneaking his arms around Kurt's waist and kissing him. Kurt reciprocated, and they spent a long while just enjoying each other and the fact that they needed not hide the vocal expressions of their pleasure.

"Maybe we should have asked for our baths to be postponed after this," Kurt said afterwards, swiping sweat off his forehead with the corner of the sheet.

"I don't know." Blaine ran his fingers over the trail of kisses Kurt had done across his chest. "I'd have hated to restrict ourselves to the cleaner parts of our bodies."

Kurt caught his hand and brought it to his chest, where Blaine could feel the faint heartbeat. "You do have
a point there."

Chapter Forty-Seven

The following morning, they were woken up with an urgent message for Kurt. Kurt, still rubbing at his eyes, pushed himself up against the headboard to better get reading light from the small window, whereas Blaine stayed comfortably under the covers, observing him.

"Finn has requested Carole's help," Kurt said finally, folding the letter back into its original shape. "No doubt we'll hear about it from Santana soon enough, but she wanted to tell us without delay."

"That's good, isn't it?" he asked, drawing absent-minded patterns around Kurt's knee with his finger.

Kurt leaned down to kiss him. "That's very, very good," he said into Blaine's hair.

After breakfast, Lady Unique requested an audience with them, which they were happy to grant her.

As they followed her away from the hall, Blaine couldn't help hoping their discussion would take place somewhere else besides Wes's old study. He'd sat there many a time, sometimes on the kingdom's business, most often not, and he was certain the room would only bring up memories he'd rather avoid while dealing with a new liegelady.

Kurt glanced at him with worry in his eyes, and offered him his arm. Blaine took it gratefully.

He couldn't help the relieved release of breath as Lady Unique led them to a small room adjacent to Wes's study, but not to the study itself.

"I apologise for the lack of space," she said as they'd sat down in comfortable chairs that seemed too large for the room. Blaine had to suppose they'd been brought in specifically for the meetings with him and Kurt. "I- If you'd prefer the larger study-"

There was something uncertain and very young about her voice just then, and Blaine hastened to reassure her. "No, no. This is good." He paused for a second. "I'm sorry for your loss, Lady Unique. I understood you worked closely with Lord Wes?"

"I did." Lady Unique's eyes seemed slightly moist, but her voice was steady. She'd be an excellent provincial leader, Blaine thought. "But I should say the same to you, Your Royal Highness. Lord Wes spoke of you often. He had the utmost respect for you. I'm sorry for *your* loss."

"We shouldn't try to compare our grief," Blaine said diplomatically, and then added, "He would not have nominated you as his heir if he had not strongly believed you could continue in his footsteps."

"Thank you, Your Royal Highness." Lady Unique straightened her spine, and Blaine could almost see her force the matter out of her mind for the time being. "I thought we might get the official business out of the way early on in your stay."

"But of course."

For the next hour, they discussed the important details of the change of leadership in Ivy, set the date for the swearing of fealty and went through Lady Unique's questions. Kurt was mostly silent, observing a part of the ruler's duties he'd been previously unaccustomed with, and held Blaine's hand.

At the end of their meeting, Lady Unique stood up and showed them to the door.

"Your Royal Highness," she asked, with some hesitation on her voice, "Lord Wes was buried at the edge of the woods by the castle. Would you like to visit the place?"

Blaine's breath was caught in his throat.

"Yes," he said when he felt he could. "Yes, thank you. I would like to do that."

The place was beautiful, Kurt had to admit. Ivy was at the fringes of Desertland, not far off from Lima, and thus got significantly more rainfall than say, the capital, and the ground was covered in grass. The trees looked like their growth had been stunted by the lack of water, but that only gave them a unique look and did not make them look withering. A little into the woods, there was a large natural stone to which Lord Wes's eulogy had been carved.

"He always hated the idea of trying to preserve the body after death," Blaine said beside him.

"Looks like he got what he wanted."

He had no idea what else to say as he and Blaine stood in front of the tomb. Blaine didn't seem to be looking for words, though, but stared at the freshly overturned ground, glassy-eyed and holding on tight to Kurt's hand. They didn't move for a long time, but eventually Blaine pulled at his hand and they left.

Chapter Forty-Eight

They'd barely taken ten steps when they spotted a messenger, running towards them like he was escaping enemy troops. Blaine perked up immediately, pushing back his shoulders and raising his chin, but he didn't let go of Kurt's hand.

"Important news, I gather," he said as the messenger reached them. "Gather your breath, young man, and tell us."

"Advance." A breath. "Going." Another. "Well." Two breaths, which Kurt supposed signified a full stop, and he had to wonder if the messenger was punctuating his words in that way intentionally. "Lady. Quinn. Of Fabray. Lends. Her soldiers. Who advance. East."

Blaine turned to give Kurt a questioning look. "Lady Quinn?"

Kurt made no effort whatsoever to hide his smile. "That's good news," he told Blaine before turning to the messenger. "Has she met Lady Lopez?"

The messenger nodded. "Yes, Your Highness. She's with her right now."

His smile seemed to get even wider, if possible. "Perfect."

