

I've Got A Fever (And the Cure is More Darren Criss), or, In Sickness and in Schmoop

by

thentheyhadsex

Chris/Darren || RPF || NC-17

Chris is sick. Chris is totally, unequivocally, completely sick. It's a good thing that he's got four days off from filming, and apparently, Darren volunteering to be his personal nursemaid. He's too sick to put up much protest, and suddenly Darren is staying at his apartment 24/7. And Chris... Chris is starting to realize he doesn't mind this one bit.

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Chapter One

When the alarm goes off, Chris drags his eyes open with a groan. The light is dim in the room, and Chris feels like his vision is swimming. He tries to kick his way out of the sheets, but they're tangled around his legs and he's not coherent enough to get them off with any degree of ease. Finally he frees himself from the bed and staggers to his feet and across the room to slap off the alarm.

The room is swirling, just a bit, and Chris is sure he gave himself nine hours of sleep for the Lunesta to wear off. He holds on to the dresser and attempts to take in a deep breath, but as soon as he tries to expand his lungs, he starts to cough, nearly folding forward and whacking his head on the dresser with the force of it. It's a lot longer than the coughing jags he was having last night, and the ache in his back and shoulders is much, much worse. He must have still been coughing in his sleep, even with his meds. Damn it.

"Oh Lunesta, how could you forsake me like this," he mumbles. His voice sounds raw, and thank goodness he only has a handful of lines today. He's been slowly getting sicker for days now, ever since Neil's sweet little Harper sneezed directly in his face at Christina's dinner party, and the coughing and the aches and the snot are starting to get to him. He waits, breathing shallowly, until he feels stable enough to move.

He drags himself into the shower and turns the water up as hot as he can stand, letting the steam fill the bathroom. The tile of the shower wall is blessedly cool against his face, and he lays his cheek against it and just lets the water beat down on him until he feels marginally more human. He washes up, and then stays in until the water turns lukewarm, before stumbling out again and drying off.

He let himself sleep as late as he could, so he only has time to get dressed, swallow a pair of cold and cough pills, and pack his bag before he has to leave for the studio. The radio turned up loud and the window open to the highway wind is enough to wake him the rest of the way, and on the way to the hair and makeup trailer, he stops at craft services for the biggest cup of tea they have and a muffin the size of his fist.

Chris drops his muffin on the makeup trailer counter and flops into Bernadette's seat, resisting the urge to curl up into a tiny ball. He sips at his tea and gives his voice a shot. "Bernadette, I need your magic today more than ever. Help me, you're my only hope."

"Sweetie, are you sick? You look horrible."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence. Good thing I'm naturally this pale, huh?" His smile in the mirror looks drawn and tired.

"You seemed all right yesterday." Bernadette starts applying the first of a thousand products that will be on Chris in some capacity today. "Is it getting worse?"

"It's been creeping up on me all week, but the coughing was bad last night." Chris sips some more tea when she steps away to pick up something else, and closes his eyes. "I only have today though, and then four blessed days off."

She pats his cheek, and her hands are so cool, it's wonderful. "Well, you rest your voice, and I'll get you fixed up." He smiles at her and closes his eyes, tucking his tea between his thighs so he doesn't drop it.

It's quiet as she works, and when she finally speaks again Chris starts in his seat. He must have been asleep. "There you go, honey, you're all set. Don't forget your muffin."

When he opens his eyes, his reflection looks hale and healthy, with no sign of the dark circles under his eyes or his reddened nose. Between that and the brief respite from coughing because of the drugs, he could almost fool himself into thinking he's fine. "Look at me, you're a miracle worker."

She mimes blowing off the end of her makeup brush like a smoking gun. "That's why they pay me the big bucks. Now go work and then go home and rest."

"Yes ma'am." He salutes her with the rim of his cup and snags his muffin on the way out to the wardrobe trailer. They must be running ahead today because the moment he walks in the door, he's handed a pair of hangers and a bag of accessories and pushed back in the direction of his trailer. That means he's got enough time to eat most of his muffin and get his contacts in before he needs to get dressed and be on set.

Kurt's outfit is surprisingly simple today, a striking white shirt with a diagonal front flap outlined in red and two tiny rows of buttons that still take forever to get fastened up. Tight black pants and his usual knee-high boots, which he can lace now like it's second nature, and a grey cape-like sweater complete the look. He checks everything in the mirror, and he'd probably be more appreciative of how sharp the outfit is if he didn't feel like he was about to collapse. He drains the last of his now-lukewarm tea and stashes some extra tissues in his laptop bag before he shoulders it and heads to set.

Chris has four scenes, three before lunch and a Rachel and Finn musical number in the afternoon. The first scene is simple; he walks with Amber and Jenna down the hall, they have several lines each, and he has one at the end. Jenna flubs a few times because she has a sneezing fit, but otherwise it's all fine.

The second scene is his toughest for the day, with Cory and Romy at the Hudson-Hummel house. His voice starts going after the run-through, but one of the new PAs -- Patti, or Patsy, something like that -- runs to fetch him another cup of tea, and the hot liquid brings it back. Between takes, Romy pats him on the shoulder and smiles at him gently, just like a real mom would. It's nice, and it makes it easier to smile at her lovingly when the camera's on.

The third scene is an outdoor one, with several of them walking from the parking lot into the school. Chris has no lines, and it moves quickly for an outdoor shot. They're released to lunch fifteen minutes early, and Chris makes a short detour for a bagel and a Diet Coke before he heads for his trailer. He manages to eat a quarter of it before he decides to just sit and rest for a while.

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He starts awake to a banging on his trailer door. A couple swallows to wet his mouth, and he croaks out, "Yes?"

"Chris, it's Patti, you're needed back on set in ten."

Chris must have slept through his whole lunch break, fuck. "Be right there," he croaks out, and she taps the door once in answer. He can feel that the drugs he took this morning have almost worn off, and he gropes in his bag next to him for another dose. When he doesn't find them by feel alone, he sits up to look in his bag, and that's the moment he remembers that they're still on the counter at home. *Fuck.*

He digs through the drawers in the bathroom until he comes up with a half-empty bag of cherry cough drops and jams them in his bag as he has a few more bites of his bagel. He drags his bag up onto his shoulder and starts the long trek across set to their soundstage.

"Hello, Emmy-nominated Chris Colfer!" a voice sing-songs from behind him, and when he turns, it's Darren. He's got his hands jammed in the pockets of Blaine's pants, and he's wearing a truly ridiculous polka-dotted bow tie.

"Hey," Chris croaks out. He digs into his bag for a cough drop.

"We missed you at lunch today. Everything okay?"

"Yeah, I just... ate in my trailer. Just a little tired."

"Cory said you're sick." Darren puts his hand on Chris's shoulder, and oh great. If Cory's off telling everyone, they're never going to leave him alone about it.

"Maybe a little. I'll be fine, I just need to make it through today and then I can go home and sleep it off."

"Wow, sleep. Do people still do that?" Darren chuckles and squeezes Chris's shoulder as they enter the soundstage.

"I hear it's pretty popular around here, though, I don't know what they're doing on the planet you come from."

"Har har har. You're hilarious," Darren deadpans.

"That's what they tell me." Chris drops his bag in his chair and straightens his cape. Everyone else in the scene is milling around, chatting and laughing, and as much fun as this still is, after all this time, his heart just isn't in it today. Harry calls out to Darren with a wave, and Darren gives Chris a quick squeeze on the shoulder before he ambles over.

The run-through goes quickly since the director is keeping a strict eye to make sure they don't run over. Chris's throat tickles and he feels cold, and he really can't wait until he can go home and get in his bed and sleep forever. When they finally get a break so the crew can set up for the shot, he hurries over to his bag for another cough drop, to try and head off the coughing jag he can feel coming. He doesn't quite make it, and while he's halfheartedly digging around with one hand, he coughs painfully into the crook of his arm. His body hurts, his *lungs* hurt, and he just wishes today was over. Just as he pulls out a tissue to blow his nose, he feels a tap at his shoulder. It's Darren, of course, wearing that painfully earnest expression that drives everyone nuts.

"Can I help you?" Chris asks, quickly tucking the unused tissue in his pocket and sniffing loudly. God, he sounds stuffy and gross. He's been trying to mask it and clear his throat between takes and work to not let his muffled voice come across, but with the cameras off, he's just too *tired* to focus on that right now.

"How long have you been sick, really? Because that cough sounds terrible." Darren's palm is pressed against his shoulder now, rubbing softly, and *God* his back is so sore from coughing.

"I'm not that bad," Chris immediately protests, even as his shoulders slump and he sways on the spot a little. "I'm fine. Just a little cold, I just need some rest." It all should make perfect sense, so why the hell is Darren giving him that *look*.

"Chuck used to get bronchitis a lot. I know what a bad cough sounds like, okay?" Darren's speaking quietly now, and Chris is thankful for it. "I'm not going to even ask if you've gone to the doctor, because I know the answer, but are you going to go tomorrow?"

Chris rolls his eyes, ignoring how much his contacts are irritating him right now, and grumbles general, grumpy sounds that aren't real words under his breath. He's about to answer when another cough overtakes him, and he actually doubles over, hands on his knees, as he feels like his lung's about to come up at any second. *Jesus*. When he can halfway breathe again and the spasms in his lower back are calming down, he climbs up into his chair, just needing a break.

Darren had been rubbing circles across Chris's shoulders, and his hand doesn't leave Chris even as he moves, finally resting on one shoulder and squeezing gently. Chris looks up at him, and his outline is blurred around the edges, and fuck, Chris's eyes are watering from the coughing. He takes the tissue out of his pocket and dabs at them carefully so makeup won't kill him and then presses right under his eyes with his fingertips, a little pressure to try to relieve the stuffy, pressing ache pounding against his face.

"I'm not going *anywhere* tomorrow. I don't care if it's the apocalypse."

"Well then I'm taking you to the doctor because you need something besides cough drops. If it's something like bronchitis, it won't just go away on its own."

Chris flattens his mouth into a thin line. "No. No, thank you," he says. "It's not bronchitis, okay? I just want to *sleep* for four days."

Darren sort of squints at him. It's hard to tell because Chris still can't really see him that well, and it's getting hard to focus. "You know that I'm now going to be calling you at regular intervals, or coming over to your house, to make sure that you don't get worse, right?"

Chris groans and lets his head fall back on his shoulders, blinking slowly up at the ceiling. "*Darreeeeen...*" he says, and it's definitely a whine. He's not entirely proud, in this moment.

"Being sick sucks, being sick alone sucks even harder. You're telling me you don't want me to bring over some soup and run you a hot bath? Because that's what you get as part of the service."

"That wasn't on the table before. You just mentioned *doctors*. Not *soup*." Because he has been *really* jonesing for some of his dad's vegetable soup with the huge noodles he puts in it. Oh God, is it wrap time yet?

"Let me take you to the doctor tomorrow, and then you can have as much bedside service as you want. Meals, baths, whatever. Or I'll go away and let you sleep, I can do that too."

"Are you really this worried about it?"

"Frankly, yes. If you get sick and miss work then who am I going to trade adorable banter and longing looks with?"

"Half the cast? You flirt with everyone," Chris bites out before sniffing again, and fuck, okay, he's just going to have to... He turns in his seat so his back is to Darren, and Darren's hand drops from his shoulder. Chris finds himself immediately missing the slight warmth of it there, but he has to blow his nose into the crumpled tissue, loud and gross and obnoxious.

Darren goes back to rubbing his back after a second, slow and calming, and Chris's ears pop as he blows, so he hears, "... is not the same as me. Blaine *only* has eyes for you. Don't make him suffer."

"Ohh, so this is for Blaine's sake, I see. I think you're maybe taking this method acting thing a little too far."

"Look, I know you well enough to know that short of a coma, you're not really going to slow down, even if you try. And you'll only eat takeout and drink Diet Coke and stay up too late working on your book."

Chris lifts his chin some. "Problem?" he says, mock-seriously, and God, why did he let Darren introduce him to Memebase?

"Fuck, I have seriously never met someone as stubborn as you." Darren's scowling, but there's no heat in his words. "I'm offering to wait on you hand and foot and you still won't let me make sure you're okay."

"It's sweet," Chris says and forgets what he's doing long enough to reach out with the hand still clutching his gross tissue, but he realizes at the last second and shakes his head as he switches hands and pats Darren's forearm with his clean hand. Thank God. "But I don't want to get dressed and have you drive me to the doctor at the asscrack of dawn. I want to be *asleep* at the asscrack of dawn."

"What, do we have to go to the doctor early so you can still get to school? Who said anything about we have to go early? Besides, you can sleep in the car, and in the waiting room."

"Do you have an answer for *every* excuse I come up with?" Chris says, trying to scoot back in his chair, but he's blocked by his messenger bag, lumpy and trapped behind his back. He sighs and slumps down low, stretching his legs out in front of himself. Darren watches him, grinning victoriously, and Chris holds up a finger. "This doesn't mean you won."

"You just keep telling yourself that, if it makes you feel better. In the meantime, figure out what you want me to bring over for dinner tonight."

"Asshole," Chris grumbles, kicking out at Darren's ankle with his boot lazily so that it's more of a nudge. Darren laughs and then the director's coming over to fetch them for the next take. Darren's watching him with his stupid, sympathetic face as Chris forces himself back up and finally digs another cough drop out of his bag to throw in his mouth.

"Thought I smelled cherry," Darren mumbles under his breath, and Chris snorts.

"At least I skipped the menthol, those are *vile*."

"Total agreement from me. I stick to honey lemon, myself."

Chris makes a humming noise of agreement. "So, why are you not concerned about the freaky disease you're probably catching from me?"

Darren glances at him out the corner of his eye and Chris watches his mouth slowly upturn into a grin. "Don't worry, I have about fifteen ideas for revenge already cookin' up here," he says, tapping his temple.

Chris laughs, which just makes him cough miserably again. Darren moves in closer and rubs his back through it, and *wow* that is a lot nicer than Chris would like to admit. When he's finally done, Darren says, "And anyway, I've been with you all week. If I haven't gotten it by now I'm not going to."

"True." Chris glances over at the risers where Jenna's sitting and texting, and he winces sympathetically when she sneezes into her mesh fingerless glove. "Pretty sure Jenna's not so lucky," he says and tries to ignore the guilt sweeping through him. Maybe their break will help her rest before it gets to plague level like Chris. He hopes so at least.

They take their seats at the back of the choir risers, and Bernadette descends on Chris and his red nose. Chris has to all but sit on his hands to keep from blowing it after she's finished. Before they start the shot, Darren leans over. "We're almost done, you can do it."

"Thanks for the pep talk, sweetie." It comes out too genuine, when he meant it to be the opposite, and Darren's grinning at him. "I mean. Fuck, just go back over there." He pushes weakly at Darren, embarrassed by the slip from reality, but Darren just sits back up straight in his chair.

Darren mumbles, "Yes, pookie tits," under his breath right before the director calls action, so Chris can't even say anything back, and fuck, he *really* wants to. He also wants to laugh, and he can't do that either or else Lea will punch him for ruining her take. And he really doesn't want to deal with her tiny fists of fury right now.

They start the scene, and they only get past one of Blaine's lines before they call it for a lighting issue. Chris resists the urge to slump down into his chair and cover his face. Darren reaches over without looking, because Harry's turned around in his chair to show Darren something on his iPhone, and rests his hand on Chris's thigh, right above his knee, smoothing his palm over the curve of it reassuringly. Chris tenses at first, and his eyes lock on Darren's hand, but after a second, just like every other touch Darren's doled out today, it feels... really nice. Comforting.

Finally they call for the next take, and Darren waits until the very last second to take his hand back. Knowing Darren, he probably would have left it there, if his blocking didn't include taking Kurt's hand during the song.

That take's the good one for the wide shots at least, and Chris sucks in a deep, slightly wheezing, breath of relief. Jenna whirls around in her seat and wrinkles her nose at Chris. He expects to see vile accusation in her face, but mostly she just looks as vaguely dazed as he felt a couple days ago. She sniffles and then asks, "Chris, you sound like you're *dying*. Do you need my inhaler?"

Darren, the bastard, is still close enough to hear, and he points to Jenna. "See! *See!* Doctor, I told you. And you too, Ushkowitz."

"I already made an appointment for tomorrow, head it off before it gets worse," she says. Darren pokes Chris in the side for emphasis.

Chris groans. "Whatever. Jenna, I'm fine, but thank you." He almost coughs but manages to hold it in, and one of the PAs brings him some water while they're resetting for the smaller shots.

Darren leans in again. "You're really not, you get that, right?"

"Nothing that four days of sleep and... a forced trip to the doctor won't fix."

Darren has just enough time to do a tiny fist pump before the director is calling their instructions for the next take. Chris rolls his eyes dramatically and doesn't even care if part of it is caught in the shot. Rachel's talking about solos again, so it's not like it'd be *out* of character after all. "Saw that," Darren says, talking out of the corner of his mouth, which he is... wow, he's really not good at.

Chris does the same, stretching the corner of his mouth down so he can say, "Look at me, I'm Darren, and I ruin takes," just as the director says, "Chris!" and Darren has to double over in his chair, he's laughing so hard.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, it won't happen again!" Talking loudly to cover the others' snickers of course means he starts coughing, and if everyone didn't know he was sick already, they do now.

Darren rubs his back, and Amber and Lea make varied sympathetic, cooing sounds.

"Shut up. Shut up, all of you. Lea, put your damn phone *down*, don't you dare tweet anything about this." Of course, Cory has his flip camera out now, and oh fuck. He hates his life. He hates his friends. He hates *Darren*.

"Come back to me, guys, and we'll get through these takes together," says the director, and they all grumble and pocket their various devices. Chris makes a mental note to send him a muffin basket or something.

Darren squeezes his shoulder before he takes his hand away, and *damn* even that feels good. Darren's a touchy-feely person just like Lea (she had seriously suggested they start an on-set cuddle club, but Chris thinks she should just buy a sweater), but this is a bit much even for him. It's awesome, but it's weird. "A little while longer and then you can ignore all of them."

"Can I ignore you too?" Chris snaps quietly, and then immediately regrets it.

Darren shrugs, his face unreadable. "Okay, if you want."

"Sorry, Darren, I didn't--"

"Aaaand action!"

Damn it. Damn it damn it damn it, Chris thinks, schooling his expression. His focus jumps from person to person as they deliver their lines of dialogue. Occasionally, he looks over at Darren to share a little nod or a small smile, and Darren's cranking Blaine up to eleven with the big eyes and everything, but Chris is pretty sure he's not entirely forgiven.

Finally, *finally* they're done, though, and Chris hops up immediately to stretch his legs. His whole body hurts, especially his chest where he's been holding in a cough for the last four shots. As soon as his body catches up with the realization that he's not being filmed, he's coughing again, clutching onto the back of the chair in front of him with one hand as he digs the heel of his other hand into his chest and rubs in tight circles. "God, this is *gross*," he grumbles to himself because he's pretty sure everyone's already spread out enough and he's the only idiot still up on the risers.

"You're not gross," Darren says quietly, and Chris starts, standing up to look over at him.

"Darren, I'm really - that came out harsher than I... than I meant," he says, his voice gravelly, and his throat scratchy and burning. Ugh. He presses two fingertips over each of his eyes to wipe up where they're watering and sniffles, and then Darren is *cooing*, which makes Chris drop his hands so fast that Darren stops mid-sound and screws up his face to not laugh.

"It's fine. I'm just *concerned*. I know the mothering is annoying. I could call your actual mom for you if you want. She loves me."

Chris's eyes go comically wide. "God, no." He'd never hear the end of being sick this long and not going to the doctor. *Ever.*

"Lemme help you, okay? I know you don't take help easily, or often willingly, but... well. I'm offering."

"I do appreciate it, I just--" He straightens and moves to step down from the riser without pausing, and apparently that was a bad plan because suddenly his balance is gone and he can feel himself falling. It only lasts for a second before Darren catches him, actually *catches* him and is holding him up, and fuck he needs to get in bed right now.

"Jesus, Chris, careful," Darren whispers, his arm looped around Chris's waist. He reaches over with the other one and brushes Chris's hair back, even if it's a moot point since it's so sprayed down for Kurt.

Chris still whimpers, though, not so much at the touch -- even if it was really, ridiculously nice, as faint as it was -- but at the thought of having to move. He has to go to his *trailer*, and get his shit, and then get to his *car*. Ugh. Maybe he can talk Mr. Hellboy into carrying him.

Darren presses his fingertips against Chris's forehead, and then the inside of his wrist, like he is totally somebody's mother. "Chris, I think you have a fever."

"It's just the lights, I'm sure." He's colder now that they're off set, even with his cape. Speaking of, he can relieve himself of its bulk now, if he can get Darren to let go of him.

"Okay, that's it, change of plans, I'm driving you home."

"You don't have to do that," Chris says quietly, voice raspy enough that he already knows it's a useless protest. "Just go get... go get my guy. Hellboy. He can throw me over his shoulder. Like potatoes."

Darren laughs beside him and starts easing Chris down the risers. "I think we can save that service for another day, Mr. Potato Head. Let's get you home."

"I need my stuff. And my bag is in my trailer..."

"We'll get it all, okay?" As they're walking out of the sound stage, Cory and Lea are waiting outside. Lea's holding Chris's Chewie bag, and Cory is holding Chris's messenger bag with his laptop that he left on set.

They have matching concerned faces, and *fuck* why is everyone Chris knows so goddamn helpful and annoying?

Cory holds out his cargo to Darren. "Are you gonna take him home? We were gonna do it, otherwise."

"Yeah, I'll get him."

Chris tries to put more of his weight on his own two feet instead of leaning against Darren and straightens his shoulder some, even if his fist is still clinging tightly to the back of Darren's shirt. What they can't see, they won't know.

"I'm fine," he says. "You guys can all sleep easy tonight."

Lea puts one hand on her hip and narrows her eyes at him over Chewie's fuzzy head. "Not if you don't do the same." She glances over at Darren. "Don't let him work. Don't let him out of your sight."

Chris groans. "Oh my God."

Darren throws her a lazy salute. "I'll do my best, ma'am. Can one of you let security know that his car's gonna be here? I'm gonna see if Mary will golf-cart us out to the parking lot."

"She just went to go get it. Chris, I got all the stuff from your trailer I thought you might want." Chris reaches out for the bag, and of course Lea hands it to Darren instead.

"Lea Michele, I swear to God, I am not an invalid," Chris grumps, and Lea just clucks her tongue at him and stretches up on her toes to pat the top of his head. To Darren, she says, "He's just going to get worse before he gets better. Don't let him get to you."

"Pretty sure this is all karmic retribution for the shit I gave Brian that time I had strep," Darren says with a shrug. He hoists Chris up and inevitably *closer*. "I can take it."

Dianna appears out of nowhere with a paper cup. The heat wrap has cheerful cartoon leaves on it, which means it's from the commissary. "Here, I got you some tea."

"Oh my God, bless you, woman." Chris snatches the tea from her and blows down into the cup until he can take a sip. His groan when the hot liquid -- peppermint, bless her whole *house* -- hits his throat is entirely

too loud and relieved. Like some kind of magical mind reader, she plucks at the button of his cape with her long fingers, and between the three of them they get him out of it. He sighs in relief, and she smiles. "I'll take this back to wardrobe for you. Are you gonna take him home, Darren?"

"Yeah, I'll get him." Darren squeezes at his side, a silent *I told you so*. They say their goodbyes, and everyone promises to check up on him over the weekend. Chris might be crabby about all of this, but he has to admit he really does have some awesome friends.

Darren walks him out to where Mary's waiting in her golf cart, and helps Chris kind of fall into it, dumping Chris's belongings in one half of the storage box in the back before climbing into the other half of it himself. "Dwarf," Chris says calmly, and Darren grins at him and then flips him off.

"Quick stop at my trailer, and then if you wouldn't mind taking us to my car?" He smiles his stupid, full-faced, genuine smile that Chris and everyone around him has fallen for on more than one occasion, the bastard. Mary's no exception, and she nods, backing up and heading across the lot to their little village. Chris is pretty sure they make small talk the whole time; Mary laughs beside him, but he doesn't pay any attention to them, opting to close his eyes behind his shades and doze while Darren gets whatever he needs to get.

The next Chris knows, Darren's clambering back onto the golf cart and saying, "Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaall aboard the fun express, next stop, the Mystery Machine," and Chris is still groggy, but he laughs and then has to cling to the side of the golf cart as he leans out the opening and coughs into his hand.

Mary tuts at him. "Damn, kid, you sound horrible. You gonna take him to the doctor?"

"That's the plan, after a good night's sleep." Darren reaches up from the back and strokes over Chris's back again, and the little soothing gestures are starting to become addictive. He sips at his tea as they race through the lot (Mary's never one to pay attention to things like speed limits or pedestrians), and in no time she's pulling up beside Darren's car.

"Nuuuuulgh," Chris groans at the sudden lurching stop. Nausea hadn't *yet* been a problem, but all of a sudden, he thinks that's about to change. Fuck his life.

Darren squeezes his shoulder again briefly before hopping out and walking around. He ducks in and wraps his arms around Chris to start hoisting him up like it's nothing, and Chris bats at his arms weakly. His face feels like it's on *fire*. "Darren," he hisses. "*Darren, I can walk.*"

Darren looks up at him with one eyebrow raised. "As you demonstrated earlier, I know. You in the car, Mary will get the stuff, thank you Mary, and then we'll get out of here. A stop at my apartment, five minutes at most, and then you'll be home."

"You've itemized my life more than *I* do," Chris grumbles, but since Darren's being a stubborn asshole, he stops trying to resist and lets Darren half-carry/half-walk him to the car, piling him into the front seat before running back around to open the trunk for Mary.

"Seriously, thank you, again. You're a saint," he says.

Mary pats his arm as she climbs back in the cart. "You're good, kid."

Chris closes his eyes, then startles when Darren slams the trunk shut. He's gentler when he climbs in the driver's seat and shuts the door, and then he rubs at Chris's knee again. "Got your tea?"

Chris lifts the container and shakes it a little. It's already mostly empty. "Drive, Alfred."

"Batman, really?" He puts the car into gear and pulls out of the lot. "Though, I don't know, you could work the rich and mysterious thing."

Chris pushes his shades up his nose and laughs weakly, combating the impending cough he can feel stirring up with a big swallow of tea. It's only lukewarm now, but it's still amazing, and he tips his head back against the seat with a sigh. Darren squeezes his knee gently, and Chris can feel Darren watching him.

He lolls his head to the side and forces his eyes to open. "And you could rock butler chic."