Blaine questioned the messenger further and then let him go, turning to Kurt once again. "Should I know of Lady Quinn?"

"Not yet," Kurt said. "But you will." At Blaine's prompting gaze, he went on, "She wanted to marry Finn, but they had a falling out because Finn couldn't decide between her and a bard by the name of Rachel. I'll tell you the whole story sometime, it's beautiful." He'd have to tell Blaine of his old infatuation with Finn, too, he realised. The thought did not even seem unpleasant; he was sure they would have a great laugh about it together. "Apparently, it ended with them both abandoning him and Lady Quinn becoming Rachel's benefactor. She's a great woman, Lady Quinn, and it seems she's putting her intellect and vigour whole-heartedly into politics now."

"You're not concerned of her allegiance?" Blaine asked.

Kurt brought his hand up to Blaine's face to smooth over the wrinkle between his eyebrows. "No. She let her troops go to east. There's nothing of interest for her there. She's on our side."

They began walking towards the castle again.

"Was there a point to you asking about Santana?" Blaine asked as they reached the castle. "Or did you just want to know her whereabouts?"

"I just think Quinn could use a friend like Santana," Kurt answered. He thought of Rachel who, much as he had come to care for her, prized adoration and applause over many other important thing, and he couldn't help thinking that Rachel was not an ideal choice for Quinn's bosom friend. Not when Quinn needed to remember that she did not need love or attention to measure her self-worth.

"Have I ever told you that I really love your compassion?"

Kurt felt his heart beat faster. He hoped Blaine would never stop being able to invoke that reaction in him. "Not specifically, no."

They didn't kiss in public, not without a special reason, but Kurt raised Blaine's hand to his lips, and Blaine's eyes told him that he knew what Kurt was thinking, and agreed wholeheartedly.

The swearing of fealty went off without a hitch, and Kurt followed the ceremony with interest. He, being the king consort, had no official part on it other than stand by Blaine's side and nod at appropriate times, but that suited him very well, as he had no stress about failing his duties but got an excellent spot for observation nonetheless.

Two days after it, he and Blaine were enjoying a friendly game of cards with Lady Unique when one of Lady Unique's men announced Santanta to them. Lady Unique, understandably not knowing who she was, furrowed her brows, whereas Kurt and Blaine exchanged an excited look. The news from the battlefield, if the invasion could be said to have one, had been increasingly positive, and as Santana was not one to abandon her army at the darkest hour, they could expect to hear good news.

Santana strode into the room, greeted and courtseyed them and then said, "I'm pleased to report that, as of noon yesterday, we are in control of the Hummel Castle."

Chapter Forty-Nine

They were quick to pack what little they'd brought to the castle, say Lady Unique goodbye and leave for Lima. Santana seemed clearly frustrated to have to sit in a carriage instead of riding a horse, but Blaine and Kurt wanted to hear more details, and that seemed to appease her at least a little bit.

"The main force reached the castle yesterday," Santana told them. "There was little resistance, and Earl of Schuester and his ministers were imprisoned for trial. There's a force left at the castle, and the rest continued towards North."

"What about the Adjacent?" Kurt asked. "Any news on that front?"

"Not completely in Finn's control," Santana said. "The Queen Dowager's troops are assisting him, though, and the situation looks very promising. We probably need not wait too long for him. His messenger said he was confident enough send some of his men to Hudson Castle for a brief respite from the battle."

Kurt and Blaine nodded.

"Lady Quinn's troops have met little resistance in the east," Santana went on. "Tell me, Blaine, with how easy the campaign has been, why didn't we attack earlier?"

"Tensions with Angelland, the Red Piping Revolt, drought in the south," Blaine listed. "Always a little something getting in the way."

Santana scoffed but nodded in acknowledgment.

Blaine had to admit, he had been curious to see the place where Kurt had grown up. He had never visited Hummel Castle; the focus of his and his father's interests had until recently been towards south. Moreover, the older court gossip told him that once upon a time when they were young, his father had challenged King Burt to a duel and lost, and Blaine could easily see why a man so interested in reputation and prestige as his father had been would have liked to forget that the kingdom of Lima even existed.

The castle was larger than he'd expected, although not quite as large as his own, and it was easy to notice which part of it had been built centuries ago and which added only some generations ago. It was quite fine, Blaine supposed, but there was nothing in it that he wouldn't find in hundreds of other castles.

Santana showed them the way to a large hall with a table, where a small dinner had been prepared for them.

"Schuester is in the dungeons, isn't he?" Kurt asked once they'd all filled their plates.

Santana nodded. "There's a pair of guards at his door. He's as slimy as his hair."

Blaine furrowed his brows but Kurt laughed.

"He wants to see you," Santana said. "I wouldn't bother, if I were you."

Kurt ate in silence for a moment. Blaine tried to read his face for his thoughts, but it was a futile effort. "I think I'll oblige him," Kurt said finally. "We are here to wait, are we not?"

"You are," Santana corrected. "I'm here to catch a decent night's sleep so that I can trot off back to my army the first thing tomorrow morning."

"The Adjacent, I assume," Blaine pitched in.

The look on Santana's face was very nearly a glare. "Naturally," she said. "Where else do you think the future ruler is going to be decided? Oh, and the Queen Dowager sends her greetings."

"We send ours right back," Kurt said.

They were just finishing their desserts when someone, a dark-haired, small woman, ran into the room.

Chapter Fifty

"Kuuuuuuurt!" she shouted, nearly knocking over Kurt's chair in her haste to swing her arms around Kurt's shoulders.

Blaine's hand went automatically to his belt, where he stored his dagger, but after the shell-shocked expression left Kurt's face, he returned the embrace.

"Rachel!" he pulled away and smiled at her before speaking in his language. "I hope that is not your new-"

Blaine did not know the last words.

Rachel laughed and said something, too quick for Blaine to comprehend, and then seemed to realise that Kurt was not the sole person at the table.

"Oh," she said, doing a little courtsey. "Your Majesty, a-"

Again, the rest of her words were lost to Blaine. Kurt seemed to notice his baffled expression since he put his hand on Rachel's wrist and said, "Slow down, Rachel."

Rachel seemed to realise the situation and when she next spoke, her words were almost comically slow and well-enunciated.

"Your Majesty," she said loudly. "I am Rachel Berry. Your husband is my friend. I am a singer."

"Wonderful to meet you, Rachel," Blaine said. "I heard a lot about you."

"But you haven't heard me sing," Rachel answered, voice a bit quieter and not so slow. "You will."

She said something to Kurt and literally danced off, leaving Blaine stare after her.

"You should be afraid," Kurt said in desert language, looking delighted. "Very afraid."

"I like her." Blaine took a bite of his pie.

"I don't," Santana said, getting up. "But the girl's got a fine set of pipes. I have to go."

They followed her out of the hall with their eyes, and then Kurt turned back to Blaine.

"She'll want to sing with you when she hears your voice," he said. "And then she'll want me to duet with her so that you can admire us both at the same time."

"That'll be my pleasure," he said, leaning over the table to take Kurt's hand and casting him a meaningful look. "Although I might not pay as much attention to her as her voice would warrant."

Kurt looked down at his plate, a smile playing on his lips.

Kurt didn't often wish he was not royalty. It had always been part of his life and logically he recognised that he could have fared a lot worse, that the little inconveniences of his life were only drips in the ocean when compared to the hardships many other people had to face in their everyday life.

Still, though, he couldn't help thinking that if his father, and Blaine's too, had been only a knight, he could show Blaine around the castle without either letting their guards follow or accept that they were going to bump into one every now and then, in a way that definitely was not an accident.

He hadn't been there in so long. There was not much you could do to a castle in four or five years to change the basic structure, though, at least if you were an unestablished leader of a declining country, and Kurt had no problems finding his way around. Blaine followed him dutifully, even if the places Kurt showed him were no more special than his old bedroom or the music room where he'd first learnt to sing.

Finally, he took Blaine to the small orchard tucked to the side of the castle.

"I used to come here a lot," he said, "after my father died. It was peaceful, and no one ever came here. I used to- sing about missing him, and I didn't want anyone to hear me."

Blaine nodded, and squeezed his hand, and Kurt didn't really expect any other response.

They went round the appletrees to find the stony bench by the wall, and Kurt was surprised to see they were not alone in the orchard.

"Quinn!" he shouted, delighted.

Beautiful as ever and clad in a blue dress that complimented her immensely, Quinn looked like the queen of fairies from a tale Kurt's mother had once told him as she stood from the bench, surrounded by the moss on the wall and the green leaves of the trees.

"Kurt," she said, starting to walk towards them and hugging Kurt as she reached them. "It's good to see you."

Chapter Fifty-One

He was a bit taken aback at the hug, although he returned it immediately. For a long time, he'd had great respect for Quinn's abilities and determination, and enjoyed her habit of always knocking Finn down a peg or two, but he'd never thought she'd like him very much. Her smile had been genuine, though, and he was inclined to believe her words hadn't been a mere formality.

Quinn pulled back and eyed Blaine apprisingly. "Your Royal Highness," she said in desert language, courtseying.

"Lady Quinn," Blaine said, his smile wide. It was obvious he had already made up his mind about liking her. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

Quinn tilted his head to the side. "Likewise."

"On behalf of myself and my husband, I'd like to thank you for your assistance."

"Least I could do." Quinn's voice was sheer honey, the way Kurt had always found difficult to read. "Anything to get the lawful king back on the throne."

Her smile was clearly directed at Kurt, and Kurt only.

In the following days, whenever he wasn't engaged in his official duties and following the progress of the campaign, Blaine found himself spending a rather sizeable part of his day with Rachel, who seemed to enjoy his company. He rather supposed Rachel was not keen on him only for his own sake, but also because his limited command of Rachel's native tongue meant Rachel could domineer the conversation and lead it in a direction that always led to her singing. Blaine did not mind; Rachel was indeed a very good singer, and although she was prone to solos, she was easily convinced to decide on a duet. Moreover, Kurt had taken up the task of acquainting himself with the affairs of the kingdom and figuring out what kind of reorganisation would be needed once the invasion was completely finished, and although Blaine supposed Kurt wouldn't exactly mind him lounging around as Kurt worked, he'd either be a dreadful distraction or else get bored.