"I do look good in a white shirt and vest, it's true. I could probably be good at... butler-y things."

Chris *hmmms*, and Darren says quietly, "Serve him tea, sit in the master's chair--"

"Pet the *pooch*," Chris mumbles, and Darren laughs and rubs Chris's knee.

Darren starts singing, of course, his best French-ish Jerry Orbach, and Chris just closes his eyes and listens, trying to breathe shallowly so his chest won't hurt. The sun through the windshield is warm, and okay, maybe he does have a little fever.

Darren goes quiet after awhile, or maybe Chris drifts off again; he's not sure. The next thing he knows is Darren softly and nearly right in his ear saying, "Chris? Hey, Chris, we're at my building. Do you wanna just... stay out here? Can I get you anything? I could bring a cool cloth down." The back of his hand presses against each of Chris's cheeks and then to his forehead.

"Some... some water?" He swallows, then realizes he didn't answer in order. "I'll just stay here, I don't think I can get up the stairs." He closes his eyes again, because yeah, he thinks he was asleep, and he would like to be again. Something brushes against his forehead, and from far away Darren says, "Okay, I'll be right back."

The seat isn't really the most comfortable thing in the world, but Chris has slept in way worse places. It's pretty much like an airplane seat but without the pillows. He turns his face away from the sun and then decides to hell with it and curls up on his side, tucking one leg under the other and draping himself over the armrest. If he curls up enough in the seat, he can pillow his arms on the rest and then lay his head on top of them.

It's not too awful long after he's gotten burrowed in that he feels the door open. Darren's apparently trying to be super quiet if he whispered, "Shit!"s after every time his stuff bangs against a part of the car is any indication. Chris makes a tiny, grumbly noise and curls up even more, not moving when Darren slides into the front seat, even. He can feel Darren's arm pressed up against his, at least until Darren's lifting it up and combing his fingers gently through Chris's damp, sweaty hair.

"Heyyy, welcome back to the land of the living, dude. I brought you water," he says when Chris finally unfolds and pushes himself up to look at Darren.

"Thank you." His voice is rough, and he coughs again, though blessedly not as long this time. Darren's hand is still combing through his hair, fingertips stroking the back of his neck. It's just... so nice. Chris cracks open the water and takes a long slug, then presses the bottle against his cheek. "I think maybe I do have a fever."

Darren nods and scratches over Chris's skull lightly. Chris tips his head back into it before he really thinks and then covers himself by taking a swig from the bottle. It only emphasizes how his mouth tastes like old peppermint and cold, and he makes a face. His vision's still a little swimmy from sleeping, but he can tell Darren's biting his lip to not laugh at him. "Terrible bedside manners," he mumbles, and Darren *does* lose it then, cracking up and hiding it behind his hand.

"Technically, you're not in a bed. Yet."

"Whatever, it's the principle of the thing. Speaking of bed, will you take me to mine now?"

"Yes, sir," Darren says, cranking the car. "Seatbelt." Chris sighs heavily but turns so he can sit in the seat properly and fixes his crooked shades before fumbling with the belt one-handed until it's tight across his chest. "Now drink your water."

"Yes, *mom*," Chris says, taking another sip. Over the bottle, he glances at Darren's hands on the steering wheel and can feel the phantom scratching through his hair all over again. Damn it.

It just felt so *good*, and he doesn't want to overthink it, or get stressed out about it. He would maybe like Darren to do it again, but that's probably just the fever talking. Has to be. He can just... ignore it.

._*._

"I hate to wake you up again, man, but we're at your place," Darren says, voice humming steadily in Chris's ear. Chris actually reaches up and bats his hand against Darren's cheek before he fully wakes up, the sound of the smack startling him back into consciousness more than anything.

"Oh... ohhh shit, sorry, I didn't -"

Darren snorts and grabs Chris's hand in both of his, setting it back on Chris's lap. "I think I'll live, but who knew you had violent tendencies."

"I don't always... wake up well. Sorry." He starts to push out of the car, and Darren leans in to help, getting one arm around Chris's shoulders. When they're finally both standing, he realizes that Darren's already strapped on both of Chris's bags. It takes a minute for Chris to get his feet under him, but when he nods, they head off in the direction of Chris's building.

"Key," Darren says. "Chris, where're your..."

Chris points to his messenger bag. "Left pocket," he mumbles, and then squawks when wandering fingers squirm into the left pocket of Kurt's pants -- oh damn, Chris didn't even change out of his Kurt clothes, even though Darren apparently has, where *is* he today. "Of the *bag* Darren, oh my *God*."

"Hey, had to check." They pause so that Darren can jam his hands into the messenger bag and tug out his keys.

"Here, I can--" Chris reaches for his keys and breathes a sigh of relief when Darren hands them over. He'd honestly expected a fight, and now he's a little sad that he can't unleash some of the wealth of insults he'd just been working on. But, it's going to be a long night and a long day tomorrow, and given how this seems to be playing out, he knows he'll have an opportunity at some point. "*Thank* you," he says, squinting as he peers down at the keys and finds the right one to let them in. He's never been more grateful to see Nerdapalooza than he is right now.

They get in the door, and Chris can get his shit together enough to get in the condo pretty much unassisted, as Darren unloads Chris's bags. "Sit down, ya zombie, I'm just gonna grab my bag."

"Don't have to tell me twice." Chris makes a beeline for the couch and flops onto it as carefully as he can manage, because right now it feels like every atom of his body hurts. He pulls the Darth Vader Snuggie Hannah got him for Christmas off the back of the couch where he'd been artfully throwing it as a pseudo-afghan and pulls it over himself as he curls up in the couch's corner. Now that he's home and can let himself *be*, the true extent of just how miserable he is really settles in, and he brings his knees up to his chin and closes his eyes against how watery they feel.

He clearly must zone out again because it feels like it's only a moment before he feels Darren touching his forehead again. "I hate that I'm the asshole that keeps waking you up. But like, we're at your house, so you could have a hundred percent less face paint and a hundred percent more pajamas and bed if you want." Darren pauses. "That's a Darth Vader Snuggie, isn't it. Bitchin'."

"Damn right it's bitchin'," Chris mumbles but stands up, dropping the Snuggie in a dark pool on the couch. He smiles to himself when he sees Darren grab it up out of the corner of his eye, and then he leads Darren to his bedroom and steadfastly does not think about how he is *leading Darren to his bedroom*.

"So, I was gonna go and get dinner right away, but I really think you should sleep some first. Since, you know, you're practically asleep on your feet. Oh, and I grabbed some Tylenol at my place, you should take some." Chris stops at the threshold, mostly because he's just so fucking *tired* that he's worn out doing that much, and Darren crashes into his back.

"I told you, I'm sleeping for days, I don't really care about dinner right now." His fingers fumble over the tiny buttons on Kurt's shirt, the two diagonal rows seeming even harder to handle now than they were this morning, and sometimes Kurt's wardrobe is just goddamn *ludicrous*.

"Hey, hey, Chris, let me," Darren says, and Chris sways dangerously when Darren sidles by him to step into Chris's room and turn to face him. He glances around quickly and nods. "You spruced up the inner sanctum, pretty swanky." He didn't, really. Nothing past some insomniatic poster purchases. Chris has no clue how to decorate, and he never has time to look into it anyway, but the comment makes Chris feel like smiling, even if he's too tired to actually make it appear on his face.

"Wait, wait, Darren, what are you... what are you *doing*?" he asks, blinking down at Darren's hands, which have migrated to Chris's buttons, already having pushed Chris's hands aside when he wasn't even paying attention. What the hell.

"I'm helping. Don't worry about it, it's just clothes. You know, I played a nudist once. If you were ever thinking about looking into a role with simpler costuming, it's the way to go." His fingers are moving quickly as he talks, and soon he's halfway done with the row, his knuckles grazing against Chris's belly as he works. Chris sucks in a rattly breath.

He's so tired, and all of him hurts, and he can't stop himself from letting his forehead drop onto Darren's shoulder. "Fuck, I'm so sick, aren't I."

"Yup. We need to give you something for that fever before it gets any higher." Finally done with the buttons, Darren gently pushes the shirt off Chris's shoulders, revealing his undershirt. "Do you want some sweats or something? I can get some from the closet?"

Chris shakes his head. "Hanging... doorknob... in the bathroom."

Darren's hands are high on Chris's waist when he pushes Chris back a couple steps until he's leaning against the wall. It's nice to have something solid at his back again and even nicer when Darren shows back up with Chris's sweats -- his comfiest pair, he's been living in them the last three days -- in one fist.

Darren tosses them to the bed and then crowds in next to Chris, his bottom lip caught between his teeth as he works Chris's pants open. "This is awkward," Chris says flatly, swallowing hard. He's kind of suddenly thankful his brain is so fuzzy right now so that he can't really focus on how Darren is pretty much nearly almost touching his dick.

Darren looks up. "You're wearing underwear, right?"

"Of course I am. *Wardrobe pants*."

"Well then, it's a lot less awkward than it could be." Darren gives him one of those smiles again, and Chris just lets his head fall back against the door frame with a soft thud and tries not to think about it.

Darren starts tugging them down over Chris's ass and then as far down his thighs as he can get them standing up. "I think I saw this in a porno once," he says with a wink before sinking down to his knees in one smooth drop. Chris drops his head forward to look at him and then blinks because... oh. Well.

But Darren is working methodically, his hands firm on Chris's calves he unlaces Kurt's boots and tosses them aside to finish pulling the tight-as-hell pants off.

Chris hums and says, "This gay porn brought to you by our sponsors, Tylenol PM and Sudafed." He can feel Darren's breath against his thigh, tickling the hairs there, when Darren huffs out a laugh.

He looks up from his knees -- oh God, Chris *really* hopes that the fever will erase this -- and gives Chris a sheepish smile. "Woould you like to go to your bed now? Believe me, I wanted something with more innuendo, but I just couldn't think of anything."

"Unfortunate. But yes, bed. Bed is good. And sweats."

Darren stands slowly, putting a foot of space between them, and Chris shakily exhales. "Sweats are at the bed, conveniently enough."

"Very good planning on your part." Chris basically just stumbles into the bed, just barely making it to a sitting position. He's able to get it together enough to paw at the sweatpants and start tugging them on.

"Chris, Jesus, hold on," Darren says, but Chris flaps his hands because *seriously*. He can only take so much of this. He does hold on to Darren's arm with one hand for balance, though, when he has to stand up again to pull the sweatpants up his hips with a twisty little shimmy. "Okay. Okay, thank God," he says once he's done.

"Congratulations, you've earned one bed." Darren makes a sweeping, Vanna White gesture that encompasses the whole thing, and Chris's only response is to sink slowly into the welcoming embrace of the cool, rumpled sheets.

"Now, I know you want to pass out, but just wait, like, two more seconds, okay?" Darren says. He doesn't wait for an answer before going over to Chris's dresser where he'd dropped the Snuggie. He fishes in the tangled confines of it until he pulls out a bottle of Tylenol and the rest of Chris's water, and brings them and the Snuggie over to the bed.

Chris pushes himself up enough so that he's halfway sitting up, sort of, and tilts his head back so he can pluck out his contacts and drop them in the wastebasket by his bed. He digs his knuckles into his eyesockets after and breathes a sigh of relief. That's much better. Darren uncaps the water and hands it over, followed by the pills when Darren dumps three in Chris's hand. He takes them quickly, swallowing when they make their way down his tender throat, and then he slides back down. Darren sets the bottles on Chris's night stand and runs his fingers through Chris's hair again. "Is there anything else you need other than me going away?" he asks.

"Would you plug in my laptop and my phone? They're both almost dead."

Darren grins. "No problem. Now sleep, yeah? Just yell if you need anything."

"Okay." He gropes around for his Snuggie, until Darren hands it to him with a chuckle, and Chris grumbles out something resembling a thank you before pulling it over himself and closing his eyes. That's the last thing he knows before everything blissfully goes black.

._*._

Chris is walking down a long hallway, slow and thick like honey. He can hear music, a familiar voice singing, leading him toward an open door. When he walks through, it's even slower, disconnected pictures that somehow make sense. He's greeted by warm hands and dark hair and the soft heat of lips against his. The touch is everywhere, hands and thighs and back and neck, and there's a weight on top of him, pressing in slowly, holding him down. He's moaning into a mouth, and the sound is what jolts him awake. It was... really loud, he realizes dimly. It takes him far too long to notice that he's hard, pressed against the mattress.

Before he can even lift his head, a hand lands on his shoulder. "Hey, are you okay?"

"Mmph," Chris murmurs, turning his head to blink owlishly up at Darren. And then - oh, *oh* oh shit. "I... sorry, I was..." He's not going to finish that sentence. "Sorry. Yeah, I'm fine. What're you doin'?"

Darren smiles at him softly and tilts his laptop up to shine the light on Chris. "Half writing, half nodding off. It's late, it's almost one. How are you feeling?"

"Dead," Chris answers. "And hot." He's hoping this means his fever's broken for now because he's sweating and sticky.

"Oh, that's awesome - well, not the dead thing," Darren says with a quiet laugh. He pushes his hair back -- free from hair gel now, so Darren must've grabbed a shower while Chris was out -- and reaches over to pull the Snuggie off of Chris.

"Better?" Darren asks when Chris is down to a sheet, and Chris nods because it *is*, but oh fuck, he wants to roll over on his side or jerk off or something, and he can't do any of those things. He shifts a little and then gasps, his breath still a gross, gravelly wheeze, and Darren's eyebrows shoot up. "... seriously, if you're not okay for now, I can try to fix it."

"I'm okay. Just... weird dream, that's all. Probably the fever. Could I... have some more water?"

"Yeah, of course," Darren says, closing his laptop and setting it down on the bed. Instead of getting up, like most non-monkey-esque-tactile people would do to get it, he reaches over Chris to the night stand for the bottle and then hands it to Chris once he's sitting back against the headboard. "And could I also fluff your pillow, sir?" he teases with a terrible English accent.

"That would mean I'd have to move, so no." Chris turns over on his side and tucks his knees up, and that's better but he's still turned on, on top of being sweaty and still achey. He drinks down the rest of the water, and smiles weakly when Darren takes the bottle from him. "Thank you."

"No problem, man." Darren stashes the bottle next to his hip and then turns back to Chris. Chris closes his eyes the second he sees Darren reaching out, and then Darren's fingers are sliding through his hair again, and it's so gentle and nice. The more Darren does it, the more Chris is falling in love with it. He sighs and leans into it a little when Darren massages over the back of his head. "Doesn't that feel awesome?" Darren asks, and when Chris peeks one eye open to look at him, Darren's smile is sleepy and fond. The combination of all of it sends a little shiver down Chris's spine.

"Really awesome." Chris's voice sounds thick, and even though he slept probably six hours, he feels like he could sleep for six more. Or sixteen. "I'm gonna owe you so much once I'm better."

"You don't owe me anything, Chris. After all, you'd do the same for me, right?"

"Crash your apartment, mother the fuck out of you, then shanghai you to the doctor?" Chris pauses. "Yeah, probably."

"When you put it like that, you make it sound like I *enjoy* watching you be sick." Chris arches one eyebrow and purses his lip, and Darren drops his jaw, mock-affronted. "I don't! I *care*, Colfer. Not my fault you assume everyone is a sociopath like you."

He won't stop petting Chris's hair while he's saying this, and Chris can't really focus on what Darren's saying anyway, but that's not helping. He shifts again and bites his lip hard because he's getting over the state his asshole dream left him in, but he's still on the edge, a little bit. Chris flops his hand weakly in Darren's general direction finally and just says, "Do not. Never. You're too... eyelashy. With the big eyes. To be a sociopath."

"Too eyelashy? I guess I'll take that as a compliment." Darren tugs playfully on Chris's hair on the next pass, then goes back to skritchng his scalp.

"Wait." Chris is slow and sleepy, but Darren's words are sinking in. "I'm not a sociopath either."

Darren snorts. "It's possible my studies on that were actually a little inconclusive," he says, and Chris groans.

"You're talking so much."

"Sorry. I can leave, let you go back to sleep."

"No no noooo," Chris says. "You can stay."

Darren's smile grows wider, his eyes crinkling at the corners. "I'll wait until you go back to sleep, okay? Keep the bad dreams away. Do you want anything else?"

Chris shakes his head as much as he can, his cheek rubbing against his pillow. "You should sleep, too. It's late. You don't have to actually watch me sleep like a Creepy Cullen."

"I still can't believe you watched all those movies."

"I had to be sure they were bad for myself. And besides, Jacob is hot."

"Your taste is a little questionable," Darren says and then muffles a yawn with the hand not still in Chris's hair.

"They're fun to mock. Seriously, go to sleep. Don't you have more mothering to do tomorrow?"

"I can run on not much sleep, don't worry about me."

Chris makes a noise of disapproval and manages to keep both his eyes open long enough to glare at Darren. "No, you need sleep. This is your break too."

"You're gonna be out in seconds, and then I'll go to sleep. Don't worry about me, okay?" Darren's hand stills in his hair, just cupping his skull.

Chris *hmmmmms* and closes his eyes again. "You better," he says, but he knows it sounds like the least-threatening thing ever.

"Sleeeeep," Darren whispers. So Chris does.

~*~

When Chris wakes up again, it's pitch black and he has to pee like nothing else. He rolls over from where he ended up on his side and hits a warm mass. Darren's sound asleep, still sitting up against the headboard, his hand splayed across Chris's pillow. Chris is struck by some feeling that he can't quite place, a mixture of surprise and mild derision and a crazy warm fondness in his belly.

Darren's going to have a hell of a backache tomorrow if Chris doesn't wake him up, though, so he reaches up and taps Darren insistently on the shoulder. "Rise and shine," he says and then exhales and makes a face at the gross taste in his mouth. Ugh. Darren doesn't stir, though, and Chris sighs. "Oh, for the love of -- Daaaaaaarren, wake uuuuuuuup." He pushes himself up, his arms shaking, which is annoying, but then he's eye level with Darren's chin. "Wake up, or I'll breathe up your nose, and my breath is really raaaaaaaaaank," he says.

Darren sucks in a sharp breath through his nose. "Whazaat.... you okay, Chris?"

"Mhmm," Chris says sleepily. "Well. Gotta pee, but. You fell asleep sitting up."

"I... did, yeah. Oops." He rolls his neck slowly. "D'you need help. Not with... I mean... think you can walk?"

"Time to find out." Chris hauls himself slowly out of the opposite side of the bed, pausing a moment to be sure his feet are under him. He's a little dizzy, but better than before, and he makes it to the bathroom without any permanent injury.

His reflection is a thing from B-roll horror films. He's fuzzy-looking without his glasses, but he can still see how ashen he looks, the bags under his eyes making him wince. His lips are dry and tight, and he lets his tongue flop out as he grimaces, top lip curled and nose wrinkled. Even his makeup is cakey and smeared and definitely not doing its job. He doesn't feel like it, but he roots around for the little bag of wipes under his sinks, pulling one out to scrub the makeup off his face. He feels slightly better after as his skin dries but looks even worse, and he turns away so he can pee and return to the sweet sanctity that is his bed.

"Good job," Darren says with an amused grin when Chris gets back, but he's slithered down under the covers and has curled himself up around one of Chris's pillows. Chris flips him off anyway.

"Why are you sleeping here?" It comes out more blunt than he intends, but. Why is he?

"... Oh. I, um." Darren pushes himself up on his elbows, not quite looking at Chris. "I just thought... I could... it's close? To take care of you? And I'm... lazy?" Chris has never seen Darren flustered before. It's almost magical.

"Too tired to argue. When you catch the plague, dibs on the 'I told you so'."

"Look, Chuck being Chuck has made my immune system superhuman." Darren reaches out and grabs hold of Chris's wrist, tugging him gently toward the bed. "Now get over here."

"We're not still ingenues in gay porn, are we? Because I am far from camera ready, and I think something died in my mouth."

Darren laughs, sudden and loud, and says, "Oh, Chris, it's *always* gay porn time. Be prepared."

Chris rolls his eyes. "Ugh. I thought you were sleepy."

"I'll sleep. Would you get in the bed before you fall down?"

"So demanding. Doctors, *bed...*" Darren scoots over so there's plenty of space for Chris and puts Chris's pillow in the right spot for him, holding out the covers as Chris sinks back into the bed with a sigh. He flops over on his stomach, too worn out to try for anything more complex.

"Yes, I'm a terrible person," Darren says with a grin in his voice as he tucks Chris in.

There's a buzz, and Darren snorts before fishing his phone out from under the covers. He squints at the bright screen and then grins at Chris. "And that makes the *third* time Lea has texted to see if you're alive."

"Huh," Chris says because he can't muster up strength for anything else, but he's touched. Sometimes it's still weird how nice friends can be.

"Yup. And just in case you were curious..." Darren taps the screen and then scrolls up. "Lea, Ashley, Jenna, Cory, Lea again, Chord, Mark with attached pics of his dog, Ashley, Dianna, Amber, Lauren Lopez, Lauren *Potter*, annnd Lea again."

Chris swallows thickly. Darren's watching him too closely, his face lit up and smile bright, and Chris's heart swells against his ribs with how many people are giving a shit about him. He even figures that if he

went to his phone, his inbox would look the same right about now, and his face feels hot from all the attention.

“Awwwww, everyone wuvs you, Christopher,” Darren says and actually reaches forward to pinch Chris’s cheek. That’s enough to break the spell at least, and he swats at Darren’s hand as Darren laughs.

“You mock me on my deathbed,” he says with a withering glare. “You will rue this day.”

Darren drops his phone back to the bed and flops down, slinging his arm over Chris’s shoulder. “Yeah, sure,” he says, flashing Chris a fond smile.

Everything’s quiet for a few minutes, and Chris feels the tug of sleep pulling at him again. He just lets his whole body relax. He doesn’t feel quite so much like he’s going to die, but he really should have brushed his teeth when he was up. He’s half asleep before he really notices that Darren’s arm is still draped across his shoulders. It’s nice, but. “Darren?”

“I’m here, go to sleep.” Darren’s fingers skritch at his shoulder, and then his arm starts to go lax against Chris.

“But Darren...”

“Hmmm? You need something?” Darren’s cheek is against his shoulder now, and his breath is warm through Chris’s thin undershirt.

“Nothing. No, never mind...” Chris says, a little breathier than before, but he’s horizontal and in his soft bed and he can’t think on anything too long before he’s drifting off again.

Chapter Two

The coughing returns a little later, and after the third time he wakes himself up from a snooze with a bout of hacking, he wishes he had thought to pop a Lunesta when he was in the bathroom. He's trying not to wake Darren up, who has now twisted in his sleep to face the opposite way, but the wracking coughs aren't exactly quiet.

"Mm - Chris, what-" Darren mumbles, and Chris tries to mumble, "S-sorry, sorry, fuck." His voice is nearly shot, and he leans over the side of the bed as he starts coughing again, but then Darren's palm is right at the center of his back and rubbing big, slow circles. "No, no, shhhhhh, it's okay, I'm here," Darren murmurs.

"Fuck, it *hurts*," Chris rasps out.

"I know, I know. Try to breathe, sweetie, it'll pass."

He's right, it finally does subside, and he's left gasping a little and hanging off the bed, with Darren still rubbing warm, wide circles over his back. He'll drag himself back up into bed in a minute, when he can operate his muscles again.

"Hey, hey, come here, get some water," Darren says, sliding his hand down to Chris's waist and then around, his fingers splaying wide on Chris's belly. He moves Chris gently, turning him over on his back, and smiles at him before rolling over and grabbing the water, unscrewing the cap. "Here you go."

"Thank you." Chris winces at his own croak, and takes too-fast slugs of water, sputtering a little and trying not to cough again.

"I hope the doctor can give you something for that cough. The codeine syrup is pretty awesome."

"Such an expert," Chris mutters but sighs when Darren's hand drops to his belly again and rubs slow, tiny circles.

"Chuck got sick a lot when we were kids. Never too bad, but he'd get miserable colds and they'd stick in his chest. We'd hang out and watch movies, even when he was snotty and gross."

"Awwwwwww," Chris says raspily, and Darren gently taps his fingers.

"Shut up."

Chris frowns, and Darren just rubs at his belly again. And seriously, Chris feels like at any other point he would find this really weird, but in this odd, half-asleep, late hour, it's just nice.

He eventually finds enough energy to roll on his side, facing Darren, and Darren moves with him, his arm draping over Chris's side. Darren smiles at him but then laughs at the pitiful, half-smile Chris manages to conjure in return. He's pretty sure it was more like a sneer.

"You poor baby." Darren's hand is warm through his shirt, and it's all Chris can do not to push closer and just let Darren hold him.

He rests his hands in the tiny space between them in fists, his knuckles resting against Darren's chest, and sighs. "This is pathetic," he mumbles, turning his head more towards his pillow.

Darren's hand is dragging long lines up his back now, up to his neck and then back down to the base of his spine. "Being sick includes a little complimentary patheticness. It's in the fine print."

"And complimentary hot caregiver guy?" Chris asks without really thinking, and oh God. Oh God, the cold wave of panic washes over him the second after it's out of his mouth. Why is he so *stupid* when he's sick?
"Darren, I didn't mean-- sorry. That. Sorry."

Darren's pouty face is so sad, even in the almost-dark. "Wait, you don't think I'm hot?"

Chris rolls his eyes. "Yes, Darren, you're super hot. I just didn't mean to say it."

"You can tell me I'm hot any ol' time, I don't mind." Darren's hand slides up into his hair again, and fuck, it's like his kryptonite.

Chris's "Mmmmmh" is probably a little obscene, he realizes belatedly, but it just feels *so nice*. It's pretty much the only thing that feels nice right now. He closes his eyes and relaxes a little more and at least has the sense and the competitive streak enough in him to mumble, "Sooo full of yourself."

"Hey, who doesn't want to be told they're hot every now and again? That's like, basic," Darren whispers, and it feels like they're getting closer together, even though neither of them have moved at all.

Chris sighs and stretches a little, flexing his fingers between them and re-settling himself, rubbing his cheek against the pillow. He feels just this edge of too awake to pass out again but too sleepy to be of any use to society. "Well, then, you're welcome," he mutters, smiling a little better at Darren.

"You should go back to sleep. Or at least not be offended if I do."

"Please sleep, it's late. Or early, I have no idea."

"I'd check, but I'm entirely too cozy," Darren murmurs, sliding his hand down to cup over the back of Chris's neck.

"Cozy," Chris repeats, letting his eyelids slide shut. It is cozy, and in the morning he's probably going to hope this is all a fever dream. Hell, maybe it is.

~*~

He manages to sleep for a few more hours, and when he wakes up, they've... definitely gravitated much closer together. They're still on their sides and facing one another, but Chris is tucked in against Darren's chest, and Darren's arms are wrapped around him, Chris's knees pressing in against Darren's thighs. It's quiet at first, just the feel of Darren's steady heartbeat against his cheek. But then Chris yawns, which means sucking in a breath, which means he launches into a massive coughing fit, trying like mad to point his face anywhere that isn't coughing directly onto Darren. It's practically impossible.

Darren starts awake at the first cough. He makes a confused noise, but his arms tighten around Chris's back. Chris tries to breathe shallowly after his cough's calmed down again, and he snuffles. "So much for waking up with a miracle cure," he grumbles.

"Guess it's the doctor for you after all, sorry Max."

"Max?" Chris only gets Darren's references half the time, which is rough because it seems like his life is one big reference.

"Miracle Max? *Princess Bride*?"

"I've never see that," Chris grumbles, and Darren makes an affronted noise.

"Ohhh, well then we are going to fix that this weekend."

Chris huffs out a breath against Darren's chest. "But sleeping. For four days."

Darren slides his hand slowly down Chris's back. "At some point, I gotta keep you awake long enough to forcefeed you some soup, Christopher," he says with a smirk. "Might as well give you some culture as well."

As if on cue, Chris's stomach rumbles loud enough to rattle the windows. He slept through dinner last night, and he only had half a bagel before that. "Maybe you'll have to forcefeed me breakfast instead."

Darren brings his hand forward to bop the tip of Chris's nose with one finger, and Chris wrinkles his face at him, which makes Darren laugh, a deep, early-morning, gruff laugh that stirs Chris a little more awake.

"That I can do," Darren says. "I'm so boss at breakfast. Do you wanna try eggs and bacon? Ooooh and fresh-squeezed O.J."

"I don't know if you'll find any of those things in my kitchen, but they all sound delicious. Anything sounds delicious, I'm really hungry."

"Mmm, Diet Coke-flavored instant oatmeal it is then," Darren teases.

"I would probably eat it," Chris grumps. "But my awesome caretaker is way nicer than that."

"So true," Darren says. He pulls away from Chris and rolls over on his back, stretching his arms over his head and yawning. "All right, I'm up. Here I go," he says as he pushes himself up. He looks over his shoulder at Chris again and smiles then ducks down to brush his lips against Chris's temple. "Feel free to pass out again while I'm slaving over a hot stove."

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He can't really sleep once Darren's off making breakfast, so he just lies there and hugs the pillow Darren abandoned and sighs into it.

"Heyyyy, Golden Globe-winning Chris Colfer, I pulled some grade-A breakfast out of my ass," Darren says, and then the bed dips behind Chris as Darren kneels onto the edge of it behind Chris's back. Darren's hand comes down heavy and warm on his shoulder and soothes down his arm.

Chris shivers and insists to himself that it's from his death plague. "That sounds disgusting," he mutters, and Darren takes a second but then laughs loudly.

"I work with my assets, what can I say. Do you want me to bring it to you? Breakfast in bed, very swanky. Or you could try the human thing and eat at the table. No judgment either way."

"I should probably start getting used to being upright, since I'm gonna have to leave the house and shit today." Slowly he sits up, and Darren puts a hand on his back to steady him as he swings his legs over the side of the bed.

"You are a brave man. Seriously, I was a total crybaby when I had strep. Made Brian wait on me hand and foot. He'll deny it now, but he actually fed me soup a couple times. Of course, he also went out and bought me a bib, so. We're even." Darren's scowling for a second, but his eyes are twinkling in amusement, and Chris imagines him with a "I <3 my Brian" bib or something around his neck, and he can't help snorting out a laugh.

But ugh, it hurts, and there's the coughing again, and he doubles over and presses his forehead to his knees as little tremors creepy-crawl down his back. His throat is so raw, and he's just not human anymore. That's all there is to it.

Darren sits down beside him and starts his fingers in Chris's hair, ghosting them down the back of Chris's neck and then down his spine, scratching lightly over Chris's shirt with blunt nails and then rubbing with the flat of his hand. Chris sighs and blindly reaches out for a tissue that he totally misses, but luckily Darren's a mindreader, and Chris is able to put the tissue to his nose before he sits up because there are some things he's not ready for people to see yet. And his snot is one of them.

"You can blow. I've been watching you hack up a lung, we're *there*. I won't even criticize your technique."

"You're so dumb," Chris says without any heat, and his words are muffled and slurred and rounded out in that cold-having way. Darren just smiles at him again and pushes his hair off his face while Chris closes his watery eyes and blows.

"You should probably take a hot shower before we go, too. It might help clean you out a little."

"Ngh, can't stand long enough, don't wanna," Chris says. "Well, want to, but ugh."

"Awwwwwwwwwwwwww," Darren lets out, like he can't even help it, and he probably *can't* - the earnest motherfucker. Chris side-eyes him as he wipes his nose and throws the tissue into his wastebasket.

"Here, I know what you need before breakfast," Darren starts, and Chris is confused for a second before there's pressure on his shoulder, and then Darren's arms are sliding around him and pulling him toward Darren's chest. He flails awkwardly for a second before his cheek is against Darren's heart, and Darren's resting his chin on Chris's head. "Shhhhh, just relax for a second. Hug therapy."

"I don't *need* hug therapy," Chris grumbles, even though this feels amazing. He could just melt into Darren, even if the position is awkward, and there's a twinge of pain in his back from the angle.

"But you *want* hug therapy. Everyone wants hug therapy, it's okay." Darren's whispering, and he rubs Chris's bicep. Chris is starting to feel a little clammy again, and fuck, his fever must be back. Fuck his life. He can't help shivering, and then he turns in closer toward Darren, burying his nose against Darren's chest and giving up, letting his arms fall as un-awkwardly as he can manage around Darren, one resting across Darren's thighs.

After a few minutes, Chris kind of feels like he might be dozing off again. Darren's so *warm*; it makes it hard to stay awake. But soon enough, Darren rouses him and forces him to sit back up. "Come on," Darren says. "Breakfast is probably cold. I'll heat it up for you. We can just have a couch breakfast so that you can have blankets too." He's wearing a concerned expression, and Chris is momentarily alarmed. God, how bad does he *look*?

"I've died and I'm a zombie now, aren't I? You can tell me the truth, I can take it."

"Do you have a sudden distinct craving for my brains?" Darren asks, reaching past Chris to grab another tissue. He holds Chris's chin between his fingers firmly but gently and angles Chris's face as he dabs at Chris's eyes where they're stupidly watering again.

"Didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Mr. Zombie," he teases gently, and Chris peeks one blurry eye open to scowl at him.

"I'm not *crying*," Chris says, reaching up to grab the tissue and take care of it himself. Darren bats Chris's fingers away and tutting under his breath.

"Shhhhhh, it's okay," Darren says. It's quieter this time, and warm, and Darren dabs with the tissue until it's damp from both of Chris's eyes. He drops it into Chris's lap then and slides one hand over to cup Chris's cheek, his thumb brushing over where it's faintly wet. Chris tenses, and everything in his middle gets tight and hot, and his lashes stick together wetly when he blinks open to look at Darren, who's... so close. Darren's eyes are wide and dark, and he's close enough that Chris can feel his little exhales of breath against his lips. It makes him fidget but not like normal. Darren's just *looking* at him so much, like he's so important, and his eyes are still watering, and God, he's so helpless, and just --

Prickling heat starts welling up behind his eyeballs, and he has to purse his lips tightly together until it vaguely hurts so he can focus on anything but the way Darren is watching and the way his eyes won't stop watering, and he feels like he's actually going to start crying. And he will *not* start crying in front of Darren, not if there's no script calling for it.

His breath hitches when he sucks it in after a moment, and Darren's thumb glances over his cheek, brushing a stray tear that he can't stop away. "Chris..."

Chris shakes his head firmly and circles his long fingers around Darren's wrist, tugging his hand down. Darren doesn't let him let go, though, lacing his fingers between Chris's warmly as their hands settle on Chris's thigh.

"Thanks," Chris mumbles, voice low and thick with unshed tears and gross cold and hot embarrassment that's still traveling all through him. This is stupid. He's stupid. How does he go from talking about zombies to *crying* in front of Darren. Trying to salvage the situation, he says, "And no, by the way. I don't want your brains. Couldn't get to it through all the hair anyway."

Darren laughs, and just like that the mood shifts, no longer close and hot and laced with something thicker. He trashes the tissue, then runs his fingers through Chris's hair and tugs a little. "You're one to talk."

"They like it so *tall*. Soon I'll have to get one of those blinky lights for planes." Chris figures that makes sense somehow. Darren will figure it out.

Darren laughs fondly and says, "Oh God, I love your brain."

Chris blinks at him and then pockets that, and whatever else that was that just happened, into the part of his brain that he is reserving for his epic freakout over all this once he's better. Instead, he just says, "Maybe you're the zombie then."

"I won't eat your brains, I promise. Now c'mon, food."

"Yes, sir," Chris grumbles, and together, they shuffle down the hallway and Darren steers Chris to the couch with a hand on his back. "I thought we were doing the table thing?"

"We were. But couches have blankets. And a TV. And I believe I promised you an education."

"I thought you were going to shuttle me off to the doctor the first thing."

"Man, it's like 7:30, we can wait a couple of hours until you've had food and are awake."

Chris blinks blearily out the windows. It is pretty pale out. "Shit, how long did I sleep?"

"We got home at 5:00 or so, so like... fourteen hours, I guess?"

"Oh God, that's *forever*," Chris groans, blinking around the room. "Where'd you put my phone?" He tries to put on his most angelic expression. "Can you get it for me? Please?"

Darren goes back to the bedroom, and Chris feels hopeful for about two seconds when Darren comes back with his Chewie bag and his Snuggie.

"You mean *thiiiiis*?" Darren asks, dangling Chewie from one finger by his straps. Chris wants to curse him and sing his praises all at once. *He needs his phone*. He was waiting on at least five different calls.

"Yes, Darren, come on, I've been so good," he says, trying to wheedle. He even pokes his bottom lip out for good measure and cheers on the inside when Darren's features soften for a moment.

But then, "Nope. I'm easy but not *that* easy." He unzips Chewie and starts digging inside of him, pulling out Chris's glasses case. "Here, I'll do you this solid, though."

Darren drapes Chris's Snuggie over him and gently lifts Chris's arms to stick them through the arm holes and then tucks Chris's legs up so the Snuggie can cover all of him before sliding his glasses on his nose. Chris has to blink as everything comes into better focus, Darren's eyelashes the first things he sees in sharp relief.

"You need to be able to see Buttercup and Westley's epic love in high def." He taps the bridge of Chris's glasses quickly before stepping back and taking Chewie with him. Chris realizes belatedly he could have snuck his phone out right then while Darren wasn't paying attention. Shit, he can't believe he missed that opportunity.

"I need my *phone*," he says again, scowling as Darren zips Chewie up and takes him back to whatever hiding place Darren's given him. Chris smiles to himself because *Darren has to sleep sometime*. He'll find his phone then. Provided he can hold in his cough and not die.

"No can do, *mi amigo*," Darren says as he traipses back in with a stupid spring in his step. "And besides, your phone isn't even in there anyway. Like I said, I'm not *that* easy."

"Come on. I just want to... see it." Chris trails off and shifts guiltily, and Darren snorts.

"I already mass-texted all your contacts that you were out of commission for at least two days, maybe more. You're not working."

"But my publishers were in there!" His eyes widen in horror. "And my *mom*."

"Will be fine. They'll all be fine. They know you're in good hands," Darren says, wiggling his fingers at Chris with a smirk and then pivoting on his heel to head toward the kitchen to reheat breakfast.

Chris might have slept fourteen hours, but he's still too tired to have a full-out freakout about Darren *texting everyone from his phone, oh my God*. He hopes his mother doesn't freak out, and if she does that she has to talk to Darren instead. He's supposedly in charge, he should be the one to get the Howler.

Darren whips around the doorway, carrying one plate in his hand and the other balanced on his arm along with two glasses full of orange juice held tightly in his other hand. It's... actually kind of impressive, but Chris is slowly counting down in his head to when Darren drops everything.

He doesn't, though, and Chris raises an eyebrow. "Were you ever a -"

"Nope. Well, waited a few tables for kicks in between my shows sometimes if the restaurant was understaffed. But I played a waiter at Michigan once and picked up some cool tricks." He sets his plate down on the coffee table along with the two glasses and then sets Chris's warm plate in his lap. There's eggs and bacon, and it looks like the best thing Chris has ever seen.

"I seriously did not have this in my fridge," Chris says, blinking down at the food.

Darren's buzzing around again, going back to the bedroom to grab up the tissues, but he shouts, "I might've called in some favors. Lea's feeling pretty guilty that she didn't get to you first anyway. Buuuuuuuuuuuut..." He pauses and deposits the box of tissues next to Chris's hip before curling up on the couch beside him. "That means it's faux-bacon. Facon."

"If Lea got it, then it's the maple, and that's not too bad." Chris doesn't know what his life is that he knows what kind of fake bacon Lea prefers, when right now he can barely tell you his full name. Lea would probably be tickled pink.

"Clearly she has you brainwashed. Which is understandable. She's very convincing," Darren says. He settles his plate in his lap and digs in, making obnoxious *mmmm* sounds of approval at his own cooking. Chris watches him and rolls his eyes, sniffing loudly.

Darren nudges Chris with his elbow. "If I heat it up again, it'll be rubbery and gross. You need to eat something."

Chris looks down at his plate and sighs. He just... doesn't feel like it. He's hungry; he knows he is. His stomach is rumbling angrily and demanding to be fed, but he pretty much just wants to sit here and do nothing and bask in the quiet moment he's being granted of not coughing. His head feels weighted down and stuffed full anyway, and it's effort enough to hold it up straight.

"Chris?" Darren says. "Hey, at least a few bites, okay?" Darren murmurs. "I can... I mean, I wasn't joking when I said Brian fed me. I don't mind."

Chris wrinkles his nose. "Ugh, no, Darren, come on, I'm not that... I mean, I don't need it. I can... I can do it myself."

Darren snorts. "You ain't doing a good job of it, kid," he says with this ridiculous television mobster voice, and he tilts in, resting more against Chris than the couch. Chris rolls his eyes. Fuck, he's going to hate himself so much when he's better for giving in so easily.

"Okay, okay, fine," he mumbles. Darren lights up, and Chris frowns at him. "You're enjoying this way too much."

"I like taking care of people I care about. It all comes in the package, really," Darren says softly. He sets his plate back on the coffee table and out of harm's way and then re-situates himself with one leg tucked under the other so he's sitting sideways, facing Chris. He reaches over to grab up Chris's fork and gathers up a bite of egg. "Now open up the hanger 'cause here comes the airplane!" he says.

"I will murder you. I will give you my flumonia and then murder you when you are sick and unsuspecting, Darren Criss," Chris scowls. Darren has to set the fork down and clutch at his sides because he's laughing so hard.

"Oh God, your face. Okay. Okay, I'm sorry. I won't... wait. Flumonia?"

Chris sighs. "Oh, um. Something Hannah came up with a couple years ago. She was in the hospital during flu season once, and she was right outside the nurses' station, so all we heard about was flu and pneumonia and flu! And some more flu that might turn into pneumonia."

"And thus flumonia was born."

"Verily," Chris says flatly, and Darren giggles softly again, face scrunching up. Chris wonders if his face will one day stick that way.

"Okay, well, you keep your flumonia, and I'll keep my baby talk." Darren crosses over his heart in a sloppy X. "Deal?"

Chris nods because he's basically used up his witty quota banter for the next couple of hours or so, which is just useless to him. He hates being sick. He *hates* being sick.

He looks down when he hears the scrape of the fork, and then Darren is back with the eggs. Chris glances at him, and they stare at each other for an awkward second, the fork hovering between them. "Um."

"Yeah, maybe I should've warned you that the first couple bites are awkward," Darren says, shrugging apologetically.

Chris hums an agreement and then makes himself lean forward and take the bite off the fork. He chews it, and it's still warm, thankfully, but that's about all he can kind of gather from it. He could be eating cardboard in the guise of eggs for all he knows. His tastebuds are *shot*.

"Hey, good." Darren whispers the praise, and Chris knows he's blushing if the sudden spike of heat to his face is any indication. At least it's a welcome break from the vaguely cool clamminess that's settled in. He pulls his Snuggie a little tighter around himself while Darren shovels another bite. Bringing the fork right to Chris's mouth that time, he shifts so he's leaning closer, so the reach for it is less awkward for the both of them. His knees are nudging right up against Chris's shins with the way he's sitting, and Darren rests one hand on Chris's shoulder to balance himself as he leans in.

Darren holds up the bacon next. "Don't worry, washed my hands," he says, and Chris rolls his eyes.

"What am I going to catch that'll make me feel shittier, the plague?"

"Maybe!" Darren chirps. "But good news for you, I am plague free."

"Congratulations," Chris says, and then Darren's waggling the bacon in front of his face, so he opens his mouth and bites off a hunk of it. At least he can kind of taste the heady smoked flavor of it, a little bit.

Darren takes a moment while Chris is slowly chewing to grab a triangle of toast from his own plate and shove it into his mouth all in one go, his cheeks bulging ridiculously, and Chris swallows too soon at the sight. The rough bacon slides down his throat and scratches, and ugh, shit, it hurts, but he has to do it so he can suck in a breath to hold back the laugh that's threatening to bubble up. He doesn't want to cough again if he can help it.

Darren hears the gasp, though, and looks up at him in concern. "Chris?" he mumbles around the toast, and then he chews too quickly and swallows even faster, sticking out his tongue afterwards. "God, sorry. You okay?"

"Fine," Chris says, slowly letting the breath out. "Your face. It was funny. I was trying not to laugh."

"Gee thanks," Darren says, but he's grinning again, and God. Nothing fazes him. It's weird.

He squeezes Chris's shoulder after he's grabbed up Chris's glass of orange juice, and then he's bringing it up to Chris's mouth carefully. "This is probably going to sting. I really did make it freshly squeezed 'cause I'm awesome."

"Because you like to see me suffer."

"Because I like for you to get your *vitamins*, Chris," Darren says and then tips the glass up some, and Chris closes his eyes as he drinks. It's cold, and especially after the bacon, Chris's throat feels on fire. It's such a good relief that he makes a little grateful noise before he can stop himself. His face heats up again, and he turns his head away from the glass just as Darren's bringing it back down. "That good, huh?"

"Yes, yes. You should market it. You're a saint among oranges."

"Now you're catching on!" Darren says. He picks up some toast next and tears off one of the corners, bringing it up to Chris's mouth. Chris tries to be careful, but he's still pretty sure he nips the tip of one of Darren's fingers when he accepts the bite, and Darren brushes Chris's bottom lip with his thumb once Chris's mouth is closed. Chris tells himself he imagines Darren's sigh. It's another thing to lock away for later. He's locking a shit ton of things away for later apparently.

The toast isn't as bad as the bacon, but it's rough enough to irritate, and Chris has to ask for juice after every bite. It's worth it, though, just to have some real food.

They keep on like that, Darren sneaking in bites of his own food in between, until Chris has eaten everything on his plate. He still feels pretty crappy, but he does feel a little less like he's going to die in the next five minutes.

"And if that doesn't make us besties, I don't know what will!" Darren grins as he finishes up his facon.

"What was that, a trust exercise? Do you want to fall into my arms next to seal the deal?" Chris means it like *Mean Girls*, and barely represses the urge to make a self-deprecating joke about rainbow cake, but Darren just falls back against him, remotes in hand, and says, "Awww, Chris, how romantic!"

"I would kick your ass so hard if I could lift my leg. Or breathe."

"I'll remind you to do it when you're better," Darren says, tipping his head back on Chris's shoulder to talk to him. "But for now, education."

He powers the television on and presses some buttons until the main menu of the *The Princess Bride* DVD comes up. "How did you... do you just carry it around with you?"

"Maybe. I'd tell you my secrets, but then I'd have to kill you," Darren says as he presses play and then winces, pausing to fiddle with Chris's DVD player's settings and adjust the audio.

"Audiophile," Chris murmurs, scoffing, and Darren grins, nudging him in retaliation.

"Not all of us have cold stacked up between our ears. You don't want me to *suffer*, do you?"

The movie starts, and it's clear out of the corner of Chris's eye that Darren is mouthing along with the words without saying them out loud. Chris is skeptical at first, but then Peter Falk is reading stories to his grandson, and Chris is instantly intrigued.

It turns out to be a really awesome movie, and honestly, it *had* been on his to-watch list, but he's been busy for a *long* time now, and his to-watch list is... really long. He's not surprised, though, when he asks Darren to hand him the Tylenol and the rest of his juice, and Darren says, "As you wish."

"Oh God, that's going to be a thing now that I'll get it, isn't it," Chris says, and Darren just grins and then shushes him and points at the TV.

He sees it coming, of course, but he gives an appropriate little gasp when Westley reveals himself as the Dread Pirate Roberts, and Darren issues a soft "awww" when Buttercup says "if you want I can fly" and kisses him fiercely.

"It's very touching," Chris says, a little too flatly, and Darren looks over at him, raising an eyebrow. They've gotten so close, physically, since the movie started. Chris had shifted so his legs were criss-crossed in front of him so he could slouch into the corner more, and Darren is leaning against him. His arm, Chris thinks at least, had started out resting on the back of the couch, but now it's coiled around Chris's shoulders, his hand every once in awhile squeezing Chris's shoulder or arm. So when they look at each other, it's just... it's close. And Chris hadn't known how close it would be.

He swallows hard, but Darren seems oblivious, or at least pretending to be so. Yet another thing to lock away for later. Darren just says, "Don't lie. That's adorable. You know it is, and I will resort to *drastic* measures to make you admit it if you don't willingly."

"Yes, it's adorable, in an almost cloying way. I dunno, ask me again later, the snot is overwhelming my senses."

Darren makes a concerned noise and looks him over. "Do you need to blow?"

"No, I think those little green dudes are just moving the furniture around." Chris gives a bit of a snuffle and then winces as a glob of gunk slides down his throat. This is so disgusting.

Darren squeezes his shoulder again, tipping his forehead against Chris's temple for a moment. "Poor thing."

Chris groans and mutters, "Enjoying this way too much," under his breath, even though he knows Darren was actually being sincere. Because Darren is *weird*. It's hard to not just... automatically excuse it as a joke, though, to keep the peace inside his brain.

They're quiet for awhile after that, just watching, and Chris hates himself a little bit, or a lot really, but his lids start feeling droopy, and he can only fight it off so long before he's sliding in closer to Darren and resting his head on Darren's shoulder as he drifts in and out of sleep.

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He wakes at a loud swell of music from the movie, and Darren's stroking at his hair again, fingertips softly carding through the strands. It feels good, and Chris doesn't want to wake back up, even though he's missing the movie. He tries to focus on the TV, but now there's a castle when there wasn't before, and he makes a confused noise because he has no idea what's going on anymore. "Mmph, sorry, I..." he whispers, and Darren's fingers still for a moment before starting back up gently again.

"It's okay. I don't mind watching this a million times. Eventually you have to catch all of it," Darren says, just as quietly. Chris feels him shift a little, and then there's another brush against his forehead, warm and dry and fleeting. "Wanna go back to bed, baby?" Darren whispers.

Chris shivers, and it's not from the fever. They've never talked about how much Chris likes pet names (in fact, the only one who really knows is Lea, and she regularly exploits that knowledge), but Darren's done it twice now and it gets Chris both times. He swallows and whispers, "Warm here, don't want to move."

Darren squeezes Chris. "You wanna lay down at least?"

"Kay." Chris doesn't have any idea how to make that happen because he's all but asleep, so he's hoping Darren has a good idea.

"Don't worry, I've organized more than one couch cuddle session in my day," Darren says as he starts to shift under Chris. It's like he can read Chris's mind. "And the last time was with four people and one couch, and the couch hadn't been a fold-out. *And* I was drunk. This is a piece of cake."

He untangles himself from Chris reluctantly and then helps Chris unfold himself. Eventually he has Chris stretched out along the length of the couch on his side and tucked into it enough so that there's still plenty of room for Darren. He slides Chris's glasses off his face and sets them on the coffee table and then grabs up the spare blanket he'd brought in the room and wraps it around himself like a cape before grinning at Chris and maneuvering his way onto the couch.

They're pressed close, their knees touching and their arms seeming to be in each other's way until Darren just drapes one of his over Chris and burrows closer. Chris is pretty sure they're both ignoring the movie now, and Darren smiles at him. The only thing Chris is really paying attention to is how loud their breathing is when they're this warm and close.

"Comfy?" Darren asks finally as he pets Chris's side.

"Y-yeah. You don't have to.... stay with me, like this. I'm okay."

"Since when do I turn down free cuddles? This is a perk," Darren said, smiling softly. "It's like you don't even know me, geez."

"I'm gross and sick. You can cuddle people that aren't gross and sick."

"This argument would've been at least a *little* more convincing before we slept together," Darren says, twisting the last two words in such a way they sound *sordid*. Chris rolls his eyes.

"You know what I mean, Darren. I'm just going to sleep a lot and cough. It's just going to stay boring."

"Hi there, songwriter? A job I can literally do lying down." Darren smiles softly again. "Also, cuddles are never boring. Certainly not with you."

Chris raises his eyebrows and tries to scan Darren's face to read his expression and see what he really *means* by that. But he's been fighting off passing back out ever since Darren has laid them down, and finally he gives up and presses his yawn into Darren's shirt. If Darren wants to put up with him being this pathetic constantly, Chris won't deny him.

"Then by all means," he says, flicking his wrist weakly, "Don't let me stop you."

Darren grins and then rubs the tip of his nose against Chris's ridiculously. "Wasn't planning on it." It's like déjà vu, but different, real life and work blending together, and Chris shivers.

"You're a cartoon, you know that?" It's slurred and faded, and he closes his eyes in the middle. He feels that brush against his forehead again, and he thinks Darren says something else but he doesn't hear it at all.

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The television's off when Chris wakes up again, alone on the couch. He sighs and tries not to feel too upset about that because all good things have to come to an end, and he *really* needs to not get attached to having Darren so close anyway. But then, and he must really be a mindreader, Darren appears, leaning over the couch. He has a cool cloth in his hand, and he smiles down at Chris.

"You're awake, awesome," Darren says. "I didn't wanna wake you up, but I called while you were out and made you an appointment. It's in an hour, and I figured you might want some help looking marginally more presentable before we go."