He was playing the piano for Rachel in the music room when Lady Quinn walked in. She came to a halt by the piano, not saying anything while Rachel still sang, but as Rachel finished the last note and fell to her knees for a dramatic effect, she clapped her hands at Rachel and then turned to Blaine.

"I already informed His Highness, but I thought to mention to Your Royal Highness as well that my army has gained control of the east and met with Lady Lopez's forces at River McKinley."

Her tone was clipped and very business-like, but Blaine smiled at her anyway. "Thank you, Lady Quinn." He gestured at the piano. "Would you like to joining us for a song? Miss Rachel has told me you have a remarkable voice of your own."

"No, thank you," was the answer, and Quinn's voice yet again adopted that weird tone of overwhelming sweetness that made Blaine think he was being disapproved of. "I have work to do."

With that, she turned at her heels and left the room.

Chapter Fifty-Two

"We should have asked her to sing," Rachel said, pleasantly oblivious to any tensions. That, or it was difficult to understand tone when you didn't understand the words. "My voice sounds divine on a duet with Quinn!"

"I asked," Blaine said, looking at the closed door. "She has work."

"I understand now why Mister Schuester taught Finn governance," Kurt groaned from where he was on his stomach starfished on their bed as Blaine entered. "They say that those who cannot, teach."

They weren't rooming in the King's chambers, because Kurt thought it'd have been weird to sleep in his father's bed, so the room was small enough for Blaine to take a few steps and sit at the edge of the bed.

"You're lucky he wasn't your teacher, then," he said, lightly kissing Kurt's neck.

"So lucky," Kurt said, turning to his side. "I'll forever be indebted to Isabelle."

"Your former tutor? Where's she now?" Blaine asked, a hint of dread coiling in his stomach. People from Kurt's past that he'd loved didn't have a good track record, from what he'd gathered.

"She went back to her home country after the revolution," Kurt said, and Blaine felt he could exhale freely. "She was so different from Mister Schuester, she said she didn't want to live under his rule."

"Where's she from?"

"Across the sea," Kurt said, smiling a little. "Condé Nast."

"Have you ever thought of-"

He was interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Come in!" he shouted.

A guard opened the door.

"Your Royal Highness, Your Highness," he said, "Prince Finn and his entourage have entered the castle. The Adjacent has been captured."

Chapter Fifty-Three

Kurt greeted the guards at Mister Schuester's door. His day had began badly already, with Finn boasting loudly of his military prowess at the breakfast table and one of his followers, a knight called Strando, expressing his surprise that Kurt could still eat with a fork after living with the barbarians. He'd figured Mister Schuester couldn't make the day any worse, so in the afternoon, he descended to the dungeon to meet the man who'd betrayed his family.

"Kurt!" Mister Schuester exclaimed as he moved into a sitting position on the straw mattress at the corner.

Kurt arched his eyebrow. He had never been given much respect by Mister Schuester, but he had thought maybe now- Well, it didn't matter. He'd been foolish to think Mister Schuester would have changed. "I go by King Consort Kurt of the Deserted Lands these days, *William*," he said coolly.

Mister Schuester shook his head in disappointment as if he still was a schoolmaster with any power whatsoever on Kurt. "You were always prone to giving lip, but I didn't think even you would resort to treason."

He couldn't help it. The laugh just burst out of his mouth, and admittedly he did little to control it. "Treason? Is that what you're calling my marriage now?"

"Can you deny that it is your *husband's*" Mister Schuester's nose scrunched in derision at having to say the word "armies that have taken over the castle?"

"I cannot." Kurt gave him a saccharine smile. "Although I can verify that they are here at your student's insistence, so he's the one you should accuse of treason. He had a good teacher."

"I was just-"

"Staging a coup?" Kurt exhaled forcefully. "I don't even know why I came. We obviously have nothing to say to each other."

He tuned out Mister Schuester's protests as he marched out, trying to hide the flames of anger inside him. The least he could do was to not give Mister Schuester the satisfaction of knowing how much his belittling actually got to Kurt.

As he reached the hall, wondering how much angry pacing he would need before he could settle down to decipher Mister Schuester's edicts again, he was approached by yet another messenger.

"The Queen Dowager wanted this handed specifically to you, Your Majesty."

Kurt flipped through Carole's greetings, wishes of well-being to both him and Blaine, descriptions of how her knitting was going, how full of vegetables the castle cellars still were, how she'd invited Finn's troops to the castle for a feast in honour of their victory to devour some of them, how great it was being around so many young people again, how she was afraid she was getting rheumatism, how Kurt should remember that Hummel Castle was always draughty in the spring and Kurt should be careful of catching pneumonia.

He folded the letter, smiling.

There was no better code language than the gossip of a middle-aged woman.

"Hey, Kurt."