"That bad, huh." Chris reaches up for the cloth, but Darren bats his hand away and starts dabbing over Chris's cheeks and his forehead, the cloth wet enough to leave a cool trail drying on his skin.

Chris sighs and leans into the touch. "I didn't know sponge bath was on the table too, I'd have been more into this idea from the jump."

"Chris Colfer: secret sponge bath fetishist," Darren teases, dragging the cloth down the slightly stubbly skin of Chris's neck. "I should've known."

"We all have our vices. At least I'm not on the blow."

"I don't think you can be 'on the blow.' Maybe on the horse? But I think that's heroin."

"Clearly you're an expert," Chris drawls, tipping his head back and closing his eyes as Darren brings the cloth back up his neck and then presses it gently against Chris's eyelids in turn. Chris is starting to give in to the assumption that Darren is a bit magic.

"Seriously, how did you get so good at this? Did you play a nurse at Michigan too?"

Darren laughs. "Baby, I was born this way," he says, and Chris groans.

"I'm burning your Gaga albums. *All* of them."

"You'll never take me alive, copper," Darren says and then puffs an imaginary cigar. Chris uses the moment to yank the cloth out of Darren's hand and toss it up into Darren's face. It quickly zaps him of the energy he had from napping *for fucking ever* but it's worth it when Darren flails to catch it before it falls back down on Chris's face. "Oh, I see how it is, after all I've done for you. I squeezed your orange juice!"

"And if I was pouring orange juice into your face, that would mean something," Chris says. He hesitates a second before punctuating that by sticking his tongue out at Darren.

"You're mean when you're sick, Chris Colfer. Mean and nasty."

Chris rolls his shoulders in a shrug and then sighs, pushing himself up to sitting. He shoves his fingers through his hair, but there's really no saving it, and he's too achey to give a shit. "Lea did warn you," he says, glancing up at Darren as he pushes his Snuggie off and rolls it into a crumpled ball in his lap.

"She did. Twice, in fact. Would you like a real shirt, or just a hoodie? New sweats?"

Chris wrinkles his nose. God, he doesn't want to *go*. Darren's stupid. "Yes on a hoodie and sweats," he says finally. "They're in--"

"The back of the closet on the right, I know," Darren says, and Chris makes a confused noise. Darren just... shouldn't know that, but he does.

"Remember that night with the drunkenness and Ashley locking me and Harry in your closet for five hours? I think I've got your whole system down pat."

"Oh God, I am never drinking bourbon again, fuck." That was a horrible evening. Apparently bourbon makes him a cocky asshole. "Sorry again, by the way."

Darren snorts. "Hey, I lived, we're good." He starts down the hall, tossing the cloth from hand to hand, but then backtracks to grin at Chris around the corner. "You just better hope I didn't poison your eggs!" He disappears immediately afterward to get Chris's clothes before Chris can respond.

"I've been building up an immunity to iocaine powder, you know." He can't really shout, but hopefully Darren heard him anyway. Setting his Snuggie aside, he leans forward with a huff and grabs up his glasses, shoving them back on his face.

"So you *were* paying attention," Darren calls back. Chris yawns and then nods just as Darren is walking back into the room, Chris's clothes in tow.

"I'm that damn awesome. I can be deathly ill and absorb pop culture at the same time."

"It can be another award to join your collection," Darren says with a smile as he hikes his thumb to the little alcove behind Chris's staircase.

"What's the statue look like for that? Just a big box of tissues?"

"The Golden Handkerchief. Very prestigious," Darren says. He holds up Chris's clothes and smiles a little more fondly. "Do you need help again? I don't mind."

"I... yeah, probably. I don't know why I'm trying to pretend that I have any shame left."

"Ugh, shame. Vastly overrated and gross anyway," Darren says, making a comical face. "Here, you can lean against the banister. We'll do the hoodie first."

Chris nods absently and shakily stands up when Darren helps him, leaning against the banister as Darren guides him, and then raising his arms when Darren tells him to. It's ridiculous, but it's nice to shuffle through on autopilot at least, and the brief chill from having his Snuggie off is gone once the hoodie is straightened on him and warm.

"Thank you. I don't know that I've said that yet. I probably would have wrecked my car stubbornly trying to get home yesterday if not for you."

"Seriously, stubbornest guy I know. Thanks for letting me take care of you, in the end," Darren says, kneeling down and easily pulling Chris's sweats down to pool around his ankles. He works Chris's feet free and then gets the new sweats on, tugging them up and popping the elastic lightly against Chris's belly before standing.

It's a dull *thwack* against his skin, and Chris's brain is probably going to implode under the weight of all the things he's filing away for later. Like Darren's smiling face when he's on his knees at Chris's feet. It's going to be a confusing *millennium* after he gets better with all that he has to think about, Jesus.

Darren's watching him and then reaches behind him to his back pocket. He pulls Chris's brush out like magic, and Chris blinks at him. "Man, you already look stoned, you know. I can't wait 'til they give you the good stuff."

"Nothing they can give me will be better than Lunesta. I want to marry it," Chris says as Darren stretches up on his toes so he can brush Chris's hair back, getting rid of his bedhead. "Mmm that feels nice," Chris murmurs before he can stop himself.

"You sound like a starving man. Remind me to cuddle-bomb you more often, clearly you're a touching fan."

"'Cuddle-bomb'? Really?" Chris snorts. "And I'm fine. You're just all stealth comber and stuff."

"You are not allowed to laugh at cuddle bombing if you call me a stealth comber. And it's either this or going to the doctor's with a rat's nest for hair. Do you think you're prepared for that?"

"I think I'm prepared for about nap number fifteen maybe," Chris says, eying the couch longingly.

"You can nap in the car, and in the waiting room. No worries. It's time for you to get drugged up, my friend."

"Mmm, delicious drugs," Chris says, zombie-shuffling with Darren to the doorway so he can shove his feet into his tennis shoes. He manages to avoid his reflection successfully until they're in Darren's car, and he catches a glimpse of himself in the side mirror.

"Holy shit, I look dead."

"Maybe a little, but no brain cravings, so there's still time."

"Yes, yes. Save me, Obi-Wan Darren, you're my only hope," Chris says, settling into the seat more and yawning again. "Can I have my phone when we get back?"

"We'll talk about it, if you're very well behaved."

"I have a mom, you know, I know that means no."

"Then why'd you ask, Christopher," Darren teases, pitching his voice up and tapping his fingers on the steering wheel to the beat of whatever five songs he has stuck in his head.

Chris slouches down into his seat more. "Worth a shot."

Darren grins over at Chris. "It was a good try, until it failed," he says cheerfully, and Chris musters up the energy to flip him off.

Darren laughs and keeps one hand on the wheel as he grabs up Chris's raised hand in his own and uncurls Chris's fingers until he can lace their fingers together and drop their hands on the armrest between them, Darren's thumb moving slowly over the back of Chris's hand. The sun is warm through the windows, and Darren's touch is trickling up his arm like water, and he just closes his eyes and refuses to think about any of it. Darren's a cuddle monster, everyone knows it, and Chris is just too feeble to fight off his advances. Like a wounded gazelle on the plains.

"Like a cuddle tiger," Chris mumbles as he closes his eyes and lets his head tip back.

He's pretty sure as he's drifting off that he hears Darren let out a really pitiful roar in response, but that might be a hallucination, and sleep is too powerful to resist so he can figure it out.

Chapter Three

The car stops with a lurch that wakes Chris up, and he blinks behind his shades. His hand's gone numb, and he realizes Darren's not holding it anymore, or in the car anymore. "Wha--"

He pushes himself up and looks, but both driver-side doors are open, and Darren's leaning into the backseat and digging through his bag. "Oh, hey, you're awake," he says, glancing up at Chris. "We're here by the way, so you might want to stay that way."

"If I must, I must." He flops around until he can reach his glasses case in the cupholder and swings his door open. This is gonna be a multi-step process, he might as well get started. "Are you prepping a diaper bag back there or something?" he asks, dropping one foot to the pavement outside the car to hold the door open.

"Not quite. But I thought I might bring in some juice and Frogger. If I can find it."

"... you have a... Darren, you have a phone. With internet. Google a flash game of it," Chris says. He's all but delirious. How is he the sane one?

"No, it's more organic with the handheld. Have some standards, man - ah-ha! Victory at last. We're gonna beat the shit out of some Frogger while we wait."

"You were that kid whose mom had to bring half his toy chest with him to the doctors because you can't sit still, weren't you," Chris says. It's not really a question since he already knows the answer. He tosses the case, now protecting his shades, somewhere into the middle console.

"Nah, Mom would tell me stories to keep me entertained. Worked every time." Darren shuts the two doors and then trots around the car to Chris's side. "All right, I'm armed, you're feverish. Let's do this thing."

"Go crack team," Chris says, shoving himself up and moving aside so Darren can shut the door. He yawns behind his hand and then stretches his arms above his head, cracking his spine and then his neck.

"That's vaguely horrifying," Darren says after the series of pops. "You might be dead. We might not need the doctor after all." His hand lands on the small of Chris's back almost like he thinks Chris will actually drop dead in a second, and Chris snickers stuffily.

"You're just jealous of my skills," he says as they shuffle in to the cool doctor's waiting room.

"I'm jealous of your apparently continued life after death, more like it." Darren leads the way into the lobby and deposits Chris on a low leather couch. "I'll go sign you in."

Chris nods and slumps down in the squeaky seat to wait. It's a fairly crowded office, and Chris feels like a douche for keeping his hat on inside, but he just *really* doesn't want some fellow flumonia sufferer to come out and ask for his autograph right now. As soon as he thinks it, he feels guilty, but *ugh*.

He tugs his hoodie sleeves down over his hands and crosses them over his chest, turning to watch Darren as he waits behind a line of an older woman followed by a couple with a baby that Darren is having a very serious eyebrow-off with over the mom's shoulder. Once his brain really works again, he's going to have to start putting serious thought into Darren's Christmas gift. Right now *puppy* is on the top of the list; though, that's as much a burden as a gift. He's still working on it.

He's starting to nod off again when Darren squeaks down onto the couch right beside to him. "We're a little early, but you shouldn't have to wait too long. Do you wanna Frogger, or do you want to go back to sleep while you wait?"

"Hmmmmmmmm," Chris says as he pretends to think because it's really no contest. "You take Frogger duty. I'll take sleeping."

"Aye aye, cap'n," Darren says, and then his arm is sliding around Chris's shoulders and tugging him in a little closer.

"What're you--"

"Dude, I am way more comfortable than this excuse of a couch. It's another one of my services."

"Darren, we're... there are *people*," Chris hisses, and Darren leans out a little so he can look at Chris properly.

"Your hoodie has a hole in it, you're wearing a baseball cap, and you look like death. I'm scruffy and I look like I haven't slept in two days. We're surrounded by old ladies and babies. Do you really give a shit who sees us right now?"

Chris pokes him weakly in the chest. "Well, I guess when you say it like that. Also, your hair is doing that vague mountain man thing again. *But*, I don't think real mountain men wear teal plaid."

"I'll give you the hair, but this shirt is all hipster. Now just come here and stop fighting the inevitable, we both know you want it." He waggled his eyebrows ridiculously at that, and Chris is relieved that the ancient lady sitting next to them is engrossed in her *Better Homes and Gardens* and didn't hear Darren's lascivious tone.

"It's a good thing you're magical or I'd have to disown you." Chris is already giving in to the siren song of Darren's embrace, so he just goes for it, turning and resting his head against Darren's chest and exhaling into it. Darren puts one arm over his shoulder, and the other hand lands on his knee.

Chris dozes until they call his name, and Darren unwinds his arms and pushes just a little so that Chris can push himself to his feet. "Do you want me to wait out here?"

"Of course not, who's going to pay attention to what meds I have to take?"

Darren grins, and his hand is on the small of Chris's back again as they walk carefully back to the exam room. The nurse leading them back is an older lady that Chris doesn't recognize, and blissfully she doesn't seem to recognize either of them. She asks all the standard questions as she gets them in the room, and Chris answers most of them on autopilot. When he stumbles over the ones like "how long have you had a fever," Darren smoothly interjects with the answer, shooting Chris a smile each time. She checks his blood pressure and his temperature, and tuts when the thermometer beeps.

"All right, the doctor will be in in a few minutes. Your partner is welcome to wait here." She gives Darren a little smile before leaving the room, pulling the door shut behind her.

"Partner?" Chris croaks out. He's starting to feel cold again now that he's not pressed up against Darren. "I mean honestly."

"Well, you were practically laying in my lap out in the exam room," Darren says, and he smirks when Chris throws up his hands and makes an exasperated noise. "She was totally not judgmental about it, though, that's pretty awesome."

"I guess. At least she didn't recognize us. Potential pictures of me on my deathbed are bad enough, a blind item about someone dating their coworker would be even worse."

"I know what you mean, but I do feel the need at this juncture to at least be a little affronted that you don't want to be seen with me in public."

"Shut up, I hate you," Chris says without too much heat.

Darren grins, unrepentant. "That's a lie, you said I was maaaaagical."

Chris groans, folding in on himself even more. "Oh my God, I'm never going to live this down ever. I'm going to have to quit the business and move to a commune upstate after this just to escape my shame."

Darren scoots his chair a little closer and grabs Chris's hand. "You know I'm just poking fun. What happens in Sick Land stays in Sick Land."

Chris is almost sure he's got a witty rejoinder for that, but he doesn't get to use it because the doctor comes in. And of course it's Dr. Morris, because every time Chris comes in and looks terrible in some way, he gets the practice's hot young doctor. Of course he does.

"Hey, Chris, long time no see. Shame we keep running into each other like this." Chris dredges up a watery smile because Dr. Morris always makes that joke, and it's always pretty cute. He doesn't waste any time, depositing his tablet computer with Chris's chart on the counter and stepping in close to press gently on the sides of Chris's neck. Chris realizes belatedly that Darren must have let go of his hand at some point, and *fuck* Chris is out of it if he didn't even notice that.

Chris shrugs one shoulder. "Well, you know I keep meaning to stop in for a social call, but who has the time these days."

Dr. Morris chuckles, pulling his stethoscope from around his neck. "Could you unzip your sweatshirt, please, and we'll have a listen to those lungs."

By sheer force of will, Chris gets his hoodie unzipped and tugs it down off his shoulders, leaving it in a pool around his waist. He shivers from the chill, and Dr. Morris makes a show of breathing on the end of the stethoscope before he presses it to Chris's chest. "Deep, slow breaths, please."

Chris makes it through two okay, but by the third breath in, he can't resist the cough anymore, and Dr. Morris steps aside while Chris all but hacks out his lung on the exam room floor.

Dr. Morris's hand is gentle on his shoulder, and he feels Darren's fingertips brush over his knee, and fuck he has never been so *useless*. When he's done, he shakes his head. Dr. Morris gives him a friendly squeeze. "So yeah, we'll get you something for that. I'm guessing you might have bronchitis, but we're going to do a quick chest x-ray before you go, just to make sure there's nothing else to worry about."

"Flumonia," Chris mumbles when the doctor turns around to mark his chart, and Darren snorts.

"So you brought him in..." Dr. Morris raises his eyebrows questioningly at Darren.

"Oh, I'm Darren." He reaches out to shake, but Dr. Morris wiggles his gloved hand, and Darren smiles and pulls his back. "I'm his friend, I've been taking care of him."

"Oh, Darren, from the show! Sorry, didn't quite recognize you with the..." He waves vaguely at his own hair, then his face, and Darren grins and scrubs at his stubbly cheek.

"Today he is playing the esteemed role of Mountain Man," Chris mumbles.

"Nice to see commitment to the role." He tucks his stethoscope up around his neck again. "Okay, we'll just do a few more quick things, and then we'll take you back to get the x-ray." He pokes and prods a little more, gently checking Chris's legs and back, and then finally helps him climb down from the table. Darren stands instantly, but Chris manages to stand up on his own.

"So x-ray is just downstairs. They'll have everything down there... fancy technology and all." He gives his tablet a shake. "Just give your name and they'll get you going. Once it's done they'll send you back up here and we'll take a look. Sound like a plan?"

"Thank you, Dr. Morris. I guess I'll see you again after my close-up."

Dr. Morris smiles with a lot of teeth. "Two shakes, and then we'll get you out of here and home."

Chris says his thank yous, and then they head out of the office and down two floors to the radiology lab. Chris is holding his unzipped hoodie close around him because he's still freezing even in the warm, brightly-lit hallways.

"So, he seems nice." Darren says, nudging his shoulder against Chris's.

"What? Oh, yeah, Dr. Morris is great."

"Suuure he is." Chris shoots him a look, but he's way too tired and unfocused to process what Darren's driving at. They get to the lab counter, and Chris has to focus instead on what his last name is and what the hell he's doing there anyway.

They won't let Darren come in to the x-ray room with him, which sucks because he's barely on his feet as it is, but the x-ray tech is a kindly older man with white hair and a goofy grandpa smile. He lets Chris keep his sweatpants on, since they don't have any metal parts, so all Chris has to do is drag off his undershirt and pull on the hospital gown. He doesn't even bother with the tiny changing room.

"Got somewhere important to be?"

"Unconscious in my bed, which is where I'll be once you work your magic."

"Well then, let's get you home. Stand with your back to that metal box."

It is a lot like a photoshoot; they take pictures, he moves and stands in a specific spot, repeat as necessary. It takes way less time, though, and the tech hands him back his shirt and hoodie when he's done. "It'll take a few minutes, but by the time you make your way back upstairs, Dr. Morris should have them to read."

"The wonder of computers," Chris grumps, but then thanks the tech before shuffling back out to the waiting room. Darren's poking at his phone, but once Chris is in his sight line he jumps up and pockets it. "All set?"

"Just have to wrangle me back upstairs, and then flumonia verdict and drugs a-plenty."

"So... which would you rather have as a reward: candy, or ice cream?"

"Is sleep an option? I'd like to trade in ice cream for sleep."

Darren chuckles, his palm warm on the small of Chris's back as they climb into the elevator. "Sleep is always an option, no trades required."

When they get back upstairs, the same nurse ushers them back in to Dr. Morris's office, where he joins them a few minutes later. He's got a swanky computer monitor mounted to his wall, and he brings up Chris's x-rays, two pairs of lungs in sharp relief.

"Nice glamor shots," Darren says low in Chris's ear, and Chris snorts and then coughs all over again just as Dr. Morris is turning to say something to him. Chris holds up his finger for Dr. Morris to wait, and Dr. Morris hums and says, "Of course, take your time." He feels Darren awkwardly patting his shoulder in apology, and he kind of wishes they would stop watching him cough because it's only making his chest tighten up with anxiety like he has to rush this along so they can get a move on and Dr. Morris can go to the next dying patient in room two or something. It's definitely not helping. Finally he can suck in a breath, and he wills down the coughs, swallowing against his sore throat and gesturing for Dr. Morris to go ahead.

"Well, I'm glad to say that there's no signs of excess fluid in or near your lungs, so no indicators for pneumonia. You do have a nasty flu, though, and coupled with that is bronchitis, which is an inflammation of the mucous membranes, all in here." He gestures to the tops of the lungs.

Chris raises an eyebrow in question, afraid that talking will trigger more coughs. Darren, like the magical damn mind reader that he is, says, "So, what's on the docket besides lots more sleep and some chicken soup?"

"Well, a nice course of antibiotics, along with a decongestant... I'll be sure you get the good heavy hitters. We'll also get you some codeine-based cough syrup for the cough, and an inhaler, which will help with the bronchitis." He checks Chris's chart again. "Are you still taking your Lunesta?"

Chris feels a brief flash of shame, even though Darren already knows. "Yes, but not more than twice a week, now. More the last few days, but."

"That's good, that sounds like an improvement. Well, there shouldn't be any problems with taking both, but I would possibly avoid it if you can. Not being awake to control a coughing fit might not be very enjoyable."

"Don't worry, Doc. Sleep is *not* a problem right now."

"That's really good to hear," Dr. Morris says with a wide smile that Chris returns, even if his eyes are still watery. He can feel Darren staring at him and tries to ignore it. "So, I'll just email your prescriptions over to the pharmacy we have on file, and after you pick these babies up you can get lots of rest."

"Thanks," Chris says and then sighs because he has to move *again* now. Darren's helping him to the door, which sends a fresh wave of embarrassment down his spine since they're out in public and Dr. Morris is watching, but Dr. Morris just says, "I really hope you feel better soon," and he sounds like he genuinely means it.

Chris looks over his shoulder to say, "Thank you," again, and then they make it through the door and start going down the hallway, the door clicking closed behind them.

"No, thank *you*, Christopher," Darren says, drawling Chris's name and batting his lashes.

"I'm way too tired to pick up whatever the hell you're alluding to, so can we just get the prescriptions and then you can use your big boy words in the car?"

Darren snorts and mutters, "Big boy words," under his breath but is quiet until they get to the front desk. He does all the talking while Chris focuses really hard on not swaying on his feet and mostly succeeds, the nurse cooing at him behind the thick glass when Chris accidentally lets out what sounds like a freaking death rattle, and he feels his face flush and not from the fever.

Soon enough, Darren's passing the prescription to him and then leading him back to the car and helping him in. He even goes so far as to zip Chris's hoodie back up, and then his wandering fingers comb Chris's hair back quickly before he smiles and says, "Let's get the show on the road, dude," and closes Chris's door to slide across the hood of his car after a running leap and then climb into the driver's side.

Chris looks over at him warily and just says, "You... you are crazy."

"Crazy *awesome*, is clearly what you mean."

"Oh, yes, *clearly*, excuse me," Chris says. He fishes in his pockets for his shades with his free hand and can't find them, but then suddenly Darren is holding them right in front of his face. "How did you..."

"*Awesome*, remember. Also, you left them in the console."

Chris grumbles and slides them on, folding in on himself in the seat and tucking his glasses into the case that Darren dropped in his lap. Darren whistles a jaunty tune, like a total asshole, and pulls them out of the parking lot and back onto the highway.

"Sooooooooooooo," Darren finally starts, and Chris braces himself. "Flirting even when you're on death's door, huh?"

"What? Wait, you mean Dr. Morris? I was not. He's just very nice."

"He was. Very nice *indeed*."

Chris shoves at Darren's shoulder. "He was polite."

"He could be more polite. In your pants."

"He's my doctor, that's like five kinds of inappropriate."

"In your pants."

"*Darren*."

"In your pant - wait." Darren blinks and Chris lets out a raspy, gross-sounding snort.

"Mm. Didn't think *that* one through, did you."

"My point still stands. I bet you could find a new doctor."

"Why would I need to find a new doctor when I am *already* perfectly satisfied with the one I have now?" Chris asks and then stifles a yawn before pulling his sleeves over his fingers. Darren's keeping the car warmer than he probably wants it, Chris knows, but he's still chilly.

"Because you can't go out with him if he's your doctor, silly. You find a new doctor so you can take your old one out on a date."

Chris shoots Darren a glare. "'Already perfectly satisfied' is just not something you understand, is it."

"What I'm saying is that you could be perfectly satisfied.... in--"

"Don't finish that, I swear to God..."

"Your paaaaaants," Darren says with a wink and a smirk. "It's not like it'd *hurt* anything."

"I'm just... not interested. That's all."

"Your pants are sad. You're going to make them cry," Darren says as they pull into the parking lot, and Chris rolls his eyes, even if his whole face hurts.

"No crying pants. Can we please just drop it?"

Darren watches Chris out of the corner of his eye for a long moment and fidgets, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel as he parks. But when he finally answers, he's all smiles and back to joking, and he says, "I guess we *can*. Stupid sick-person privileges."

"You can torment me about my lack of a sex life when I'm well and can better defend myself, thank you."

"It's a date, and I'll hold you to it."

"Can we just go do this? I'd like to go back to being unconscious if at all possible."

"Oh! Oh, yeah, sure. Here, just... you can wait here, I'll be in and out, no worries." Darren's halfway out of the car when he turns back and says, "If you start to die, text me."

Chris thinks about saluting him, but just flips him off instead. He figures it carries the same message.

Darren's laughter is cut off when he closes the door, and Chris's eyes are slits as he watches Darren bounce-walk to the pharmacy, but he can vaguely feel the stupid smile on his face. Whatever. He has more important things right now like changing all of Darren's favorite radio stations to horrible alternatives, but he only gets to do the first one before he's collapsing back in the seat and drifting off, his body heavy with sleep.

._.*._

"Wake up, Chris, we're home." Darren's palm is warm on his arm, and Chris struggles to drag himself into wakefulness.

"Rise and shine, sleeping beauty," Darren says when Chris blinks his eyes open finally, and Chris groans.

"We were at..." He breaks off and wipes his mouth on his sleeve in case he was drooling and then looks to see a small white bag sitting between him and Darren. "Oh, you got the meds," he says dumbly.

"And stopped at my apartment, and at the grocery store. You were pretty much out." Darren gives him a little smile, and Chris groans and tries to roll his neck.

"Stiff?" Darren asks sympathetically, and Chris tries to nod and then groans again and lifts up one hand to sign 'yes.' His hand falls back heavily in his lap, and Darren smiles. "If you get up and go inside, we can get you doped up, and then I'll rub your neck for you."

"Bless you, bless Dr. Morris, and bless the pharmaceutical industry." Chris swings one leg out, then the other, then drags himself to his feet.

"I bet you'll bless Dr. Morris," Darren says under his breath, and Chris shoots him a glare over the top of the car.

"Be glad I'm not on my A-game or else I'd point out how jealous you sound right now," he grumbles, and he's satisfied for a moment at least with how much Darren is gawking at him.

"I'm not *jealous*," Darren says with a scoff. "I'm merely pointing out what is, like, obvious to everyone. Since I know you're not on your A-game and all."

"Oh yes, thank you for your wisdom," Chris says as they walk to the door, and then he grabs his keys out of Darren's hand to unlock the door and let them in. "Your jealous, jealous wisdom." He can't help but poke Darren back a little after the *torture* he just had to sit through.

"Look, I just call 'em like I see 'em. He's nice, he's pretty handsome, he clearly likes you..." Darren puts the grocery bags on the table. "You should be happy, that's all."

Chris holds onto the back of one of his chairs to keep his balance and noses through the bags curiously. There's a lot of healthy vegan alternatives in them, and he's beginning to get suspicious that Lea made Darren a whole list. At least Chris is pretty sure he likes everything he sees.

Darren opens both the doors to Chris's fridge and starts putting groceries up, stacking a carton of Chris's favorite ice cream on top of some frozen waffles. Chris watches for a moment before resuming his snooping.

"You're working under the assumption that I have time to find a new doctor, or..." He pulls out a package of frozen broccoli and makes an exaggerated grossed-out face at it that Darren huffs out a laugh at. "Or that I have time to date." Darren grabs the broccoli from it and tosses it in the freezer before nudging the doors closed.

He grabs Chris's shoulders and starts steering him to the bedroom even though Chris was still looking, and he hopes Darren gets sick soon. Payback is going to be *delicious*. "Or," he begins again, "that I even like Dr. Morris back. *If* he likes me, which I don't think he does. But I don't like him. Like that." Chris sneezes then, right as they reach the doorway, and groans as it makes his whole head pound.

"Come on, let's get you to bed," Darren says softly, hand on his back pushing him into the room. He doesn't say anything else about Dr. Morris, which Chris is grateful for.

Chris waits impatiently for Darren to move the covers back and then falls down on the bed on his belly, and *oh* his bed is the best thing in the *world*.

"Nice try, but you have to make the pill rounds first, man," Darren says and then helps Chris sit up on his knees when Chris can't push himself back up without his arms wobbling.

"Ugh, fine, gimme," Chris says, and Darren hands him a tissue first with a silent, eyebrowed demand to blow. Chris does as he watches Darren carefully read each label and pour out the right amount of pills and then the right dosage of cough syrup in the little plastic cup. He exchanges the gross tissue for the handful of pills and a water bottle, and Chris throws them all back at once and chases them down with a long swig of water.

"Dude, serious swallowing skills," Darren says, his eyes wide, and Chris almost drops the water, coughing all over again and doubling over because he swallowed the last of his sip wrong. "Sorry, sorry, I'll hold all

future BJ jokes until you're better. Here, come on, take this and then you can sleep. And be glad you can't smell it."

"I take back anything good I said or thought about your bedside manners," Chris says once he can talk, and he holds himself up with one hand firmly planted on one knee and then takes the little cup and braces himself before throwing the syrup back. He winces as he swallows. He can't really taste it, but he can feel how slimy-thick it is going down his throat, and it's all sun-warm from the car ride and feels *weird* mostly.

Darren's right beside him, and Chris isn't sure when Darren started rubbing his back, but he shivers a little when Darren whispers, "Good job, there you go," as he takes the cup away. "*Now*, you can lay down." Chris sighs in relief and stretches back out again, tugging off his glasses and laying them on the nightstand. The pillowcase is cool and wonderful against his cheek.

"I can still make good on that backrub if you want, or do you wanna sleep first?" Darren asks.

"Backrub, please," Chris mumbles into the pillow. "My back hurts so much."

"Aww, baby," Darren says quietly, and Chris doesn't even blink at it anymore, which probably says something about him, or maybe about Darren, but Chris is too sleepy and wound up tight to think about it. The bed dips as Darren kneels on it, and then Chris's eyes fly open as he feels Darren straddle his thighs, his weight settling down just below Chris's ass.

"Um."

"I... is this okay? It helps it be more even, and I don't wanna ask you to move any, so I just thought..."

Darren doesn't sound unsure often, and Chris is finding out that it's *weird* when he does, so he nods, already feeling himself settling under the warm weight of it, and then Darren's hands are curling around his shoulders. He digs his thumbs in, and that's even *better*.

"*Darren*, thank you, ohh..." His hands are wide and warm, and his fingertips are digging in *just* right, and... wow.

"I always wanted to take a class in this at Michigan but never had the time," Darren says conversationally, and he presses the heels of his palms into Chris's shoulder blades while his thumbs stretch out to rub slow

circles right at the base of Chris's neck. It's where Chris was the most sore, and he winces and grabs onto his pillow with both hands for something to hold onto. "Too much?"

"No." Chris sucks in a shallow breath and tries to settle as Darren gives him a brief reprieve, and then Darren's circling again, slowly working his thumbs up the back of Chris's neck to the base of his skull and then back down, retracing his route.

"For, like, half a semester, one of my exes in sophomore year wanted to be a masseuse, and she practiced on me," Darren continues, and Chris can't help but snort and peek one eye open at Darren, who looks so much different when he's shadowed and looming over Chris and smiling warmly. "Shut up, it was legit," Darren says as he slides one hand down the center of Chris's back, following it with the other.

He gives the small of Chris's back the same treatment as his shoulders and slowly fans out from that, digging his thumbs into the dimples right above Chris's ass, his hoodie cushioning it enough so it just feels *good* and then moves up, tracing the line of Chris's spine with the circling pressure that has Chris tensing and then relaxing every two seconds as he's slowly worked boneless.

"Well you... seem to have picked up a lot," Chris whispers, and his voice is breathy and distant. It's been *ages* since he felt like this, well before he got sick.

"Quick learner," Darren says, his own voice a little lower, and then he shifts a little on top of Chris just to get more comfortable before he goes back to Chris's neck and squeezes and rubs at the base of it. Chris can't help but groan because *God*, right there, and then Darren whispers, "Like how I've picked up that you really like that spot."

Chris flushes hotly and squirms under Darren before giving up with a sigh. His fingers flex in his pillow, and he keeps his eyes closed as he says, "Secret genius, you are," and then forces himself to relax.

"Thanks, Yoda," Darren whispers. After that it's quiet, and Chris lies there and lets Darren work until his whole back is tingling, the muscles loose, and he feels like he could probably bend his spine in new and fascinating ways. He almost wants to get out the long scarves and try some of those tricks that Zach's friend had showed him again, if he wasn't practically comatose.

Darren's hands are slowing, and he's not so much massaging anymore as just soothingly rubbing Chris's back, his palms broad and fingers splayed wide as he moves up and down, making sure Chris's hoodie and

shirt don't get rucked up anymore after the first time when Chris had shivered from the sudden chill. It feels so nice, and the cocktail of drugs Chris took is starting to kick in; his eyelids feel even heavier, and his pillow is so soft, and Darren's *so warm*. Chris feels sleep tugging at him and doesn't even think to warn Darren or stupidly tell him he can stop or whatever before he's drifting off to Darren's hands still smoothing up his back.

._*._

When he finally wakes up again, the light has shifted in the room, and he's covered up with a sheet. He hears some faint sounds coming from the living room, and he feels sweaty and disgusting from falling asleep in his hoodie. He doesn't, however, feel quite so much like he's going to fall over the second he sits up.

His head even feels marginally -- very, very marginally -- clearer, and as he sits up and blinks around his room, he realizes he has to piss. He grumbles nonsensical things under his breath as he holds onto his night table to stand up, his body feeling heavy with grogginess still. He unzips his hoodie in a hurry and flings it off, unable to take it for another second, and breathes as the cool air in his room hits his bare arms. It's so much better.

As he shuffles out into the hallway, he realizes the noise is Darren on his phone again, talking animatedly, and then he hears something about "The tour - holy shit, sold out? That's so amazing, man, oh my God, this is so fucking great!" Chris smiles a little to himself on his way to the bathroom. His vision is even clear enough for the time being that he doesn't have to close one eye to aim, and he's overall considering this afternoon a win, his muscles still feeling loose and the rattle in his lungs even settling down a smidge.

He flushes and tugs his pants back up, and then braces himself against the sink, washing his hands and checking himself out in the mirror. He still looks like hell, extra pale with high spots of flush on his cheeks, but again, marginally better all around. He's trying to decide if he feels stable enough to shower when there's a knock at the door. "Hey, you all right?"

"Fine, Darren." His throat feels better when he speaks, and man that cough syrup must be magical.

"Oh, awesome, that's great news. Is there anything I can help you with, or should I just get out of your hair for awhile?" Chris wonders what Darren thinks he's going to *do*, but he just says, "No, I was... thinking about showering, maybe. I'm pretty gross."

"Oh. Well." Chris watches the shadows of Darren's feet shuffle under the door, and then Darren says, "Do you want... I mean, I can help, no worries. Cleanliness is next to broliness."

"Look, I really appreciate the extreme nursemaid act, I do, but I think I have to draw the line at bathing me."

Darren chuckles. "Okay. Though should I maybe come in there, just to be sure? I mean, I'm gonna be sitting out here listening to make sure you don't fall and crack your head, at least if I'm in there we can talk?"

"I think you have trust issues," Chris says, but he leans over and unlocks the door anyway. Darren immediately opens it but then disappears, and Chris is just starting to fidget impatiently when Darren comes back and unloads an armful of goods, starting with Chris's glasses. Then there's a towel, and then a pair of grey sweats, and finally a black t-shirt emblazoned with 'Master Splinter's Dojo'. "Darren, what--"

"Mine. It's... mine. I just... my bag was laying there, open, just screaming at me, 'Daaaarren, pick something from meeeeeeee,' so I had to. Also your undershirt collection is seriously dwindling, which is saying something because I think you own five thousand." He kicks the door closed and smiles a little awkwardly as he hands the stuff to Chris.

"Yeeaaaah, okay," Chris says. He's not better enough to question it, locking it away with *everything else, oh my God*. He takes his time hanging the towel up and then settling the clothes on the sink counter before he gives Darren a pointed look and doesn't stop until Darren is turned around, nose practically in the corner.

"You remember that we were on tour this summer, right? And that we all witnessed The Spandex Incident? Or Incidents, in point of fact?"

Chris tugs off his shirt and throws it squarely at Darren's head, where it actually stays, which is about the best thing he's seen today. He shucks his sweats and underwear quickly and climbs into the cold shower, turning the water on and backing away, waiting for it to warm up. Darren's laughing, and through the shower curtain he can see his shadow move, the thump that means he's probably hoisted himself up on the counter. "How are the meds doing?"

"I want to marry them," Chris says.

"I'm really starting to question your need for holy matrimony with medication, man," Darren says. "This is turning into something more than a passing craze."

"It's not my fault they're all shiny and blue and trying to seduce me," Chris mumbles, sticking his hand out to test the water. It's warm, and he shuffles forward carefully to step under it, closing his eyes and tipping his head back. He can't help the little whine that escapes him at how *good* it feels, oh God.

"Chris? You okay?" Darren asks, and before Chris can answer, he follows it with, "... or are you *very* okay and I should stop talking?"

"You should stop talking anyway, but it feels like I haven't had a shower in five years is all," Chris says, dropping his head forward then and letting the spray hit at the back of his neck and water roll down his back and make him shiver. He reaches down to turn up the temperature and groans when a fresh wave of hot water hits his skin. "Oh fuck, I might almost feel human after this."

"Ah! Human again! Human again... Yes, think of what that means!" Darren says, adopting first Lumiere's accent, followed by Mrs. Potts', and Chris shakes his head.

"If I get that song stuck in my head..." Which of course means that Darren starts singing it, loudly and obnoxiously, and Chris watches his shadow arms flail. "I'm going to pull a reverse *Psycho* and stab the person *outside* the shower in a minute," he threatens once Darren's hit the chorus.

"You must really be sick if you don't even want some *Beauty and the Beast* action. It's just not *right*." Darren sounds so smug, and Chris really could punch him.

"I want to make sweet, tender love to my shower, and you're ruining it with my *childhood*, which in turn *ruins my childhood*, Darren. Think about the consequences here."

"You went on and on about that new shower head, but I didn't know it was *that* nice. Don't let me keep you two lovebirds apart."

Chris leans up against the shower wall and just breathes in the steam. He thinks for a moment that Darren's going to actually shut up, but then, softly, he starts singing, "I've been really tryyyyin, baby..."

Chris thumps his head against the shower wall. "Oh no."

"Tryin' to hold back this feeling for sooooo long...."

"I will kill you. *Violently*," Chris mutters, and Darren tries to sing through the next line of it and laugh at the same time. It gives Chris enough time to grab one of the washcloths off the little rack he keeps in the shower and wet and soap it and then fling it at Darren, where it lands with a wet *thwack* somewhere on him, and Chris smiles at his shower curtain in satisfaction.

"Now, see, that was just unnecessary."

"Shut you up, didn't it?"

"You could have just *asked*. I was just trying to make it romantic for you and your shower."

"When I need a background crooner, I'll let you know, but now is not that time."

"Suit yourself. I'm pretty decent at serenades."

"As you've proven time and again. At all hours."

Darren gives a mock-affronted gasp and then says, "Are you saying that I'm... *annoying*, Chris Colfer? After I've tended your fevered brow?"

Chris coughs again, but it's not so dry, and he feels his head draining with the steam. "No Darren," he says flatly when he's done, "you're wonderful. Women want you, men want to be you."

He dares to peek around the curtain just in time to see Darren obnoxiously buffing his nails on his shirt with a smirk. "Go on," he says, winking at Chris, and Chris rolls his eyes and jerks the curtain closed again. "You're doing wonders for my ego."

"Yes, you're wonderful and charming and fantastic and you'll take the world by storm." Chris says it jokingly, but... it's all actually true. Chris will never say it like that, though. *Not over my dead body*.

"Why thank you, Golden Globe-winning, Emmy-nominated, TIME's Top 100 Chris Colfer," Darren says, and his voice sounds too fond, but Chris chalks that up to not hearing him well over the spray of water.

"Clearly we're both fantastic." Reluctantly, Chris turns off the water, panting for a moment in the silence. The hot water was *wonderful*, but he's back to feeling exhausted, and also he's starving. "Could you hand me my towel? And turn around again."

"Yes, cap'n," Darren says, and Chris listens as Darren hops off the counter and tugs the towel free. He shoves his hand out past the curtain for it, and Darren passes it over. Chris is sure that Darren's turned around; he can trust him that much at least, and there was the whole Darren-taking-his-pants-off-for-him-the-night-before thing, but still, Chris wraps the towel around his waist before stepping out of the shower, just to be sure.

True to his command, Darren's back facing the corner, his hands hilariously over his eyes as well. Chris snorts and then makes a face at the bad taste in his mouth, and fuck it, he knows Darren isn't squeamish. He leans over the sink and spits a few times before turning the faucet on and cupping his hands under it to drink from them.

"For the safety of my own mind, there was no blood just now, was there? Because I've heard horror stories," Darren asks without turning around, and Chris raises an eyebrow at his back.

"No, we're blood free, just gross and phlegm-y," he says, finally whipping his towel off and drying the rest of himself before bending over to towel over his hair. He sways dangerously and staggers when he rights himself again and mutters a "whoa" that has Darren twitching and clearly wanting to turn around. "I'm fine. Just... overdid it with the toweling," Chris says, moving again once his head isn't spinning quite so badly and shuffling into his clothes. Rolled up in Darren's sweatpants is a bright red pair of boxer briefs that Chris is sure he doesn't own. His cheeks burn as he glances over at Darren while he holds the underwear up. Did he really...

But it's all Chris has for now, so he steps into them without thinking about it for too long, wincing at how snug they are. Darren's sweatpants are predictably short on him, leaving his ankles bare, and they're slouchy enough in the ass that Chris is laughing under his breath before he can help himself. His shirt is tight across Chris's shoulders and his chest and stops right at his waistband. "God, you are seriously tiny," he says.

"Not where it counts," Darren replies, the smirk evident in his voice. "Is it safe to turn around, or will I get an eyepoke of penis?"

"You're safe. And I'm pretty sure that's not how... anything works, really, anyway."

Darren turns around. "Wow, you have... gotten taller, haven't you." He sounds... surprised.

"Well, not in the last five minutes or anything. Like I said, you're just short." Chris slides on his glasses and then tugs on the front of the shirt self-consciously.

"Hardy har," Darren says, coming closer to take Chris's damp towel from him. "It's not a bad thing, I just... didn't notice, I guess, since I was there and all."

"That... doesn't make any sense, Darren," Chris says, blinking, and he's still fiddling with the shirt hem and trying to tug his sweats up a little higher, but they keep sliding down his waist to rest on his hips.

"Yes it does!" Darren says. "You don't see what's right in front of you. You were right in front of me, so I didn't see you, like... grow."

"It wasn't a monumental moment in my life, I assure you." He can't help but smirk then after a second and lean his hip against the counter. "Though, didn't you wonder why your box was taller this year during promos?"

Darren squints. "You promised we wouldn't speak of it."

"We're not! I'm just saying. It happens."

"Guess so." Darren's still... just *looking* at him in a weird way, and Chris doesn't really know what to do about it. So he changes the subject.

"So, is it time for dinner yet? You bought all those groceries, the least I can do is eat some. And pay you for them later, of course."

"I charge in video game marathons and bed and breakfast services as well as sexual favors," Darren quips, waggling his eyebrows and then opening the door behind him. There's a burst of cold air, and Chris doesn't keep his house cool, but he'd gotten used to how stifling and warm the bathroom was from his shower, so he shivers and immediately sneezes.

"Damn it," he mutters, and Darren looks back at him and then his eyes get even *bigger*. How does he *do* that?

"One sec," Darren says, disappearing and then reappearing in a flash with a clean hoodie. Chris shrugs it on, and Darren zips it up and then bops under Chris's chin lightly with his finger and grins before leading

him to the kitchen. "I'll cook whatever you want, but the first thing on the menu is a heaping bowl of steaming broccoli."

"Dear God, no. I've cooperated with you, why must you torture me. I told you I don't have any launch codes." He tugs ineffectually against Darren's grip, his hand wrapped gently around Chris's wrist.

"Mostly to see your reaction," Darren says, grinning back at Chris over his shoulder. "Okay, enough exertion for awhile, Mr. Colfer. Sit." He then steps aside and guides Chris into one of the chairs while Chris grumbles the whole time.

"I'm *fine*. I managed a whole shower."

"And that's good enough for now."

Chris grumps some more, and Darren laughs and runs his hand through Chris's hair again. He scratches softly at Chris's scalp, and Chris leans obviously into the touch, pressing against Darren's hand. Darren chuckles, low. "You sure like that, don't you?"

Chris flushes and tips his head back further so he can narrow his eyes upside down at Darren. "You started it," he says, completely skillfully avoiding answering the question.

"It's just nice to know how to tame the savage Colfer." Darren lets his hand slide down Chris's neck, kneading over his skin until he reaches the top of his spine, and Chris groans quietly.

"M'not a savage."

Darren hums agreeably, and Chris lets his head tip forward a little and his eyes slide closed. There's a brief warm press right to the top of his wet hair, and he blinks at the table because he's pretty sure Darren just kissed his hair. But it's gone before he can process it and with one final scritch of Darren's fingers at the back of his head, that's gone too, and Darren's sticking his nose in the fridge to find something to cook. Chris twists around in the chair and hooks his arms and chin on the back of it, watching Darren quietly.

"So I have vegetable soup, and I could make grilled cheese. What veggies would you like, green beans, or this mix thing with asparagus?" He holds up two bags from the freezer, then his face softens into a smile. "What?"

"Nothing. Just.... thank you for taking care of me. I mean, really, I don't think I can repay you for this."

Darren's smile wobbles a little before growing bigger, and the high points of his cheeks flush pink. "It's really no problem, Chris, seriously. You saw how I had to fight Cory and Lea off tooth and nail. We all care about you, dude. Whether you like it or not."

Chris opens his mouth before he's even sure what to say, and finally he goes with, "Yeah, but this is more than the occasional check-in call or soup delivery. And I just... it's just really nice. Seriously."

The moment's ruined when another coughing fit wells up inside of him all of a sudden, and he has to twist to the side of the chair and press his forehead to his knees as he coughs into his lap violently, the familiar little tremors from it going down his back. He's not surprised when he hears the thunks of Darren setting down the vegetables and then Darren's slightly cool hand rubbing at his back. He drags his fingertips over and across and up and down while Chris lets it out, and it's almost like scratching but softer through his hoodie and with Darren's blunt nails. It's soothing.

He sighs when he's done and just stays where he is, muttering, "Son of a *bitch*," in a gravelly voice. "Ugh. Green beans, I guess. To... answer your question. Neither one sounds good, though."

Darren shrugs. "I'll skip the veggies, then. So hey, it's been about six hours, I think you can have some more cough syrup now. And I can set you up on the couch while I cook, if you want. Watch some TV, or nap."

"Cough syrup sounds excellent. And I'd rather sit up, my head's draining better this way, I think."

"Mmmm, delicious drainage," Darren says, and Chris groans as he rolls his eyes.

"Whatever, okay, I smelled the boys' changing rooms, and I saw that pile of tissues from that contest you had with Mark and Cory and Chord. I'm nowhere near as gross as you on any given day," Chris says, and Darren pauses midstep and turns and looks at him in horror.

"I have *no* idea what you're talking about."

"You're a liar, Darren Criss, and just for that, I want extra cheese." He pushes himself up while he says it and snaps his fingers, and Darren gives him a sloppy salute that ends with him flipping Chris off. But then he's leading Chris to the living room and moving a couple pillows he must've put there when Chris was out

like a light. He also apparently brought in one of Chris's spare blankets, and he's holding it up and eying Chris to climb in. Chris does so, curling his legs up under himself and tucking himself into the corner of the couch as Darren drapes the blanket over him.

"Good? Cozy? Are you cold?"

"I'm okay, this is... wait. This hoodie is yours too, isn't it?"

Darren looks sheepish again. "Well, I figured it went with the rest of the ensemble, so."

And okay, the box where he's storing things must have just reached its limit. "So everything I'm wearing belongs to you? Even though I'm in my own house?"

"Um. I can find you something else?"

"No, I just wanted to acknowledge verbally how strange that is. Carry on." Chris sinks back into the couch, and Darren jams his hands in his back pockets, watching Chris with an unreadable expression until he turns around and goes back to the kitchen.

He shifts awkwardly. He feels like he might've just jammed a hot poker in something that was... well, good, he guesses. He should've went with his first instinct and made a joke about being a mannequin for Abercrombie & Darren. That would've been better.

"Stop being stupid," he mutters to himself out loud and then grapples for the remote to turn the TV on. The Princess Bride's menu is still playing, and Chris wonders what the hell Darren even did when he was out, but he probably used the time to work. God, Chris was probably making Darren as behind in everything as he's going to be. He hates this part where he's coherent enough to feel all this *guilt*, fuck.

He flips through the channels and settles on an Oprah rerun, tucking his blanket higher up to his chin and leaning against one of his pillows to halfway watch it while he listens to Darren move around in the kitchen. He can hear Darren singing something that Chris doesn't recognize because Darren probably wrote it. He really should apologize, if he offended Darren. He's kind of been amazing, in a way that Chris doesn't really understand but absolutely does appreciate. He tries to think about what to say when Darren comes back.

Eventually, the singing stops, and Darren comes around the couch with a plate and two bowls balanced in some gravity-defying way. "Aaaand dinner is suh-ved, suh."

Chris sits up a little more and mutes the TV, and Darren sets one of the bowls in his lap gingerly. "Careful, it's still hot," he says quietly, dropping the ridiculous accent and giving Chris a brief smile when he looks up at him. He sets his own bowl and the plate with the sandwiches down on the coffee table and heads back, returning in a second with more juice for the both of them.

"Thanks, again," Chris says when he's handed his glass, and Darren *hmmms* in response and sits down carefully beside Chris, leaving enough space between them to set the plate.

"So, I learned from this morning's mistake, and you might hate me, but your grilled cheese is not proper, warmblooded grilled cheese," Darren says after a minute. Chris looks up from where he'd been stirring his soup idly while he thought of what to say and glances at the plate. One of the sandwiches is considerably whiter and less toasted than the other. "I just thought you'd want something soft. Apparently toast on a sore throat isn't fun, who knew. Was that okay?"

"I... yeah, that's okay. It's... really considerate, just like you've been this whole time, and I'm sorry if I was insulting before, or made it weird. I'm really grateful." Chris looks down at his soup for a second, delicious-looking vegetable soup with little chunks of pasta. "I just... don't usually have people take care of me like this. Not since I was a kid. It's just... unusual."

Darren smiles warmly and ducks his head a little, eyelashes fanning out shadows on his cheeks. "Clearly you just need to be spoiled," he says, glancing up at Chris again. It's one of his more charming moves, and Chris has seen him work it a *thousand* times before, and it should not affect him like this, making him sit up a little straighter and his breath come a little quicker.

He won't think about it. He shakes his head and then shrugs one shoulder. "Well, you're doing a good job if that's what you're trying." He busies himself with eating some soup, then, and it's not until the third bite that his mouth is warm enough and his throat clear enough that he can taste much of it, but then, "Holy crap, this is good."

"It's out of a can, but it's some fancy brand Lea told me about. I got a couple more, so."

"Awesome. Thank you again."

Darren grins into his soup. "I'm getting an awesome Christmas gift, aren't I?"

"You should just make a wishlist on Amazon at this point. I'll be sleep-ordering you stuff for months."

"I dunnoooo... I still think that sexual favors might be the way to go." Darren blinks, and then looks up at Chris. "I didn't say that."

"You so did," Chris says, snorting. Darren's joking is going to his brain. Both their brains. "Perving on the sick like that."

"Oh yes, the clammy skin and fever flush really does it for me," Darren chuckles. "And we won't even talk about the snot, oh baby, oh baby."

"Jerk off material for *weeks*," Chris mumbles, smirking a little but quickly busying himself with tearing off a hunk of his sandwich to dip in his soup.

Darren puts on a high, breathy voice. "Ohhh yeah, baby, c'mon and cough allll over me." He winks at Chris and then takes a huge bite of his sandwich.

He probably didn't mean it, but his voice *was* kind of sexy, and the pet names are really starting to get to Chris. He disguises his shifting by leaning forward to get his juice. He can feel Darren watching him, and then Darren clears his throat and says, "But you know I'm joking, right? I don't actually fetishize your mucus."

"You're *actually* ruining my appetite is what you're doing," Chris says before taking a long swallow of juice, his throat bobbing. The first wave of it stings his throat, and he winces and brings his free hand up to his neck to rub absently at the dip at the base of it as he drinks.

When he brings his cup back down, he realizes that Darren is staring at him. Like, *really* staring, and when his eyes flick up from Chris's neck to his face, he looks down and blushes. Chris feels himself smiling. Darren just looks so... Chris doesn't know what's going on. Darren probably needs sleep. *Lots* of sleep. "What is it?" he asks quietly, tearing off another bite of sandwich as he watches Darren think.

"I just... you... play with your neck." Darren drags his fingers over his own neck, across the spot exposed by the deep vee of his shirt. "I figured you don't know you do it. It's just... yeah."

"O-oh," Chris says, fingers twitching as he shoves the urge down to bring one hand right back up to his own neck on impulse. "So... you... felt the urge to enlighten me?"

Darren's blush gets even brighter. "Something like that, I guess. It's time for some more cough syrup, you know."

"I still have soup left. And you didn't really answer the question."

"You're pushy now that you're mostly conscious."

Chris flashes him a smile with too much teeth and arches a brow. "You missed this," he says. "It'll only get worse as I get better. This is what you signed up for." His tone turns sing-song by the end of it, and Darren shakes his head.