Chapter Fifty-Four

He almost jumped before realising he was no longer alone with the messenger.

"Hi, Sam," he said as Sir Sam of Evans, a friend of Finn, a blond, fit man, now nursing a bandage around his arm, approached him.

"Or should I call you something else now that you're a king consort?" Sam asked. "Sorry, I'm bad at titles."

He'd always disliked Sam somewhat less than the rest of Finn's friends. "Informally, Kurt's fine."

"Great." Sam's smile was wide. "So, how's the desert treating you?"

"Very well, thank you."

"You know, I always thought you'd like the Desert King," Sam said, a pondering look his face. "Don't know why, I only ever met him at the negotiations with Finn, but he seemed like a good guy."

Kurt couldn't help the small smile. "He is."

"Hey, have you met this one girl that worked there?" Sam asked, his face lighting up. "She was from around here, I think? Lady Brittany of- something?"

"Of Pierce," Kurt finished for him. "And yes, I have indeed met her. Frequently. She's a friend of mine."

"How's she doing?" Sam looked like he was seconds away from *drooling*. Kurt felt his levels of annoyance rising again. "Man, I danced with her once. Those legs..."

"She's doing fine," Kurt said, pursing his lips. "Very happy with her wife."

Oh." He could see Sam's face fall. "I didn't realise she was married. To whom?"

Kurt took a second to prepare for seeing Sam's face. "Lady Lopez."

He wasn't disappointed. Sam looked mildly horrified, hands coming up to hug his chest like he was afraid Santana would appear out of nowhere to slay him. When he spoke, however, he said, "She's one fierce soldier. Put us all to shame on the battlefields."

Mildly placated, Kurt was about to enquire after Sam's life since they'd met last time, but he was prevented by Finn's appearance.

"Kurt! I've been looking for you."

Kurt turned to him, sighing internally. Having to deal with Finn was truly the last thing he needed right then. "Have you?"

"Yes," Finn said, looking very enthusiastic. "I've been thinking, and I need you to translate something to the King for me."

He speaks your language well enough, why don't you tell that to him yourself, Kurt thought, but didn't say.

"You know, kings are always at their most vulnerable when they're just coming to power," Finn went on, "so I was thinking, we should make it official as quick as possible, and then give the people some gifts to make them feel happy about my rule."

Kurt shook his head, glad that he could grip the letter in his hand instead of just making his palm into a fist. He didn't need Finn using him as a *servant* after Mister Schuester had already put him in a foul mood, he couldn't blow everything up now- A few more days, he could survive a few more days and make the final move when he wouldn't be practically alone with both Finn and Sam.

Chapter Fifty-Five

Like they'd heard, Blaine and the guards came in from the dining hall.

"They tell me dinner will be served in a few moments," Blaine said, looking at the three of them.

"What'd he say?" Finn asked, not even bothering to look at Kurt.

"Dinner," Kurt said through clenched teeth. He turned to Blaine. "Can I tell him now?"

Blaine's eyebrows rose a bit, but he smiled, nodded and gestured at some of his guards, who went for the staircase and upstairs.

"Are you talking to him about my coronation, now?" Finn asked.

"No," Kurt said, taking a few steps away from Sam. "I was asking for his permission to tell you that you will never be the King of Lima."

Finn's brow furrowed. "What do you mean? We've got the kingdom, Mister Schuester's in the dungeons-"

"I mean," Kurt said calmly, "that the Desert King very kindly offered his assistance to get the lawful king of Lima back on the throne." He allowed himself a small smile. "That's me, Finn. Not you."

"That's not true," Finn said weakly. "I'm-"

"Older than me, yes," Kurt interrupted. "But you're not the legal son of the last king. My father married Carole but he never adopted you. I was still the legal heir. And now I'm pressing my claim."

Finn seemed to recover from his shock. "You don't control the country, though," he said, face brightening like he'd invented the candle.

"I don't," Kurt agreed and paused for dramatic effect. "But my husband and his allies do."

"No," Finn started, "my armies and my mother control all of the south and-"

Kurt raised the letter in his hand. "This letter says otherwise. Your mother sends her greetings and tells me that your whole army is confined in her castle."

Looking less shaken than Kurt would have expected at the news of his mother's betrayal of him, Finn pressed on. "Quinn told me her troops are in the east."

"And she told me that she wants me for her king," Kurt answered easily.

At that point, they were both startled at shouts from upstairs. Kurt took some more steps away from Sam, allowing two of Blaine's guards get in between them.

"Oh, and those are the shouts of the rest of your men being imprisoned to be sent to your mother."

Sam stood completely still as the guards restrained him, but as three more approached Finn, he launched himself forwards towards Kurt.

It was pure instinct. Kurt barely realised what he was doing, but in the next second, Finn was groaning on the floor and Kurt noticed his bent leg in the air after he had, he could only deduce, kneed Finn in the groin.

He put his foot down as Blaine reached him. They stood in place as the guards took Finn and Sam away, leaving Kurt and Blaine alone aside from two guards, who very discreetly moved to the doorway to the dinner hall.