"I know. I'm in for the long haul. I've been preparing for this moment for years."

It's quiet for a while, and for some reason Chris feels like sharing. He just.. he *wants* to talk about it. Which is weird. "I do... know about the neck thing. For the record. Though you... already figured that out. With the... skritchng. And the backrub."

"I... I did. Yeah. With the... yeah." Darren's got his hands wrapped around his soup bowl, and he's staring at it pretty intently now. He's blushing still, and... man, he's really rattled. Huh.

Chris clears his throat and then yawns and groans, letting his head fall back on the couch. "You've got to be kidding me." He glances over at Darren and makes a face. "I'm never sleeping again after this. I won't let myself. This is ridiculous." It's a convenient change of subject that he's probably making too much of a show of, but right now, he doesn't care. If he keeps going on about the *other* thing, he'll end up saying something he'll regret.

"Well, we could watch a movie? Or play some video games. Or I could annoy you with more Michigan stories."

Chris leans forward long enough to set the rest of his food on the coffee table and then settles back on the couch. "Hmmm, hilariously terrible stories from your misspent youth or Super Smash Brothers."

"Hey, that could be a two for one deal, if you play your cards right."

"How much sauce do I gotta hit you with first?" Chris asks, the corner of his mouth turning up in a slow smile.

"Stories you get sober. Too drunk and you're likely to get accidental making out instead." Darren blinks, and then stands up suddenly. "You want some more juice?"

Chris doesn't know what to say, so he just nods jerkily and hands Darren his cup. Darren takes it, his fingertips brushing against Chris's for a brief second, and then he all but runs into the kitchen. It takes him way too long in there to just be pouring juice. When Darren finally comes back, Chris takes the juice from him with a soft smile. "Thanks. Do you want to watch a movie?"

"I think that'd be better for my reputation," Darren says, returning Chris's smile. He looks less... jangled and shaken than before, and Chris sighs in relief and waves his hand to his DVD racks.

"You can just pick something, I don't care," he says preemptively, and Darren taps his chin as he moseys over to look.

"You may not have a lot of movies, but I want you to know that what your collection lacks in size it makes up for in quality." He turns and gives Chris a smirk and an eyebrow, and then turns back and grabs the first movie. "*Moulin Rouge*? Always a classic..."

Chris rolls his eyes at the lame joke and allows himself to laugh but points accusingly at Darren and says, "Only if you agree to cry with me when she dies."

"Everybody cries when she dies, it's in like the top five saddest moments in movie history."

"This is true. I just wanted to make my demands known ahead of time."

"Duly noted." He sticks the DVD in, and then comes back to the couch. "Oh, wait, cough medicine." He disappears into the kitchen and comes back with the little plastic cup.

"Oh. It's cherry? I couldn't smell it before."

"That's what the bottle says, though, I don't know if I believe it."

Chris throws it back in one fell swoop, and it's still thick and cloying, but it goes down all right. Darren takes the cup away then flops down on the couch, closer to Chris than he was now that there's not a plate between them.

Chris lifts his blanket up and smiles almost shyly at Darren. He's in this weird state of halfway sleepy and halfway too awake and wired, skin buzzing, and he keeps finding himself just *looking* at Darren, and damn. But then Darren settles the blanket on top of himself too and scoots closer until their sides are pressed together so that he can cover himself fully with it as he presses play. Darren puts his arm behind Chris on the couch, and it's just easy to lean into his shoulder. Chris isn't as cold as he was, but Darren is still warm, and yeah, a lot more comfortable than the seats at the doctor.

Darren settles in more against him, and as the opening piracy warnings and disclaimers are slowly running through, Chris turns his head to talk quietly right in Darren's ear. "So, there *are* hilariously terrible stories from your youth? Ones that you haven't blabbed about yet, I mean."

Darren makes a show of miming his lips zipped shut and then unzips them long enough to say, "I only tell those stories to my most trusted amigos. Are you one of my most trusted amigos, Chris?"

Chris huffs out a warm breath against Darren's neck and flaps his hand at the two of them and how they're sitting. "Something tells me I am. *Weird*."

"But kinda nice?" Darren says, the question mark obvious at the end. Chris nods, and Darren grins at him. "Most of the stories you don't know don't cast me in the best light. Or they're about my exes. So, potentially hilarious, but also cringe-worthy."

"Well, those are the best kind of stories," Chris says around a yawn. He rests his cheek against Darren's shoulder and feels Darren tip his head to rest against Chris's hair. Chris smiles at the television as Ewan starts narrating.

Chris doesn't chance trying to sing along, but he hums, and Darren sings all of Christian's parts, which is just.... damn, he'd be a fine Christian, if that one wacky dream Chris had once is to be believed. Chris had also looked pretty awesome in a top hat and sparkling spandex, but that is still something Chris tries not to think about too hard.

Just after the Elephant Love Song, Chris feels his eyelids steadily drooping more closed, his vision turning into tiny slits. He grumbles under his breath, and he turns a little more until his face is pressed into Darren's neck, so most of what he can see is blurry stubble and the flashes of color from the television on Darren's skin. He sighs out and thinks he feels Darren shiver, but he's probably already dreaming. Sort of dreaming. Awake dreaming.

"Going back to sleep?" Darren whispers softly after lowering the volume of the movie by a lot so it's just a buzz in Chris's ear. Chris nods, his cheek rubbing against Darren's shoulder, and Darren pats the blanket and slips Chris's glasses off before curling his hand around Chris's knee. "That's okay, you need to rest."

"Mm. But quality entertainment," Chris mutters, struggling to stay awake. This is such bullshit, he *just* slept.

"The magic of technology," Darren begins, tilting his head so he can lean in and whisper like it's a secret, "is that I can pause this, and we can finish it when you wake up."

"But then what'll you do?"

Darren shrugs the shoulder Chris hasn't commandeered. "Maybe I'll sleep too. You've inspired me, Chris Colfer."

"Mhmm, s'what I do, I'm an inspiration. A sleepspiration," Chris mumbles, and Darren tries to shush Chris around his own whispered laugh, but it totally fails.

"Must be some good stuff in that cough syrup," he says, and Chris nods again, drawing it out this time because Darren's shirt is really soft against his cheek, and it's just nice to rub against it and feel Darren's warmth through the material. He yawns again, and Darren's arm around him slips lower, his hand cupping Chris's elbow and then curling, tucking Chris even closer against him. With his other hand, he really does pause the movie and then uses Chris's master remote to turn off the lights. Chris knew installing that would come in super handy.

There's a few gentle presses to Chris's hair, one right after the other, and Chris realizes it's a small litany of kisses that Darren's giving him yet again, and he just... he could lock it away, but that's beginning to take a lot of *effort* to do, but all he can muster up to say is, "Are you actually tryin' t'kiss me better?" And wow, he sounds sleepier than he thought he was.

Darren's quiet for a minute, and Chris is tempted to look up at him but doesn't let himself, waiting and halfway drifting as he feels Darren tense and then relax, and his fingers flex against Chris's arm.

"...maybe," Darren says finally. "Is it working?"

Chris uncrosses his legs and leans a little more heavily against Darren so that he can tuck his knees up against Darren's thigh and twist his socked feet up against his ass under the blanket. All the shifting takes it out of him, and he yawns loudly enough that his jaw pops. He *hmmms*. "Maybe," he answers, and Darren makes a little sound low in his throat that Chris can't identify in this state because he's falling fast asleep before he can even try.

Chapter Four

Chris wakes up, and it's still light out; though, it's darker than it was. Darren's humming quietly, and he has his feet propped up on the coffee table, ankles crossed, and one socked foot bobbing back and forth to whatever he's humming. Darren's cheek is resting against Chris's hair, and Chris can feel the faint vibrations of whatever the song is all around him.

His palm is moving in soft strokes over Chris's shoulder, back and forth, as if he doesn't realize he's doing it. Chris takes his time just basking in the quiet because his chest isn't even hurting all that much at the moment, and there's no itch in his throat where he needs to cough, and he knows Darren wouldn't let him work right now even if he begged. But he *could*, he thinks. He's possibly feeling well enough that it would be feasible. If only Darren would relinquish his damn phone. However, for now there is literally nothing to do, so he settles with enjoying that for a moment and listening to the total quiet of his apartment, save for Darren's humming, and the hushed brushing of his fingertips over Chris's sleeve. (Well, Darren's sleeve. *Oh*, - oh, right, he's in Darren's clothes.)

He shifts a little, then, at that realization, and watches as Darren's foot stops swaying, his fingers stop moving, and the humming stops. "Oh, hey, sleepyhead," Darren says, just a bare notch about a whisper. "You weren't knocked out very long."

"Think I'm using up my sleep quota for the month. Or the year." He shoots for a soft voice, but it doesn't come out at all, so he gets no more than a whisper. It's loud enough, though, considering they're so close. So *very* close.

"The fact that you have a sleep quota, and that I really believe you would, is part of the problem, you know," Darren says, and Chris raises one arm to smack ineffectually at Darren's chest with the back of his hand. He's too lazy and drowsy feeling to move it after, though, and Darren takes the opportunity to reach up and take Chris's hand in his, threading their fingers together and bringing their hands down to his lap.

He smooths his thumb over the ridges and dips of Chris's knuckles slowly, and Chris tips his head down enough so he can watch. His focus is zoomed in to just Darren, and how warm and close he is, and it's really too much. Which is why he's relieved when Darren finally breaks the silence again by asking, "So, how you feeling? Any better?"

"I think this is the first time my chest hasn't hurt in four days. It's so wonderful. I'm gonna send Dr. Morris a puppy."

Darren laughs, and it rumbles his chest under Chris's cheek. "I can see you picking out one now. 'Hmmm, what puppy do I get the life-saving hot doctor?'"

"You're terrible, and I hate you," Chris says without any heat to it, and Darren laughs again, softer. When Chris tips his head up to look at Darren, Darren's watching him so intently it makes Chris suck in a breath, and - oh. There's the rattling he knows so well. "Ugh."

That seems to snap Darren out of it, though, if only to shake his hand free from Chris's and bring it up to Chris's chest. He rests his hand flat over Chris's heart and then starts palming smooth circles, his fingers slipping underneath the hoodie, and his palm hot through the thin cotton of the t-shirt.

It actually helps Chris focus, though, and take in a deep breath without coughing, and Darren grins. "I Googled. It doesn't really do much, like, legit helping, but it's great for relaxing." He nudges Chris's shoulder with the hand still wrapped around him. "It helps that you're secretly a very tactile person."

Chris rolls his eyes and scoffs, the sound thick with cold that makes him smack his tongue against the roof of his mouth in distaste. He feels hot all over, and not just from the blankets. The hottest parts are everywhere he's coming into contact with Darren, including the high points of color on his cheeks because Darren is just *watching* him again. "I - yeah, maybe, you don't know me," he tries, which just makes Darren's insufferably red mouth curve up in one corner in an amused little smile.

Chris shifts again, sliding out of Darren's hold and shaking the blanket off of him. "I need to brush my teeth. This is disgusting."

"Disgusting's a strong word, but. Give me a yell if you need help?" Darren almost looks... disappointed, his curved arm still perched on the back of the couch. Chris shakes his head, mostly to remind himself of what's real here, but he smiles before he turns to head down the hallway.

He distracts himself as he rounds the corner into the bathroom by thinking of increasingly more hilarious ways that he could get Darren's attention with if needed since actual yelling is out of the picture. He thinks about setting the smoke detector off with one of the candles in his cabinet, or dropping dead in a pretend faint, or tossing a carefully aimed toothpaste tube cap at Darren's messy bedhead.

He doesn't actually need to do any of that, though, which is *disappointing*, geez, because Darren pops his head in, a cheesy smile plastered on his face. He's holding his own toothbrush and toothpaste in his hand, and he waves with it. "The door was open, so I figured you were decent, and then I thought, 'hey! My breath is pretty kickin' right now. I could join Golden Globe-winning Chris Colfer in epic teeth brushage.'"

He's a little too bouncy, and Chris narrows his eyes suspiciously at the pep in his step. Darren just grins at him again, though, and nudges him over with gentle hip bumps until Chris gives in and moves so they can share the mirror.

Darren starts trying to hold a conversation mid-brush, his mouth full of foam, and Chris is pretty sure he's not forming actual words, his eyes bright when he meets Chris's in the mirror. The smell of mint is heavy enough that even Chris can pick it up, which means it has to be pretty damn strong. Granted, it's enough for two, and he's just... he's not used to sharing his bathroom with other people. It's so... it's weirdly *intimate*, even after all the hardcore cuddling they've been doing, or Darren *feeding* him for God's sake.

When Chris doesn't answer, eventually Darren grins around a mouthful of foam and then leans over the sink to rinse his mouth. Chris turns away, leaning against the counter so he doesn't have to look at the two of them, elbow to elbow in his bathroom. If he keeps looking he thinks he might start asking questions, and he's not sure where that's going to lead them.

Once he thinks he's brushed all the taste of cold and cough syrup and stale soup out of his mouth, he rinses and then opens the mirror, allowing himself to take a few moments with the mirror blocking Darren's face and his smiles and his *eyelashes* as Chris takes longer than he needs to to dig for his floss.

"Ooooh, floss me, my main man," Darren says once Chris snaps the mirror closed again, and he bounces on his toes some.

"Did you take a hit of straight caffeine before coming in here?" Chris asks as he flips the top open and lets Darren pinch the end of the floss between his fingertips so Chris can pull the box back and then snap the lid closed and cut it off. Darren winds the ends around his fingers, a little too tightly, Chris notices, before answering.

"Nope, just being myself!" he says, too sharp, and maybe it's just how much he's been... exposed, for lack of better words, to Darren lately, or how quiet and easy-going Darren's been (Chris doesn't really know a time when Darren *hasn't* been easy-going, honestly), but it's too forced, too bright.

"Yourself on speed, maybe," Chris says, unwinding his own floss and then twirling it tight and leaning in close to the mirror. His arm is pressed firmly against Darren's, warm and solid, and they're leaning in enough that their whole sides meet at the middle of the counter, and Chris finds himself sighing and slipping right back into Darren's nearness and comfortableness way too easily, no matter if Darren's a little tense all against him.

So they stand there, flossing their teeth together, and it's possibly the weirdest moment Chris has had with another human in a very long time. Whenever Darren catches his eye, he grins around his thumbs, waggling his eyebrows ridiculously. Chris can't really help but grin back at him, but it's still just so strange. Chris almost wishes he hadn't gotten up, just so that they could still be pressed close together on the couch, and not... doing whatever this is.

Finally Chris is done, and he drops his floss into the trash, his sleeve pulling up more than expected when he reaches out because it's not *his* sleeve, it's Darren's.

Darren finishes right behind him and stretches past Chris to reach the trash can. He turns back just in time to see Chris tugging at the sleeves. Chris grins when Darren rolls his eyes and crosses his arms over his chest. "Okay, fine, there's a slight height difference there. I'm accepting this."

"Are you, Darren? *Are you?*" Chris asks, and Darren relaxes just a smidge as he grins, his shoulders lowering. Chris hadn't noticed how high they were raised up around his ears until then.

"Oh, come on, here, give me," Darren says, reaching forward before Chris can protest and grabbing Chris's forearm, holding him steady as Darren works the sleeve back down and then switches arms, stretching his hoodie out to make it fit Chris better.

"I could just put on one of my own," Chris says quietly. "Rather than stretching yours out."

"Nah. Now I can claim it as yet another noble sacrifice in the name of... of friendship," Darren says, smiling past the slight stammer. He looks up at Chris and winks, his hand sliding down Chris's arm until their fingers brush and curl against each other for a second before Darren drops his hand away. "But I really don't mind. I have five thousand of them from school alone."

Chris blinks, and holds back from chasing after Darren's hand with his own. "Well, it is pretty warm. And it has the fuzzy lining, which is always nice."

"I have really good taste," Darren says with a nod that makes one flyaway curl bounce against his forehead. "Besides, it looks better on you than it does me." He bites his lip and then grins too big. "Even when sick, you can't stop being hot stuff, Chris," he says, more joking than before, and then he throws a glance at the sink. "Thanks for the, um... for the floss."

"No problem." Chris's voice comes out as a whisper again. The compliment didn't seem quite like Darren's other little throw-away comments that he doles out to everyone like candy, making them feel appreciated when they're having a bad day. It felt like... more. Chris has no idea what to do.

He clears his throat and winces when it burns a little bit, and what is unmistakably a low, cooing sound escapes from Darren's mouth before it even looks like he can help it. Chris watches as Darren swallows hard, his eyes flickering over Chris's face and then down to his throat. "Hurts still?"

"Just when I do fun things like use it at all," Chris says flatly with a shrug, and Darren huffs out a quiet laugh.

"Poor thing," he murmurs, and everything's moving in slow motion as Chris watches Darren's hand come up and then feels his fingers curve around the side of Chris's neck so that his thumb can rub gently over the smooth column of Chris's throat and the bump of his adam's apple.

Chris's breath catches. "Darren, I -" He wants to make some crack about Darren's utter dependence on touch therapy, but nothing comes to him because Darren's fingers are such a light pressure and yet so heavy all at the same time, with how much Chris is focusing on them, his eyes glued to Darren's face.

"Chris..." It hangs in the air between them, like the start of a thought, but the rest of it doesn't come. They just stay like that, with Darren's thumb smoothing softly over Chris's skin, his hand warm on Chris's neck. Darren touched him like this once before, when they were filming their sex scene that wasn't, but that didn't give him a thrill like this.

It's Chris's turn to swallow reflexively, and Darren's thumb skids over the bob of his adam's apple on its glide up, and it spirals in circles on its trip back down.

Chris bites his lip and flexes his fingers against his thighs because if he doesn't, he's going to reach up and grab Darren's hand and just *tug* until Darren's closer, and --

"You... you called *me* the secretly tactile person," he settles on instead, even if his brain is two seconds behind his mouth, and he's a little surprised he managed to say anything at all.

Darren blinks, too, but his thumb doesn't still. He smiles up at Chris softly, and Chris feels the press of Darren's toes nudging against his own before he notices that Darren's shuffled closer. "Mine isn't a secret, really," Darren says, eventually, and Chris isn't even sure what he's talking about for a long second.

"Darren, what..." Chris whispers. He swallows again, ignoring the sting, and tries again. "What are you... what?"

Darren opens his mouth and then closes it and slides his hand over to rest on Chris's shoulder instead, his fingertips digging in just a smidge, like he's trying to anchor himself to something. "I--" He breaks off and ducks his head sheepishly.

After a moment, he takes in a deep breath, and looks up at Chris again. "I'm making this a weird afternoon. And you've been standing up too long. I can't in good conscience let you have this much freedom. Do you want to go and finish the movie?" he asks.

"I... sure, okay." The moment is escaping again, and Chris doesn't know how he feels about it. Darren's just been *touching* him so much, and it's been so... amazing, really. Chris doesn't think he wants it to stop.

"Great. Awesome," Darren says, walking backwards out of the bathroom and then down the hall. He hops over the arm of the couch and falls into the corner of it unceremoniously, tugging the blanket out from under him and holding it up for Chris.

Chris isn't sure... if anything is different. If he can just... slide in next to Darren and fit himself in just right, or if there's a bubble now, or. There *was* a bubble, when they weren't on camera, or drunk, before Darren invaded his house, and now *Chris* is the one being all... invade-y. It's not fair.

He opts to sit primly on the couch, a handwidth of space between him and Darren as Darren drapes the blanket back over him, practically tucking him in.

"Are you... comfortable over there?" Darren asks, his gaze warm, and Chris flushes a little and shrugs one shoulder as an answer. Darren grins and holds his arm out, looking as relieved as Chris feels after a moment, with the clear invitation. "C'mere," Darren says softly, and Chris leans in.

They've switched sides, and it takes Chris a minute to find the most comfortable spot, shifting against Darren and sliding his cheek down until he's resting against Darren's chest, his arm awkwardly pinned between them. Darren raises up for a second, though, and Chris is able to slide his arm around, draping it low across Darren's back.

"Good?" Darren asks, his hand settling in between Chris's shoulders, and he scratches at Chris's back dully through the layers.

"Mmhmm," Chris says. "If you make me pass out again, I'm punching you, though."

Darren laughs his rumbly laugh again. "Duly noted. Let's turn on the movie, then, give your brain something to do."

"You coooooould give me my phone, you know." Chris can't help but give it a shot when Darren gives him an opening like that.

Darren jostles his shoulder until Chris looks up at him, and Darren purses his lips in a thin line. "Do you think I'm that easy?"

Chris bites the corner of his lip but can't help smirking anyway. "Weeeeeell..."

Darren tips his head back on the couch and groans. "I get no respect."

"It's nothing you haven't intimidated yourself, really, you shouldn't be surprised."

"How about we watch the movie, and then I'll make dinner, and then if you're still feeling good we'll see?"

"Fiiiine, I guess." He jabs a finger gently in Darren's side, just to get him to look down so Chris can smile at him.

"Incapable of relaxing, aren't you." Darren's hand slides up from his shoulder to his neck, then up into his hair, his fingers slipping through the strands.

Chris shivers and then instantly melts, his head falling back down to Darren's shoulder and his eyes slipping closed for a long second. "Well, *now* I'm not, when you cheat like that," he grumbles, and Darren snorts out another laugh.

"It's not my fault I can read you like a book," he says, scritchng his nails over the base of Chris's skull, and Chris makes a small, contented noise low in his throat.

"Darren, I..." Chris closes his eyes and braces for what he feels he needs to say next. "This is really nice."

Chris feels Darren freeze for a second before he's letting out a long, cool breath. Chris determinedly keeps his eyes closed now because just waiting for Darren to say something back is torture enough without waiting and *watching*.

"Yeah, it... it really is," Darren says, and Chris lets himself breathe again. "I'm glad that you let me help," he adds, even quieter than before. "For whatever good I've done. I... like being able to do this kind of stuff for you."

Chris just doesn't even know what to say to that, but he can't really help it when his hand tightens around Darren's side, just above his hip. "It's... really nice of you."

He rides out Darren's shrug and then resettles his cheek with a sigh.

"I told you, I don't mind. You... you shouldn't've had to do this alone anyway." Darren's fingers slide up through his hair again and then back down, combing it halfway back in place. "It's important to let yourself be coddled."

"Even still," Chris says, deciding to fuck it and sling his other arm across Darren's belly, sliding his palm flat across the narrow plain and then clasping his fingers together at Darren's side. It pins him close to Darren, and Darren's hand stills in Chris's hair. He can hear him gasp, he can *feel* it, but he ignores it, like he's been ignoring... so, so many things.

He licks his lips. "I'm glad that you, um... that you... coddled me?" It's a little unsure at the end because that doesn't feel right. "I'm just glad you were here, Darren," he ends up whispering.

A quiet moment hangs between them, and then he feels the gentle press of what he now knows is Darren kissing the top of his head. It's just... Chris doesn't even know what it is anymore.

Chris tries to barrel on, but the not looking is reaching his limit, so he opens his eyes and tilts his head up to glance at Darren, gauge his reaction. Darren just smiles gently at him, though, and slides his hand down to squeeze the back of Chris's neck.

"So... so, thanks, I guess. I mean, thanks, definitely. I might've said it when I was kind of fevered, maybe. Hopefully. But, I just... wanted to say it now. When it's for real."

"You're welcome," Darren whispers. They're so close, Chris could just lean up and...

Chris inhales, and of course it's just the right thing to send him into another coughing jag. It's not nearly as bad as before, but he still leans away to not cough on Darren, curling against his chest.

"Shhhh, shhhh, just breathe," Darren murmurs, sitting up a little more so he can curl around Chris and pet his hair. He reaches forward and grabs Chris's half-empty glass of orange juice. Once Chris feels like his lungs have decided to stay put, he pushes himself up again, his hand on Darren's belly, and he looks up at Darren, his eyes watery all over again.

"Great," he says. "I'd missed that."

Darren rolls his eyes fondly and holds up the glass, and Chris wrinkles his nose because orange juice right after he's brushed his teeth is *awful*, but his throat is dry and tacky and scratchy, and he'll take it. "Fine, fine," he says, curling his hand around the glass, but Darren doesn't let go, just moving with Chris and helping him bring the cup to his mouth and tip it back carefully, letting Chris take a shallow drink.

It tastes like ass, just like Chris knew it would, but even at room temperature, it's colder than the fire in his throat. "Thanks," he says finally, chasing the taste of minty orange on his lips with his tongue and making a face.

"God, that face, here, okay, I'll suffer with you," Darren says, taking a swallow of the juice as well and shuddering full-on at the taste.

"What a pal," Chris says, curling his hand in a loose fist and rubbing his knuckles up and down over Darren's belly idly.

Darren leans forward to sit down the orange juice and grabs the remote. "Let's go see Satine, shall we?"

Chris smiles into Darren's shirt. "Yes, let's."

They're quiet as they watch for a little while, but after the coughing jag, Chris can't get comfortable again. He keeps bending in half a little more, his head sliding down further until his cheek resting right above his hand on Darren's belly, and a low, burning ache is settling in the base of his back.

Darren laughs suddenly, then, the movement of it nearly shaking Chris from his precarious perch. "Chris, what are you doing? That's gotta be hell on you, and you're supposed to be relaxing. I have a perfectly good lap going to waste over here."

Chris clucks his tongue. "You are so..."

"Irresistible, is how you were going to finish that. Now come on, streeetch out," Darren says, rubbing his hand down Chris's arm and down his side to his hip. Chris sighs and slides his legs out and down the length of the couch until his toes can tuck into the corner of the arm and the seat. Darren pulls the blanket off just long enough to billow it out, making Chris sneeze from the breeze as Darren fans it down over Chris's legs.

But then Darren is sitting back and patting his lap with the most obnoxious look on his face. Chris sighs, and nerves are twisting all up inside him for some reason, now of all times, as he rests his hand on Darren's knee and then guides himself down until his cheek is pressed against Darren's sturdy thigh.

"See, isn't that better?" Darren says softly. His hand lands on Chris's head again, his fingertips just brushing the edge of Chris's forehead.

"Yeah. Thank you. You know, again."

"You're welcome again," Darren says, an amused lilt to his voice, and Chris thumps him hard on the knee. "Ow, ow, okay, fine, you play dirty. But I'll get my revenge before you know it, just wait. I'm still in charge here."

"Okay, suuuure you are." Chris lets his fingers wrap over Darren's knee.

"Totally in charge, *amico mio*."

"Yep. Didn't doubt you for a minute," Chris murmurs as Darren's fingers start dragging slowly through his hair again, starting from his forehead and combing back, only to start all over every few seconds. Chris's

fingers flex, and he sighs, finally letting himself relax into it. He sags into the couch and rests his head more fully in Darren's lap, sighing out against Darren's sweats as he tries to focus on the movie.

He's really not tired at all, because he feels like he's slept a lifetime, but it's nice to just be relaxed like this, curled up with Darren touching him so softly, so carefully.

When Satine starts coughing and can't stop, Darren's hand slides down to Chris's back, and he starts rubbing circles, just like he does when Chris is hacking up all his insides. Chris laughs quietly and twists until he can look up at Darren. From where he's lying, Darren's half-covered in shadows, from his hair and his lashes, and from the curve of his bottom lip on his chin, all darker save for when the television bursts some color on his face.

"Are you worried I'm gonna get inspired?" Chris asks, grinning wide and evil and showing teeth.

Darren rolls his eyes. "Can't be too careful. You might channel Satine, and we all know how that would end. You're not dying on my watch."

"I'll try to keep that in mind," Chris says, turning back to face the TV so Darren can't see what is undoubtedly a dopey expression scrunching up his face. He feels Darren's knuckles press in a little and graze down his spine, and he arches into it like a cat, his hand sliding up Darren's thigh from his knee and patting the curve of it in response.

Darren pauses, just for a moment, his thigh tensing under Chris's hand. Chris thinks about moving it, but. He doesn't really want to. In a few seconds, Chris feels him exhale, relaxing again under Chris's hand. Darren's hand moves again, this time to curl his fingers around Chris's side gently, along his ribs.

Chris leans back a little, feeling the weight of Darren's hand on him. He's sore, just from laying around in so many places so much, and he stretches, flexing his toes and then stretching his arm out in front of himself and circling his wrist until it pops. When he resituates himself again, he crosses his arms on Darren's thigh so he can pillow his head on them, tucking the fingertips of his left hand in the crease of Darren's hip and belly and then settling again.

"Really, *really* bad at relaxing," Darren mutters, his voice sounding a shade breathier than before.

"Had too much relaxing. That's the problem," Chris mumbles because they're coming up on his favorite part, and after the stretch, he feels a little shaken out and looser now, better, and Darren's hand skates up his ribs then back down, idly petting him with slow strokes.

"No such thing," Darren says, squeezing Chris's side a little before falling quiet again.

Even though he has seen this movie at least fifteen times, he still feels his heart swell when Satine sings back to the retreating Christian, and when he's running back to the stage, he feels Darren's hand tighten around his side again. Chris shifts his hand so he can squeeze softly at Darren's knee.

A few moments later, Darren whispers, "Tell me a story, Christian," with Satine because he's *evil*, but Chris takes some comfort in the thickness of his voice. Christian clutches Satine closer, and Chris shifts some, spreading his arms a little more on Darren's thigh until he's nearly hugging it, clinging to it as he feels a couple tears fall onto Darren's sweats.

"Ewan McGregor should not be that good," Darren mutters once the camera pans up to the windmill and Christian's sobs fade out. His hand leaves Chris's side just for a second and there's a loud sniffle, and Chris looks up just in time to see Darren wiping his eyes. Darren glances down at him and grins sheepishly. "Shut up."

"Ugh, whatever, we said we would," Chris says, wiping his own eyes on his sleeve and swallowing around the lump in his throat.

"Every time," Darren mutters, and his hand finds its way to Chris's hair again, stroking at the soft space behind his ear. Chris just keeps holding on to Darren's thigh.

"Yep," Chris says, only half paying attention to the last few minutes of it as Darren rubs circles behind Chris's ear and then a little lower, to the corner of his jaw, then down to his neck. Chris squeezes Darren's thigh, and when the movie ends, Darren pauses the credits so they can sit in the quiet and sniffle together.

Eventually, Darren snuffles again, and then shifts a little in his seat, like he's getting ready to stand. "Well, are you hungry? I'll make us some dinner."

"I could eat," Chris says, and for the first time in about four days, his appetite really kicks in at the mention of food, and his stomach growls. "Okay, yes, hungry."

He pushes himself up reluctantly and sits back on the couch, criss-crossing his legs. When he finally looks over at Darren, Darren's pink in the face, and his eyes are red-rimmed, and Chris can't keep himself from going, "Awwwwwwwww." *Payback.*

Darren nudges Chris's shoulder with his own. "Hey, you don't look any better than I possibly do, I promise," he says, wagging a finger in Chris's face, and Chris laughs and then winces when it bothers his throat. *Jesus Christ.*

"Yeah, but," he points at his face, "You've seen me like this five million times. I haven't seen elusive Darren Criss tears. Allow me a moment to bask."

"Fine, bask in my misfortune. You're a terrible person," Darren shoots back, shoving his hands through his hair to push it back from his face.

"Am not. Look, I can be nice. I'll show you," Chris says, only second-guessing himself for a second as he reaches forward and grabs a tissue, but hey. Darren's been doing it for him, and so much more, anyway. Chris smiles as he reaches up, cautiously.

Darren's eyes flutter shut, and he tips his head up as Chris swipes the tissue over his cheek and dabs at the corners of his eyes. "Mm, thank you," Darren says quietly, and Chris thinks his heart actually flutters a little bit with how warm and cozy Darren sounds. Which is just... ugh.

"See? I'm not a terrible person. I'm actually really awesome," Chris insists, and Darren opens his eyes as he grins at him.

"Fine. Then what does Mr. Not-A-Terrible-Person-Who-Is-Actually-Really-Awesome Colfer want to eat?"

"Was there any real food in the Lea Michele Care Package?" Chris can't really stop himself from stroking his thumb over the rise of Darren's cheek. Darren's eyes lock to his, and he feels Darren's palm cup his knee softly, like he can't help but reach out.

"I... may have swapped out frozen hamburgers for the portabello mushrooms in the mushroom burger recipe she emailed me."

Chris slips his hand a little lower, just to curl under Darren's jaw, and he smiles shyly, all his insides feeling tense and ready to spring. He processes Darren's answer after a second too long, and then smiles wider, finally letting his hand fall. "Oh, good, you're amazing," he says.

Darren clears his throat and pulls his hand away too, buffing his nails on his shirt and then blowing them off before winking at Chris. "I do what I can," he says, still an octave too low to sound casual.

"I think I could help? I haven't coughed in a while, and I feel pretty rested."

"You don't have to, I can get it..."

"Darren, look. You're one of the few people who will probably understand what I truly mean when I tell you how *incredibly fucking bored* I am."

Darren's laugh bubbles out of him, sudden and loud, but then he nods and rakes his fingers through his hair again. "Yeah... Yeah, okay, fine. But, the first sign of cough or snuffle or shakiness, or if you *breathe funny*, I'm putting you back on couch arrest, mister," he says, eyebrows raised in what Chris figures he means is a serious expression, but it's not working. Chris salutes anyway, though, with a roll of his eyes.

"Good, then let's make dinner!" Chris grins, and in his excitement, he almost grabs Darren's hand and pulls him off the couch, but he reins it in at the last moment. This is... just them hanging out. It doesn't mean anything more, even though it may feel like it.

Darren stays close as they shuffle into the kitchen, but Chris only wobbles a couple times, and he's pretty sure that's just from all the lounging and less that he's going to pass out at any given moment.

"It'll be about time for some more cough syrup after dinner, too," Darren comments as he opens the fridge and rummages through it. Chris leans against the counter and grumbles under his breath.

"Joy of my life," he says and then feels a sneeze coming on, but luckily he manages to hold it back and grab a tissue out of the pocket of Darren's hoodie and blow his nose. It's just the crying he did, nothing else, and it merely dislodged some gunk. At least that's the idea he would telepathically send Darren if he could right now if only to stop Darren's concerned looks.

Chris's head feels a little clearer after that, and he throws the gross tissue away before pushing his sleeves up and all but scalding his hands in the kitchen sink. Some steam raises up from the bottom of the sink,

and Darren snorts as he sets the box of burgers down on the counter. "Save some hot water for the rest of the world, Chris, geez," he teases.

"You haven't gotten sick yet, and I'm not going to give it to you by contaminating your food."

"Well, thanks for your consideration. But again, if I'm not sick from sleeping with you I think I'm in the clear." Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Darren freeze. "You... you know what I mean."

Chris scrunches his face in confusion. It's a *joke*, one he's made before. Why is he getting weird about it now? "Yes, Darren, I've been pretty out of it but I know we didn't have sex."

Darren's hands lose their grip on the plastic wrapping of the burgers and skitter across the top of it for a second before he gets himself together. "And *trust me*, you'd *know* if you had sex with me."

Chris groans. "If you have to talk it up so much, it's probably not worth it," he teases, turning the sink off and then flicking his fingers at Darren to sprinkle him with water.

"Hey! Hey! Uncalled for attack!" Darren gets the wrapping off the burgers finally and shakes it out toward Chris where a few stubborn pieces of ice and condensation were clinging to it. Chris laughs, dangerously close to outright *giggling*, as he holds his hands up to shield himself.

"And, it's totally worth it, by the way. I have *skills*."

Chris makes a noncommittal, agreeing noise in his throat but then gasps before he can help it when Darren's hand lands on the small of his back for a second on its way to the drawer Darren's now reaching in, pinning Chris to the counter with his arm. "'Scuuuuuze me," Darren says quietly. "Getting a knife. Didn't want you to... back up. Onto it."

Chris watches Darren as Darren finds the knife he's looking for and carefully holds it away from Chris, the length of his arm trailing across Chris's back before Darren's facing the counter again and using the knife to open the box and pry the hamburgers up. Darren licks over his lips, and Chris finds himself doing the same to his own as he focuses in on the pink tip of Darren's tongue.

God. *God*. What is *wrong* with him. He dries his hands on his dish towel and pushes himself away from the counter with a shaky breath, moving back to the fridge. "Hey, so, tell me what else you need."

It's a couple beats too long for the answer, but Darren's voice sounds normal when he finally says, "Well, I got tomatoes, since you like those. You could cut one? I got spinach, too, but I'm not sure if it needs washing."

Chris finds the tomatoes and the spinach and grabs the mustard and ketchup he already had. "Got it. Hey, I bet it would be good with the portabello on it anyway."

"Oooh, I bet. We'll have to try that next time."

Next time, Chris thinks. Sure, because this might happen again, right. It sounds like Darren's planning on it, and Chris... Chris doesn't know what to make of that. He doesn't know what to make of *any* of this, and that box of confusion in his head about Darren has spilled open several times already, and he can't figure out how to lock it up again.

"Yeah... yeah, definitely," he says, just to acknowledge Darren spoke. He busies himself, then, with tearing off a couple paper towels and methodically folding them at the perforation before setting the tomato on it.

Darren's hips are right in front of the drawer he needs to get to for his own knife, now, and he sighs before striding over, business-like, and grasping hold of Darren's hip, intending to shove him over. He hadn't expected Darren to gasp, which he does, and nearly drop the patties he's holding.

"O-oh, hi, Chris, hey, sorry, it got too quiet, and I was... distracted. Am I in your way? I can move out of your way."

Chris squints over at him because Darren being so babbly is still... just *weird*. But. "Yeah, I mean, I need a knife. For the tomato."

"Right, right. Oh, right, sure, zwoooooop," Darren says, providing his own sound effects as he step-slides out of Chris's way.

"Thanks." Chris grabs the knife he needs and shuts the drawer, and as he steps back to his part of the counter, Darren *zwooops* back to where he was standing and picks up the patties. He drops them on a plate and moves to put them in the microwave. "Look, I know... I know it's your time off too, and I'm doing much better. You don't..." He looks down at the tomato and starts to slice it. "You don't need to stay. If you want to go home, have some time off of your own."

Darren's quiet as he presses buttons on the microwave, and Chris listens to each beep, and then the hum of it as it starts up. "Chris," Darren starts, and Chris's back straightens, his shoulders raising minutely. "Chris, turn *around*."

Chris does, schooling his face first, though, and raises his eyebrows curiously.

Darren leans back against the counter and rests his hands on it, the veins in his arms standing out with how tightly he's holding on. "Chris, do you think this has been *miserable* for me? Because it hasn't. I've... enjoyed this break as much as you have. I mean, probably more so since I don't have the flumonia," he concedes. "But I mean, I really don't mind this. Not one bit."

Chris's stomach flips, and he rests his hand on it, as if that'll help, but it also gives him an outlet for his nervous energy as he flicks the zipper pull of Darren's hoodie up and down. "Well... Well, I just mean -"

"Unless that was a thinly-veiled attempt to get me to leave."

"No! No, oh my gosh, Darren, no, I just. This has been..." Chris shrugs one shoulder and his hand slips up to his neck, shoving under the collar of his shirt nervously. It's the neck thing again, he realizes belatedly, but oh well. "I just thought I'd say. In case you wanted to, I release you from captivity."

"I was never a captive, Chris." Darren drops his gaze, but doesn't make it much farther than watching Chris's hand move. "I... hope you get that."

"I... yeah. It was a joke. Mostly a joke," Chris says, chewing on his lip. He scratches at the base of his neck, probably leaving tiny pink lines criss-crossing over the spot of skin. "I guess I'm just not used to people being so nice. I mean, I am, because..." He waves his hand before settling it back on his neck. "All you guys are nice, and the best friends a guy could ask for, but-"

Darren smiles faintly at that. "It's cool. Look, okay, just, you know. I care about you. It's been nice... *caring* about you yesterday and today, and I'd like to keep on keepin' on, you know? Is that okay?"

"It's been nice... having you here, so. Yeah, it's. Yeah." Darren's smile gets bigger at that, and somehow infinitely warmer, which Chris didn't even know was possible, and Chris can't help but smile back. They stay like that, just smiling at each other like goofs, until the microwaves beeps and Darren starts a little.

Chris laughs quietly at Darren's expense, and Darren pulls an exaggeratedly funny face at him before spinning around to take the patties out. Chris turns back to his task, too, and slices a few more pieces before rummaging around for a Ziploc bag for the other half, tossing it inside. Darren's humming to himself again as he pulls out the buns and fumbles with the bottles of ketchup and mustard, trying to twirl them in his hands before flipping them open to squirt them both on his buns at the same time.

Chris snorts. "Amateur," he says, and Darren points the long neck of the ketchup bottle at him.

"Hey, I'll have you know that not all of us are trained ninja masters, okay," he says, and Chris nods.

"I know, sweetie, now let me show off," he coos pseudo-affectionately, which just makes Darren grumble under his breath as he hands them over. He's already got buns set on a plate for Chris, and Chris twirls the two bottles nimbly between his fingers and finishes off the ketchup with a tiny flick of his wrist that makes it spin on his fingertips. He's been working on that one for ages now.

Darren slowly starts clapping beside him, and Chris's beaming smile spreads quickly across his face, along with a pink flush. "Thank you, thank you. I figure if the acting doesn't work out I'll do trick bartending or something." He grabs a slice of tomato, and then holds out the bottom of his bun to Darren for a burger.

With a wince, Darren picks up one of the hot burgers and plops it onto Chris's bun, then the other onto his own. "Oh yeah, because the acting thing is totally just a phase, what with the Emmy nomination and everything."

"You never know. Fickle industry," Chris says airily, even as his blush glows hotter - and then redder still when Darren sucks the tip of his thumb in his mouth to lick off the taste of the burgers. Darren's eyes meet his for a second, and Chris is quick to look back down at his food and finish putting his own burger together. "Anyway, if nothing else, I could play a rascally bartender with a secret agenda."

"And a heart of gold," Darren says as he digs in the fridge for a Diet Coke, handing the can off. "I replenished your stock."

"You're the best," Chris says. "And maybe with a heart of ice. He could be a sociopathic rascally bartender with a secret agenda."

"Ugh, God, you'd be in your element," Darren says, grabbing a can for himself and flicking the top of it open with a crisp *fsssht*.

"*I know*," Chris says, a little too evilly delighted, and Darren grins.

"You should play a bad guy, though." Darren moves over to the grocery bags still on the table and roots around until he pulls out a bag of potato chips. "You'd be really great at it, no one would suspect." He tugs the bag open, and makes a happy little face that makes Chris smile when he doesn't tear the bag. "Shame we already have most of our villains, or we'd put you in the Threequel."

"Cruel temptation," Chris says, hating Darren a little bit at teasing that so nonchalantly. Nineteen-year-old Chris would've never believed that was possible, and is doing a few victory laps in Chris's brain. He only hopes his face isn't revealing all that, though.

"Well, should the need arise, it'd be an honor," he winds up saying loftily, waving his hand and giving Darren a little bow.

Darren grins up at him before munching on a potato chip. "I'll definitely tell the guys, that'd be so fucking cool."

"Shame you've already got an Umbridge, though no one could play that like Joe."

"Don't worry, Brian can find some other way to put you in a dress." Darren winks at him as he pours out some chips onto Chris's plate. "We haven't used McGonagall yet."

"I could be a feisty McGonagall," Chris says, snagging one of the chips.

"Chew it slowly. And a lot," Darren says. "They've got wicked ridges."

"I think I can handle this, somehow," Chris quips, rolling his eyes yet again as he leans back against the counter. He obediently chews until he counts to fifty and swallows the chip mush, which is significantly less desirable after all that. But at least it doesn't hurt his throat.

"C'mon, let's be civilized or something," Darren says, hooking his toes on one leg of one of Chris's table chairs and tugging it out, eyeing it and then Chris meaningfully to get him to come sit. Chris plops down and Darren does the same right beside him, munching on another chip as he taps his chin, thinking.

"McGonagall would be badass," he decides, and Chris's mouth falls open, mock-offended.

"'Would be'? I think you mean *is and always will be*, no matter the permutation. You're a terrible fan," Chris says, shaking his head in disappointment.

"Well, specifically I meant *you* as McGonagall would be badass, but you're right, Captain Crazy Fan, she is and always will be the best." Darren grins at him over the edge of his can.

Chris grins, pleased, and ducks his head. "Not a crazy fan," he says. "Just a diligent one."

Darren holds his can out for a mock toast, and Chris looks up at him again with an amused expression, finally clinking his can against Darren's. "To constant diligence, then," Darren says, and Chris can't help but throw his head back and laugh at that, his big, honking laugh that usually makes him cringe after.

His inhale to laugh again, of course, triggers another coughing fit, though not nearly as bad as before. He turns so he doesn't cough on their food, and Darren's right there again, his hand warm and gentle against Chris's back. The congestion is starting to break up in his chest, and he has enough warning that he can push himself up and make his way to the sink to spit with some dignity, even if he misses the warmth of Darren's hand immediately.

"Eeeeeeeaaaugh," he groans as he shuffles back to his chair and falls in it. Darren had been resting his arm on the back of it, and his hand drops right back into place, fingers curled to scratch across Chris's back in long, slow strokes.

"At least that means you're on the mend for real. The best part is yet to come."

"The gross part is yet to come," Chris grumbles, voice still thick with cold, and he quickly washes it down with Diet Coke. "Much better."

"We'll get there. You'll be back to your old self in no time."

"Aww, thanks, Mr. Rogers," Chris says, and Darren reaches over and steals one of Chris's chips for it.

"Hideous, foul thief," Chris says, and Darren's reaction is immediate -- he bats his lashes and pokes his spit-slick bottom lip out hilariously, and Chris purses his lips. "Really?"

"Do you really think I'm hideous, TIME's 100 Most Influential Chris Colfer?"

"You have got to stop doing that--"

"Because it really hurts my feelings, and I just--"

"Fine. *Fine*, no, you're not. It's still foul thievery, though, but *handsome* foul thievery. Do you feel better?"

Darren sucks his lip back in and smirks. "I feel great! You think I'm handsome."

"I thought we got over this last season," Chris says flatly. Darren's actually bouncing in his chair a little, though, and Chris just shakes his head and bites into his burger before it gets cold.

"Look, you know I'm easy for compliments, it's no secret. So, ergo, and so forth." He gestures with his dripping burger before taking a massive bite out of it. He chews loudly, his mouth only barely closed over his food, and then says something that's completely unintelligible.

Chris makes a disgusted face. "Try that one again, when you're not being a filthy carnivore."

He chews, trying to cover his mouth with his hand, and finally swallows. "First, there's vegetables, so I'm an omnivore. Second, I said that I like it when people think I'm cute."

"Whaaaaat? You like your ego stroked?" Chris says.

"Wanky," Darren says with a waggle of his brows, and Chris snorts. "But, no, seriously. I tell you all the time I think you're cute. I think it's something people deserve to hear."

"Well, I wouldn't say *all the time*," Chris says, blushing all over again, and damn it, Darren. He busies himself with another bite, big enough that he has to chew for awhile.

"I called you hot this afternoon!"

"You were joking."

Darren's mouth drops open, and Chris is tempted to reach forward and tip it closed again, so he does just that, hooking two fingertips under Darren's chin and pressing up until Darren gets the memo and closes his mouth.

As soon as Chris drops his hand, Darren says, "I was *not*."

"Okay, sure. I'm a centerfold, with my bedhead and wracking cough and someone else's pajamas." With *your* pajamas, he thinks, but doesn't say out loud. They both know, anyway.

"Hey, at least two out of three of those things are totally sexy," Darren says, which makes Chris's hand still where it was already on its way to comb through his hair. Darren smirks, though, and adds, "And the bedhead is negotiable."

Chris is shocked into laughing again, and he presses his hand to his chest where his lungs are starting to ache again, all tight and sore, and he sips his Diet Coke and tries to keep the coughing at bay.

"Poor thing. More cough syrup for you, though I won't ruin your dinner with it." Darren looks at his plate for a moment, and then says, "I could... rub your back again later. If you'd like."

Chris worries his bottom lip between his teeth. "Yeah, sure, I mean... if you don't mind." At one look, Chris holds up his hands. "Okay, okay, I know you don't mind. That would be... nice."

"Great, awesome, we'll drug you up and then I can rub your back and maybe you can get another nap in."

Chris deflates a little, shoulders slumping, at the thought of sleeping more. "Whoopie," he says.

"Don't be a Grumpy Gus," Darren says, reaching out and squeezing Chris's shoulder.

"I'm a Bored Gus, more like it. I'm not.... I'm not good at this. At not... moving. Doing things."

"All the more reason to do it every now and again. Though, I would advise my tactic, which is to get shitfaced with Joey, over this whole plague thing."

"I'd gladly take your method over my method. I'm man enough to admit that your method owns my method," Chris says. He finishes up his burger and then sighs because now that he's done, that means more medicine and no work.

"We do have a lot of good ideas, it's true," Darren says, sliding his hand up to pet at the ends of Chris's hair. "Come on, though, hands of a god, I can spoil you."

"Urgh, fine, you're so insistent," Chris says, standing up. He stretches his arms over his head and grabs one wrist with the opposite hand, arching up and back with a series of pops. He wants to do his whole stretching routine, but holding that position nearly winds him and makes his chest ache when he lowers his arms again.

"Yeah, yeah, you love me, old man," Darren says. He bustles around the kitchen, picking up their plates and getting rid of their cans. He twists the chip bag closed and then swings by Chris, effortlessly grabbing his hand to pull him back through the living room, so he can grab the cough syrup off the coffee table.

"I put the rest of the drugs in your room, so we'll get those and some water and you'll be set. And since the codeine seems to do a number on you, you should get another nice nap to boot."

"God, I hate naps. I'm never napping again. I'm never *sleeping* again." Darren grins at him over his shoulder as they go into Chris's room, his hand still wrapped around Chris's.

"My mom would say something awesome right now about how you're feeling good enough to whine at least," Darren says, and Chris scowls and squeezes Darren's hand extra hard, but Darren turns his head forward before Chris can see his wince.

"Don't break that, I'll need it to rub your back."

"You have another," Chris says blandly, and he's rewarded by the shake of Darren's shoulders as he tries to keep his laugh silent.

"Aw, but baby, I can't treat you right with just one," Darren all-but-purrs as he leads Chris into his bedroom, finally slipping his hand free so he can pour some more cough syrup in the stupid little cup. "Come on, it's time."

"I hate everything," Chris grumbles as he takes the cup and throws it back, shivering at the slimy feel of it.

"You won't when this sets in, kiddo, believe me. Here, take your pills too." He hands him a bottle of water, and then shakes out the assortment of pills.

Chris takes them with considerably less moaning and groaning and drinks down several long pulls of the water to rinse the taste of lukewarm cherry out of his mouth. He hands the bottle back to Darren and starts unzipping the hoodie, pulling it off his shoulders.

Darren stares for a long minute, his eyes dancing up to Chris's face every few seconds before going back to his biceps or his chest, and Chris looks down instinctively to make sure there's no terrible ketchup or mustard stain on his shirt or anything, but he's good. Darren seems to notice Chris noticing, however, and he gives Chris a fleeting smile before moving around him to shut the bedroom door.

"Gotta keep the heat in," he mumbles, but there's no heater going. Chris chooses not to question it, though.

"Do you... wanna lay down?"

"I... yeah, okay." Chris turns and climbs up on the bed, laying out on his belly.

"Awesome," Darren says, balancing on his knees on the edge of the bed while Chris gets settled. Even without Darren's flimsy heat excuse, the room is still pretty warm, except for the sheets, which are nice and cool against the tiny exposed strip of belly where Darren's shirt rucked up as Chris laid down.

"Mmmkay," Chris murmurs, feeling an odd sense of déjà vu as Darren straddles his thighs and rests all his weight on them, pinning Chris down easily to the bed. It's not startling this time, at least, and Chris just sighs, resting his cheek against the pillow, and smiles up at Darren.

"Our fans would have a field day right about now. Me and you and your magic hands."

"Oh, it would take *way* less than this," Darren says as he leans forward and rests his hands on Chris's shoulder blades. "Here, tip your head down against the pillow so I can get at your neck, 'kay, baby?" he whispers, and Chris licks his lips nervously. That part he'll probably never get used to.

"Yeah, sure. If suffocation is your secret motive, I'll haunt you forever," he mumbles, voice muffled as he turns his head so his forehead is resting on his pillow, neck stretched long and bared for Darren, and Chris's breath sticky hot against his sheets. He flexes his fingers in his pillow and waits, sighing to himself when he feels Darren press a kiss to his hair before slowly digging his thumbs between Chris's shoulders and sliding them up in slow circles up along the back of Chris's neck.

Chris groans long and low into the mattress and breaks off the noise too slowly with an embarrassed gasp. "Sorry," he breathes.

"Dude, that means it's working. Live a little," Darren says, but Chris feels Darren shifting just the smallest bit further back on his thighs and holding some of his own weight up and off of Chris. Which is... puzzling.