"I love you," Blaine said quietly. "But you do have a serious flare for dramatics."

"I'd earned it," Kurt said, unable to stop himself from smiling.

"You had earned it," Blaine agreed, resting his forehead against Kurt's. "Your Royal Highness."

Chapter Fifty-Six

Finn and his men were sent to the Queen Dowager the very evening. Blaine didn't see any reason for delays, and he knew Kurt agreed with him. The Queen Dowager had agreed to help them restore Kurt to the throne, but she had been very clear that she wanted no harm come to her son through their hands (she had, very astutely, in Blaine's opinion, observed that sometimes it was impossible to prevent Finn from bringing harm on himself, without help from anyone else). Most likely she would have been inclined to trust them even if they had wanted to retain Finn for some days, but there was no reason to give her time to doubt and no purpose for Finn's prolonged stay in the castle.

Blaine allowed himself the night to just be happy for Kurt's victory and rejoice about it with him. They went to bed late and fell asleep even later, exhausted and satisfied for reasons that had nothing to do with the kingdom of Lima.

It was only when he woke up the following morning to featherlight kisses being trailed along his jaw that Blaine made himself remember the realities of their situation.

"Good morning to you," Kurt said, pulling back an inch or two.

"Morning," Blaine mumbled, rubbing at his eyes.

"We should get downstairs or we'll miss breakfast." Kurt snuggled even closer to him. "Although I definitely wouldn't mind. I'm not really *hungry*."

With huge effort, he managed to push himself up into a more sitting position and open his eyes properly.

"Kurt, we should talk."

Kurt was up in a second, pulling away from Blaine's side and closer to the edge of the bed, but not so far that he'd have had to relinquish his grip on Blaine's hand.

"We can go," he said, speaking abnormally fast, gaze not settling on any part of Blaine's face but instead wandering without aim. "I know we always agreed we didn't want the servants to know anything more of

our- private life than they're wont to figure out anyway, and you know how they get about unusual sleeping habits, we've heard all the rumours and I know we don't-

"Kurt." He couldn't help the smile. Kurt was absolutely adorable when he was nervous of little details. "We don't have to go to breakfast if you don't want. I couldn't think of anything I'd like to do more today than pass my time in bed with you."

Kurt seemed to relax, but he was still obviously waiting for the follow-up.

"I meant that we should discuss practical issues of governance." Too vague? Too vague. "As two kings."

Kurt's thumb began gently caressing his knuckles. "I don't understand."

Blaine looked down at the bed. This was not a discussion he'd imagined them having naked.

"You're a king now," he said. "Of Lima. How are you planning to govern it?"

"Are you doubting my abilities?"

Blaine raced his hand after Kurt's as Kurt tried to pull it away.

"No!" He forced himself to look up into Kurt's eyes, which were clouding with uncertainty and even hurt. "Do you want to move here?" he asked. "Because it's not like I could tell you not to, without being a hypocrite, I just-"

Couldn't follow you and don't want to live apart from you.

Kurt stared at him for a while and then burst out laughing.

Chapter Fifty-Seven

“That’s what you’re worried about?”

“Can you blame me?”

“Blaine,” Kurt said, inching closer to him on the bed until he was snug against Blaine’s side again, “of course I don’t want to move here. I’ve found my home, and it’s in your court.”

He couldn’t help kissing Kurt then, and somehow they ended up lying on the bed again, Blaine half on top of Kurt.

“You have no idea how happy I’m to hear that,” he whispered in Kurt’s ear before asking, “What are you planning to do with Lima?”

Surely Kurt did have a plan. His main motivation for acquiring kingship may have been the desire to deny it from Finn, but Kurt was far too well-trained and meticulous to have given the matter no further thought at all.

“Well,” Kurt said, smiling, “I was thinking I would appoint a liegelady to take care of my country and give me regular reports that I could listen to while my extremely handsome husband sits by my side.”

Blaine bumped his nose gently against Kurt’s. “That sounds wonderful.”

“And then,” Kurt’s voice grew a little more uncertain, “when my extremely handsome husband and I grow old, we could nominate an heir together to inherit both kingdoms and make Lima one province of the Deserted Lands.”

Blaine’s breath was caught in his throat. He knew they were married, eternal union and all that, and he knew he often thought how much time with Kurt he’d, with any luck, have. But it was still amazing, still wonderful, to hear Kurt talk of the distant future, their distant future that they would spend together.

“You make even wise statemanship sound incredibly romantic,” he said, in between peppering Kurt’s face with kisses. “I feel like I can never compare to that. I’m hopeless at romance.”

Kurt shook his head, making Blaine's lips miss his cheek and landing under his ear instead.

"You had elaborate plans to woo me," he said. "With foreign trips and fabric merchants. That has to count for something."

—

When they eventually made it down to the hall, Kurt was surprised to find Quinn still sitting at the table. Not that it was unwelcome, of course; in fact, he would have had to go in search of Quinn had he not seen her. It was slightly inconvenient in that respect that he now had to try and tamp down his large, probably foolish-looking smile that hadn't gone away since he'd told Blaine that he thought of them together decades into the future and had been answered with loving kisses.

"I didn't think we'd find you here," he said as they sat down.

Blaine's hand rested briefly on his thigh, but Blaine was forced to take it off as he took up the fork and knife. If only they were in the desert court.

"I'm rewarding myself for our victory with a second serving of pancakes," Quinn said, and true enough, her fork was pointing at a neat pile of pancakes with some strawberry jam on the side.

"That you have well deserved," Blaine said.

Quinn eyed her. "Thank you, Your Royal Highness."

Kurt toyed with his napkin a bit, wondering if now would be a proper moment to ask. Probably not, but at least it was a natural moment.

"Quinn, I need you to consider something."

Quinn looked up at him, interest clearly piqued. Blaine gave Kurt an encouraging smile, probably having figured out what Kurt was going to ask.

"I don't intend to stay in Lima for much longer than necessary," Kurt said. "I need someone to govern in my name. Would you take that position?"

Quinn's fork came to a halt midway to her mouth. Her gaze went from Kurt to Blaine and back, and eventually fixed on Kurt's eyes.

"Are you actually offering it to me?"

Chapter Fifty-Eight

He wanted to frown (yes, *of course* he was offering, he wouldn't have been talking like he had if he wasn't), but instead, he held onto his current neutral expression. "Yes."

"Then," Quinn said, giving him a small, genuine smile, "I would take that position, thank you very much."

She shot Blaine a look Kurt couldn't decipher, although he couldn't say he tried very hard.

"That's wonderful!"

"When are you intending to have yourself coronated, Your Royal Highness?"

This time he frowned, unable to know if she was teasing him with the title.

"As soon as possible. I intend to start preparations already today."

Quinn nodded approvingly, and the conversation shifted to other topics. They stayed at the table for long, making light conversation and indulging in third servings, until it seemed that they had celebrated enough and had to get to work to maintain their achievements.

"Your Royal Highness," Quinn said as they left the hall, and Kurt turned to her to tell her she didn't need to call him by his newest title just because he'd be a king and she'd be his liegelay, but this time she seemed to be addressing her words to Blaine, "may I have a word with you?"

—

Blaine had noticed Quinn's coolness towards him; it was hard not to. From Kurt's stories, he'd learnt that she was one of those people who had trusted and been betrayed, and he didn't begrudge her for expecting him to earn her trust before dropping the stand-offish politeness.

But as Quinn had glared at him after being offered the position as the liegelay for Lima and as her use of the ruling king's title for Kurt went against their previous informality, Blaine began to suspect there was more to it than had initially met his eye.

“Of course,” he said, giving Quinn a smile.

She led him to the room she’d claimed for her study, and shut the door. She went for the desk chair, and Blaine stood in front of the other chair in the room, but neither of them sat down.

“I agreed to govern in Kurt’s name,” Quinn said, eyes nailed at Blaine. “And I want you to know that when I say that, I mean that I will govern for Kurt and for Kurt *only*.”

Blaine held her gaze. “That is your right.” He sat down on the chair. “Would you mind telling me why you felt the need to specifically tell me this, Lady Quinn?”

Quinn chuckled drily, her knuckles turning white as she grasped the backrest of the desk chair.

“You married a man you had never met to invade his kingdom,” she said. “Tell me, *Your Royal Highness*, why would I believe your good treatment of him will continue now that he’s for all intents and purposes outlived his usefulness to you?”

Chapter Fifty-Nine

Blaine could only stare. He knew, logically, that the reasons for his and Kurt's marriage had been sensible, not sentimental, but the mere thought of Kurt as someone who could ever 'outlive his usefulness' to Blaine pained him.

"I don't flatter myself thinking my army could ever seriously challenge yours," Quinn went on, "but should I ever hear of you mistreating Kurt in any way, you can be very sure that I will try. Finn's foolishness has caused enough suffering without Kurt having to undergo anything worse."

"Should I ever mistreat Kurt," Blaine said, finding his voice again, "I should probably find my army severely torn between those who'd follow me and those who'd follow their commander. I sincerely doubt Lady Lopez would stand for my abusing a dear friend of her wife."

Not to mention a friend of Santana herself, but Quinn likely knew Santana and he went back years.

"That's very touching," Quinn said coolly. "You better keep that in mind, Your Royal Highness."

Blaine suppressed the urge to rip at his hair.

"Lady Quinn, let me be honest with you. Yes, I did marry Kurt partially to give legitimacy for my eventual invasion of Lima. It was not my initial plan, but when Prince Finn suggested the marriage, I saw the opportunity and took it. But you're wrong in thinking I ever thought of Kurt merely as means to an end. I had not met him before our wedding, that is true, but I did make enquiries of his character, and had I thought him someone I could never see myself fall in love with, I would not have accepted Prince Finn's suggestion."

Quinn seemed unfazed, and Blaine sighed.

"I had seen all the noblemen of my kingdom and knew I wanted none of them," he said. "A member of my court, who had befriended a follower of Prince Finn on my orders, told me she thought him a good person based on his stories."

"Which one?" Quinn asked, glancing down for the first time in their conversation. "Which follower?"

“Sir Sam of Evans.” Blaine chuckled. “I looked at him once and knew he couldn’t lie to a pretty woman.”

Quinn let out a laugh. It was short but sincere. “He truly can’t.”

“Look, Lady Quinn. I cannot make you believe that I truly love Kurt and would never wish any harm on him. But I do hope that with time, you’ll come to see that it is true.”

Quinn didn’t answer, so Blaine stood up and went for the door. With his hand on the door handle, he turned to Quinn.

“For what it’s worth, milady,” he said, “if my actions ever caused harm to Kurt, he wouldn’t need you to avenge him. There’d be nothing in the world that I wouldn’t be ready to do to make things right with him again.”

With that, he exited without staying to see Quinn’s reaction.

A/N: Since I’m done writing this fic but don’t want to give up on this verse yet, **I hereby take prompts for drabbles/headcanons in this verse.** If there’s something you’d want to read more about, either comment here or send me an ask on tumblr (satonawall; I have anon asks enabled as well).

Bonus Fic: Five times Kurt was happy and Finn was an idiot

Finn winced as he stepped on the toes of that intimidating woman who'd pulled him to the dance floor.

Damn barbarians who didn't even use forks but still came up with weird dance moves. Wasn't it enough that he'd suffered through that week Kurt had made him learn the waltz?

Kurt seemed to like it, though. Or at least the Desert King wasn't looking cross with him, so Finn had to guess Kurt hadn't stepped on his toes yet. He squinted his eyes in their direction, and it seemed like Kurt was laughing at something the Desert King had said. Good. Kurt should totally build up trust with the king so that he'd be a better spy. It had been genius planning of Finn to make that marriage happen.

The intimidating woman stepped on his toes. Finn didn't know how this dance was done at all, but even he knew it was on purpose.

The Desert King said something. It sounded really gross, but the King was smiling, so Finn guessed it was just the language.

"We are all very happy to have your brother here in our court," that guy with the weird hat who'd glared at Finn in the feast said.

Finn sat up straighter. He totally could talk up Kurt so that the King would trust him more. It'd make Kurt's job so much easier.

"Yeah, Kurt's always been kinda gay."

The King smiled like Finn had told a joke he thought a bit weird or something, but Finn didn't let it bother him.

"He's a great kid, isn't he?"

Coughing into his sleeve (Finn was pretty sure the barbarians had to have more diseases than people in Lima, so he moved his chair a bit further away), the King said something with a wide smile.

“His Majesty agreeing to marry myself has indeed brought great joy to our life.”

Finn nodded and smiled real wide. No way would the King hide anything from Kurt if he talked about him that highly. Finn was such a master planner.

—

It was so great to be sleeping in a castle again. Finn almost skipped the stairs down to the hall, but he told himself he was going to be a king and that probably wouldn't be okay. Kings didn't do that. Or Burt hadn't done that, and Finn was pretty sure the Desert King didn't either.

Speaking of the devil, there he was, and Kurt was there, too. He had a fork halfway to the King's mouth, and Finn barely suppressed a laugh. Who'd think that the Great King of the Desert couldn't even eat his breakfast by himself like civilised people? It seemed that the King realised that, too, because he took up his own fork the second he spotted Finn.

Finn gave him a smile to show that his secret would be safe with Finn. Don't bite the hand that feeds you, right, even if the hand couldn't hold a fork properly.

—

“Do you think Quinn would be fine with building a new tower?” Finn asked one time he found Kurt going through some papers.

Kurt raised his eyebrow, like he often did when talking to Finn. “Why would Quinn have opinions on how the castle will be developed?”

Finn sighed. Sometimes it was really annoying to explain to Kurt all his awesome schemes because Kurt didn't get the simplest things.

“She's talking to me again,” he said. “And her knights are helping on the eastern front. Quinn-speak, that totally means she wants to marry me again.”

He was pretty sure he couldn't tell Kurt's eyebrows and hair apart. Kurt had always had some weird problems about Finn getting married. Finn sure hoped the Desert King wouldn't find out Kurt still hadn't got over his feelings for Finn.

"Have you asked her?" Kurt asked.

"No," Finn admitted. "But she always just told me that we were getting engaged, so that's not a problem."

"I need to find His Majesty," Kurt said, collecting the papers. "He said he's been practicing a song he'd like to sing me."

He didn't even wait until Finn said something before he was gone. Finn shrugged his shoulders. Not everyone could be such a good sport as he was.

Finn knew he was sulking.

Then again, his mother had given him a book to read and told him to stay out of the way, so he totally had the right to sulk, right?

"Bew-" someone shouted above him, and then the next sound he heard was a loud noise when something dropped on his head.

He stared down at the sheets at his feet. Who knew fabric hurt when it fell on your head?

"So sorry, sir," one of the maids said, running down the stairs. "Those sheets, there were so many- His Majesty King Kurt sent them to the Queen Dowager from his travels. She says His Majesty and the King Consort wish the best for everyone."

Finn didn't answer, being too busy to rub at his head.