"You okay?" Chris mumbles into the pillow.

"Yeah, I'm good. Just getting the right angle." He changes the subject by shifting his hands down to Chris's back, rubbing gently over the spot where he's most sore, just behind his lungs. It's such a relief, and Chris groans again, shifting to try and stretch his back under the touch.

"Darren, fuck, that feels so good..." It sounds a little dirty, he's sure, but Chris doesn't care because it feels absolutely amazing.

Darren shifts again and clears his throat. Chris is just about to look over his shoulder to see what's wrong, but Darren digs the heels of his hands in and kneads over the sore spot. "Oh. *Ohhh*, my gosh," Chris keens.

"*God*, Chris." Darren pauses, clears his throat. "I mean. That feels good, right?"

"Ugh, *yes*," Chris says with a sigh. Darren's hands move further down, his thumbs sliding hot and hard down the center of Chris's back, the slope of it, to the spot right above the curve of his ass.

"Could I, um." Darren pauses, and Chris turns his head to the side, taking a deep breath. It only rattles a little, so he considers it a win.

"Hmmm?" he hums, blinking up at Darren. Once he can focus, he notices the slight pink spreading across Darren's cheeks and the tense, stiff way he's holding his arms while his hands fan out across the small of Chris's back.

Darren starts pushing his thumbs back up, taking Chris's shirt with them, and he twists his wrists some so his pinkies drag lightly over Chris's skin. "I could... I mean, *you* could take this off? It'd be better." He swallows audibly. "Less dull. Than, you know. Through the shirt."

He's already got it raked halfway up Chris's back, the material bunched up and still trapped under Chris's belly. Chris draws in a shallow breath, and his skin is tingly everywhere Darren's touching it. "Sure.... I mean, yeah, sure, Darren, I guess."

Darren hops off him too fast to be completely casual, but Chris doesn't question it, doesn't question anything as he sits up on his knees and toys with the hem of his shirt for a second to gather up his nerves (why is he *nervous*, why now, it's so *stupid*) before tugging it up and over his head to drop it on the floor.

He looks over at Darren and sees how even the top of his own shoulder is flushed, Jesus, and apparently Darren notices too, his eyes dark.

The pieces are starting to come together in Chris's brain, so he carefully does not look at any of Darren lower than his face as he stretches out again on his belly, the sheets suddenly feeling even colder against his overheated skin. They had the awkward boner conversation before they filmed the car scene, and Chris understands that it happens; he just doesn't understand why it's happening now.

Darren's back on him in a moment, his knees bracketing Chris's hips; though, once again he doesn't lower his weight down onto Chris. He spreads his hands wide on either side of Chris's spine and presses in, leading with his thumbs, and Chris just arches up into the touch. He can't do anything else.

Darren's hands feel so much larger than Chris knows they really are, like this. They're fanned out wide across his skin, and Chris's breath hitches when Darren slides them back down to Chris's waist. Chris doesn't mean to, but he squirms a little, and Darren's fingertips dig in to keep him still as he says, "Shhhhhh, I got you."

"I - I know," Chris says on an exhale, and Darren finally lifts his hands up before Chris makes this even more awkward, but then Darren's knuckles are pressing in, four hard points of pressure that Darren rocks up Chris's spine and then across the entire width of his shoulders, circling as he goes. He starts over, repeating the whole trail, and after the third time, Chris is helplessly boneless, face pressed in his pillow as he all-but-cries from how good it feels, eyes squeezed shut and his face hot. His breath even shudders when he breathes in deep, and he whimpers softly again by the time Darren reaches across to his right shoulder and splays his hand wide to brush his thumb lightly over Chris's skin to soothe him.

"You okay?" Darren asks, brow furrowed, and that snaps Chris out of the lull of silence and strong pull on all his focus from Darren's hands.

"Fine. Fine, you're not hurting me, promise," he mumbles, letting the tension bleed out of his face before he opens his eyes again, looking up at Darren. "It's just so freaking *good*."

It shouldn't be a surprise, but it still is, when Darren leans over and presses a kiss to the base of Chris's neck, and then another on the wing of his shoulder blade. It makes Chris shiver so hard that Darren shushes him, a hot puff of breath against his skin.

"Darren..."

One more soft brush of lips at the curve of his neck and shoulder, and then he's leaning up again, hands dragging firm up and down Chris's back. "I got you."

Chris's skin is still tingling from where Darren's lips were, and he shifts under him uncomfortably, half-hard in Darren's sweats and pressed against the bed, and he... should have been expecting that, too, after all this, but it still makes him freeze and hold in a breath as he tries to relax.

He closes his eyes again and lets Darren smooth his hands all the way up his back and then circle them back down. Every swipe of his hands gets increasingly gentler until it's just his fingertips skating up and down, almost tickling with how light the touch is.

Chris almost feels like he can breathe properly again, and as long as Darren doesn't make him move and humiliate himself forever, he'll be fine.

"How're you doing?" Darren asks as his hands settle above Chris's hips again and his thumbs dig into the middle in tiny circles, a last little bit of relief. Darren's voice is pitched low, and it makes Chris's heart clench in his chest.

"I... um. I'm better, a lot better," he says, sounding vaguely wrecked. "Are you done?"

"For now," Darren says, stilling his hands. "Unless you want more?"

Chris honestly can't stop his hips from grinding down into the mattress at Darren's words. He knows that this isn't what his body is turning it into, but that doesn't mean he can stop it. Above him, Darren lets out a shaky breath. "I'm... good. Thank you."

"Okay." It's a really, really long moment before Darren climbs off Chris's hips and sits down on the bed next to him, on the opposite side of where Chris's face is pointing. Chris just lies there and lets himself feel for a second, the ghost of Darren's hands still making his skin prickle.

He's too worked up to be sleepy. He can faintly feel the effects of his medicine tugging at him, but it's so much duller than the heat pooling in his gut. He's so hard, and he's so afraid to move, either to roll over or to roll his hips down again, afraid that Darren's watching.

With a sigh, he at least turns his head so he can look at Darren, whose hand jerks away from his thigh guiltily and settles on his belly and then away from his body all together, falling to the bed with a quiet thump. Chris frowns a little and looks up at Darren's face, watches him swallow.

"Yeah, so." Darren lets out a quiet laugh. "That... got intense." He bites his lip. "Iiii'm... gonna check out the reading material in your bathroom. I'll be back in a few." He quickly rolls off the bed and walks around it, slipping out the door and closing it behind him.

Chris watches him go, confused for a moment before he realizes what Darren's going to do, a heavy, hot flush spreading across his whole face. "Oh my gosh," he breathes out to himself, rolling up on his side and ignoring how his dick is tenting Darren's sweats, as he stares at the door.

Chris refuses to touch himself while wearing Darren's sweats, because he has to draw a line for himself somewhere. He tries not to think about anything, about Darren's hands or his stupid voice or how he might be sliding his own hand into his pants right now...

Chris shakes it off and closes his eyes, trying to blank out his mind. He wants to just float and feel good from Darren's hands and will away his hard-on so that maybe when Darren finally comes back in it won't be the most awkward moment of his *life*.

Chapter Five

Chris hitches one leg up higher than the other, shielding himself just in case, and turns his pillow until he can curl up around it, burying his face in it with a hot sigh. He really does feel a lot looser, and with Darren not in the room, the hot coil inside of him begins to unwind, which lets his medicine kick in. He closes his eyes and wills himself more relaxed, giving in to the floaty feeling bit by bit. Darren's hard work shouldn't go to waste after all.

He's just coasting, listening to the bits of music that go trickling through his head, not quite asleep but just on the edge. He's not sure how long it is before he hears the gentle click of the door, feels the bed dip down slightly on one side. Darren doesn't touch him, probably thinking that he's asleep, and Chris just lets it be silent for a moment, unsure of what to say.

He sighs eventually, and there's a breath more of silence before Darren whispers, "Chris?"

"Yeah." His voice comes out nice and even, and Chris gives himself a mental pat on the back.

"So you *are* awake," Darren says, and the bed dips again as he shifts. There's still plenty of space between them, but Chris can feel the heat coming off Darren against his bare back.

"Awake and slightly stoned." And not really hard anymore, but he doesn't mention that part. Chris swallows against his rough throat. "You all right? Find something good to read?" Chris rolls his eyes at himself, but he didn't know what else to say.

Darren lets out an awkward chuckle, and Chris gives in, rolling over onto his opposite side so he can see Darren properly. Darren's on his side with his knees tucked up a bit, his head pillowed on his arm, and he beams at Chris.

"Loads. Really... absorbing." Darren clears his throat. "How are you? You sound better. That cough syrup's really doing the trick."

"I feel a lot better. The... the backrub really helped, thank you."

"Anytime," Darren says warmly. Chris's skin prickles when Darren's eyes dance from his face to his neck and down to his chest, but before he can say anything potentially awkward and embarrassing for them both, Darren just asks, "You're not getting cold, are you?"

"I'm okay for now. Thanks for asking." He lets his eyes slide shut, just focusing on the warm feeling in his chest. He doesn't think anyone has taken care of him, been so concerned about him like this since he was a little kid. He doesn't know yet how to say thank you to Darren for it, but he knows he'll have to figure it out eventually. It's just so nice.

"Sooooooo.... would you like to... watch another movie? Play some games? Or should I just leave you alone?"

"Uh-uh, no, you can stay, I'm good." He peeks his eyes open when Darren's hand lands in his hair, but just for a second, because Darren's gazing at him again, so intensely that he just *can't* keep looking at him. Darren scratches his fingers through Chris's hair and scoots a little closer so he can rest his hand comfortably on the side of Chris's neck, fingers curving around the back of it.

"What kind of games?" Chris murmurs eventually. "I could beat you at something stoned, I bet."

"Could play Mario Kart. Or Smash Brothers. I think I saw Super Mario Wii on your shelf, I haven't played that one yet."

"It's easier with two people. You get farther when you... work together."

"Sounds fun. I'd like to play it with you sometime."

"Me too," Chris whispers. He opens his eyes, and Darren seems so impossibly close that he almost feels like he's crossing them to meet his gaze.

"Got all the time in the world," Darren says as he starts smoothing his thumb back and forth over the line of Chris's jaw. "Or, well, two and a half more days."

Chris huffs out a laugh and smiles up at Darren, shifting a little closer almost subconsciously, just so he can focus and... and feel Darren, like this. It's so nice. "Shame it's not one I can kick your ass on, though."

"I'm sure you'll find a way," Darren whispers, smiling wide and open and cozy. It makes Chris's heart leap into his throat, and he tries to swallow it back down.

"I... yeah," he murmurs, licking over his lips, and Darren's thumb stills, and his gaze drops to Chris's mouth, just for a second.

"Chris..."

"Do it, please, if you're going to." Chris can't believe he said it, but it's too late to take it back now. He just can't stand this waiting, he wants to *know* what's happening here, even if it's only going to be this.

Chris doesn't miss Darren's sharp inhale or the way his eyebrows go up, but then he's leaning in with intent and murmuring a quick, "Yeah. *Yeah*, okay," that buzzes against Chris's mouth as Darren presses his lips soft and warm against Chris's, hand curling around Chris's jaw.

It feels like they both exhale together, a sigh of relief. Chris lets his arm slide up over Darren's side, presses his palm into Darren's back to pull them closer. Darren comes easily, and they don't quite press their bodies together but he gets close enough that Chris can feel Darren's t-shirt soft against his skin. It's like the times they've kissed before, but it's also not; Darren's kisses are confident where Blaine's are tentative, and Darren easily presses his tongue against Chris's mouth, asking to be let inside.

Chris parts his lips and groans when Darren's tongue slicks wetly against his own. Chris clings a little, pressing closer and fisting the back of Darren's shirt in his hand as he sucks Darren's bottom lip between his own.

Darren slides his hand back into Chris's hair and tugs lightly, just holding on as he whimpers into the kiss, a quiet, keening noise that makes Chris nearly melt.

After another moment, they pull away long enough to catch their breath, and Chris sucks his in too fast. It catches in his throat and tickles, and suddenly he's coughing again, loud and abrasive above the heady quiet that had fallen over the room. Darren slides his other arm underneath Chris's head and pulls him in until Chris's face is tucked into Darren's shirt, Darren petting his shoulders as he rides it out.

"Son of a bitch," he mutters darkly, blinking watery eyes open and staring at the darkness of Darren's shirt for a minute as his breathing slows. *Shit. Shit.* He was just...

He pulls back, too quick, and Darren's left flailing at air for a second before one hand settles again on Chris's shoulder.

"God, I'm sorry, Darren, I didn't mean... I mean." He licks over his bottom lip and swears he tastes Darren there. "I just..."

"Please don't say you didn't mean it. Please, Chris." Darren's fingers grip his shoulder, like he's trying to hang on. He's looking at Chris so closely, like he can't stop, and Chris feels like his heart skips a beat.

"No... no, I..." Chris breaks off, relaxing back onto the bed and shifting closer, almost close enough for the tips of their noses to brush. "I meant *that*. I'm gonna go out on a limb here and guess you meant it too?"

"I did. I know this is... yeah, I did." Darren smiles at him, and he leans forward just a little and rubs his nose against Chris's. It's such *déjà vu* that Chris can't help but think about the last time they were wrapped together like this. They were Kurt and Blaine, and it was fake and semi-public and clinical. It wasn't *anything* like this.

"Blaine's been teaching you some moves," he blurts out, and Darren laughs warmly, breath gusting over Chris's mouth.

"I've still got some on him, though," Darren says before dipping in and kissing Chris again.

It's just so good, and Chris doesn't want to overanalyze, doesn't want to overthink, he just lets it happen, lets himself *feel* this right now. Darren holds him so gently, even with his grip on Chris's hair, even as his tongue's dipping into Chris's mouth, sliding against his own.

Chris makes a low noise in his throat, and it's still too-dry from his coughing, but he can ignore it because this is amazing. He re-settles his hand on Darren's chest, sliding it up to rest over his heart. It's thumping against Chris's palm so fast, and that just makes Chris inch closer and kiss Darren harder.

Eventually Darren pulls away, just a little, panting against Chris's cheek. "Fuck, Chris, I can't... been thinking about this..."

"You have?"

Darren chuckles. "Why d'you think I've been touching you so much? Could hardly resist..."

Chris shivers. "Geez, *Darren...*" He trails off and slides his hand up to Darren's shoulder. "I just... kind of assumed..." He laughs, self-deprecatingly, and scrunches his nose at Darren in a wince. "If I'd known that earlier, I'd been *way* less confused this whole time, you know."

Darren ducks his head, peering at Chris from under his lashes, which should just be cheating. "Sorry, I was... I didn't want you to think... And you were *sick*, so."

"We should... we really should talk, but right now I just want you to kiss me some more."

Darren grins. "As you wish," he says, but he doesn't immediately lean in, not until he can slide his hand around and catch his finger under Chris's chin, tilting him up for a sweet kiss that he lets linger and turn into something hotter, all over again.

Chris thinks back over everything he's been noticing and locking away, and then he's laughing against Darren's mouth.

"You know, I didn't think I was *that* bad," Darren says.

"No, no," Chris says, "not that. It's just... You used my flumonia to get into my pants."

"Au contrair," Darren says, holding up one finger and wagging it. "Technically, I am not in your pants. You're in mine. So what does that say about *you*."

Chris rolls his eyes and stifles a yawn against the curve of Darren's shoulder before pulling back to sleepily graze a kiss against his mouth again. "It says I think my meds are about to knock me out again," he grumbles, and Darren smiles at him and leans up, kissing his forehead just like normal.

"Then you shouldn't resist, Christopher. Go into the light," he says. "I'll be here when you wake up."

~*~

Chris wakes up with his pillow rising and falling beneath him, which is a little odd, if not magical. His brain is still groggy as he blinks his eyes open, and he realizes he's nearly completely on top of Darren.

"I think I drooled on you," Chris says, surprised that his voice almost passes for normal. Darren jerks awake at the sound and nearly dislodges Chris as he tries to push up.

"What's wrong?" he asks, blinking in the dark. "Chris?"

"Whoa," Chris says. He can't really say anything else, mostly because the room is spinning a little.

Darren finally falls back on the bed with a *fwomp* and scrubs his hands over his face, digging his fingers into the corners of his eyes. "Ugh, okay, hello impending heart attack, nice to meetcha," he says. "Wait, did you drool on me?"

"Save the shirt and sell it on eBay," Chris quips. "Good morning, by the way."

"Good -" Darren shifts until he can peer over Chris's head at his alarm clock. "More like good two in the morning," he says.

Chris stretches backward and stares at his clock. "You've got to be kidding me."

"Just gonna throw this out there now, but I have this funny feeling our sleep schedules are completely fucked," Darren says as he scratches at his belly. Chris turns back around so he can rest against Darren again, trapping Darren's hand between them. There's a moment where he just *looks* at Darren, through the fog of his cocktail of sleep medication, and unmistakable *want* builds inside him. So this is really happening, then.

"You could kiss me before our morning breath gets even more rank," Darren says, too loud in the quiet, but it's not a bad idea.

"I could," Chris says. It's been easier, now that he knows where they stand, knows what all of this really means, and he's smiling when he stretches up and tilts his head to capture Darren's mouth in a kiss. He settles his weight more comfortably against Darren and licks into his mouth, and Darren was a total liar - his morning breath is *already* rank. Not that that is deterring Chris, though.

All of Darren pushes into the kiss, pressing them closer, and Chris sighs into it and brings his free hand up to tangle in Darren's messy hair. It's quiet but for the sound of their mouths, and it's so gentle that Chris almost feels like he's floating, detached from everything but Darren against him.

"See? Awesome idea," Darren murmurs against Chris's mouth, and Chris doesn't really deign to answer, stretching out against Darren all the more languidly instead and lazily sucking at his bottom lip. Darren's hands come up to Chris's hips and squeeze, and Chris arches slowly against him and hums into his mouth.

Chris wants him closer, wants more, so he gets hold of Darren's shoulder and tugs, encouraging him to move. He gets the hint and rolls them both, letting his weight rest on Chris, his cock hard in the hollow of Chris's hip. Darren shifts against Chris and then presses in, rocking against Chris's hip as he straddles Chris's thigh. He breathes out a tiny grunt and then licks into Chris's mouth, one hand slipping up to cup Chris's cheek while the other traces over the elastic band of Chris's borrowed sweats.

"So far... *hnngh*... ahead of me already, show-off."

"I can help you catch up," Darren whispers against his lips.

"Promises, promises," Chris says even as he holds on a little tighter to Darren's hair and presses up against his touch. He snuffles and then there's an answering rattle in his lungs that is *definitely* unattractive, but Darren seems to not care, so Chris doesn't pull away, kissing Darren deeper.

It's easy just to let Darren touch him, even move him a little, shifting Chris's legs open wider with his knee, pulling Chris's other hand up and urging it to tangle in his hair. Darren's hands slide under Chris's waistband, just pressing into the small of his back, and Chris just rocks up into it.

Darren pushes Chris's sweats down over his hip a little, wiggling his fingers against the tight cotton of Darren's briefs Chris is wearing, and snorting. Chris pulls back from the kiss some to give Darren a bewildered look. "What's so funny?"

"Now I'm getting into your pants," Darren says as he tugs the sweats a little lower, cool air hitting the stripe of Chris's belly that's exposed. Chris hums and shimmies his hips, helping Darren's cause. He's always been charitable.

"Nooope," he says, tugging Darren's hair teasingly. "Now you're getting into *your* pants. Which is totally narcissistic by the way."

"Mmm, you can keep doing that," Darren breathes as he tugs the sweatpants lower, the waistband dragging against Chris's cock through his briefs -- through Darren's briefs, *fuck* -- and making him gasp.

"Yeah?" Chris tugs again, and Darren groans into his mouth. Chris smiles, filing that tidbit away for later testing.

"Mmmhm," Darren hums as he kisses down the strong line of Chris's jaw to the little hollow of his neck right under his ear. He sucks on Chris's skin, and Chris jolts, heat shooting through him and making his toes curl. The scratch of Darren's stubble makes his skin tingle, and his teeth scrape against him, and Chris doesn't know which way is up. He can feel Darren's hand sliding lower, his fingertips brushing over the damp spot of his briefs right over the head of Chris's cock, and Chris groans, canting his hips up.

"God, Darren, please..." Darren doesn't make him wait, he just cups Chris's cock softly through his briefs, and Chris gasps.

"Fuck, Chris, can I... please, I wanna..."

"Yes, yes..." Chris thrusts up into his hand, and Darren shifts to tug the briefs away from his cock, tucking the waistband down and under his balls to lay him bare.

Chris bites his lip too hard when Darren's hand wraps around him, and he grows harder at Darren's sweat-slicked touch. Darren trails kisses down his neck, and Chris tips his head back with a whine, one of his hands leaving Darren's hair to trail down his bicep and then down to his hip, trying to push Darren's sweats down too, but Darren stops him, warm breath skittering over his neck as Darren shushes him.

Chris tries to protest, but Darren swats his hands away. "No, sweetie, just let me," he says as he squeezes a little tighter.

"Gonna owe you one. Wanna touch you, Darren, fuck..." Chris mumbles. He peeks one eye open when he feels a kiss pressed to his cheek and then hears Darren huffing out a laugh right in his ear.

"Believe me, I'm gonna exploit the fuck out of that later," Darren says.

Chris sighs. Darren is loving this way too much, just like everything else. "When I can work my arms, I'm gonna... *nnngh*... get you off..."

Darren grins and drops kisses at the corner of Chris's mouth and down his jaw. He strokes faster and rests the hard line of his cock against Chris's hip as he says, "So sexy. Let me take care of you for now."

Chris whimpers, and God, he's apparently still pathetic. Darren has been doing nothing *but* taking care of him, and Chris is full of too many emotions - the electric feel of Darren's hand washing over him and how delightful he feels pressed all along Chris's side and the unfamiliar stinging pinprick behind his eyes at

how stupidly *grateful* he is for Darren right now -- for way more than just his (rapidly) approaching orgasm. "Take such good care of me... Feels so good, your hands... Everything..." He trails off, swallowing hard, and Darren swipes his thumb over the head of Chris's cock, making Chris's hips snap up against Darren's hand, and Darren groans against his cheek.

"Fuck, you're so amazing, Chris. And so fucking hot." Darren rubs his thumb right along the thick vein, hard enough to make Chris thrash, his hand flailing out until it lands against Darren's chest, and he grabs hold of Darren's shirt in a tight grip.

"Fuck, Dar... Darren, gonna... Fuck..." Chris is so close and Darren's hot against him, and everything is sweat and heat.

Darren noses at Chris's jaw and tips his chin up just right to kiss and nip right at the little dip under Chris's chin. "Come on, it's okay, baby," he whispers, pressing more insistently against Chris, and Chris can feel him hot and hard in his underwear and pressed so firmly against Chris's thigh. Darren twists his hand and Chris gasps and comes with a jolt, his hips twitching.

He can feel it dripping down over him, over Darren's fist as he works him through it until he's shaking. Finally he stops moving but still has his hand wrapped around Chris. Chris is panting, and unfortunately wheezing, and he tries valiantly not to cough because that is the *opposite* of sexy right now. But he's breathing so hard, and Darren just made him *come*, and it's so hot, *fuck*.

He can feel the tell-tale rattle and knows Darren can hear it on the next inhale, but Darren's already letting go of him and wiping his hand clean on a tissue before pulling Chris in, his hand broad and warm on Chris's waist. "C'mon, c'm'ere," Darren whispers, tugging Chris until Chris is lying on his side and tucked in against Darren, his face pressed into Darren's chest, and Chris can't hold it back anymore, coughing harshly into Darren's shirt until his arms are shaking from it, just a little. The whole way through, Darren shushes him quietly and smooths his palm up and down Chris's sweaty back, pressing his face into the crook of Chris's neck and just waiting, pressing the occasional kiss to Chris's hot skin.

When he can manage words, Chris whispers, "And the award for sexiest male performance clearly goes to..."

Darren huffs out a laugh against Chris's neck and pulls back so they can look at each other, reaching up to smooth Chris's hair back for the approximately millionth time. "Hey, you didn't see you just now. If it

didn't make you so miserable, I'd take a million of those coughing fits to see you coming like that all the time."

Chris wrinkles his nose. "God, how could you possibly want me like this, I'm so gross."

"You're not gross," Darren whispers fiercely. "Even sick, you could never be gross." As if to punctuate, he presses against Chris's half-naked hip, cock hard and hot between them.

"Oh, hello," Chris says as he slips his hand down between them, fingertips just brushing the head of Darren's cock before Darren twists his hips away. "Darren, are you *serious*?"

"Told you. Exploitation, later. Trust me," Darren says. "But right now, you're still sick."

"I don't think jerking you off is going to aggravate my flumonia," Chris says, quirking his lips up in a sly smile.

Darren slides his hand quickly into his sweatpants, groaning against Chris's ear when he palms his cock. "I can't wait, really, if you want to know the truth." He starts to jerk himself, fast enough that Chris can feel it shifting them both a little on the bed, and he turns his head to crash their mouths together, drinking in his panting breaths.

Chris uses Darren's distraction to touch him everywhere else he can, resting his hand on Darren's hip only for a second until he can slide his palm down into Darren's sweats and over his ass. He pulls Darren closer, fitting them together until Darren's knuckles are brushing through his sweats against Chris's belly, and Chris whines into Darren's mouth.

"Feels so good, c'mon, come for me."

Darren groans, and his hand speeds up, knocking against Chris on every upstroke. Chris just tries to hang on, holds Darren close while he quickly falls apart.

Darren bites at Chris's bottom lip as he comes, his hips stuttering forward and rocking against Chris as he jerks himself through it with a keening whine. Chris gives his ass a couple playful pats before tugging his hand away and letting the elastic hit against Darren's skin with a dull thwack. Darren's panting hard as he peppers kisses all over Chris's face, and Chris laughs.

"You liked that, did you?"

"Shut up." Darren ducks his head, hiding his face in Chris's neck, and after a moment his hand -- clean, and Chris is flying too high to think about that very hard -- winds around Chris's back to press him close. "Yes, I did, if you must know."

"Hmmm good," Chris says as he leans into Darren and nuzzles his cheek. "I did too."

"Good." Darren's body starts to go lax against him, and Chris can finally convince his hand to loosen his grip a little, petting softly at Darren's hair in apology. Darren pulls him in closer, their legs tangling together, and it's... totally awesome. Chris giggles at the song that instantly starts playing in his head, and Darren laughs too, even though he can't possibly know what Chris is thinking about. Unless he can read minds.

Chris should really read the label on that cough syrup.

"So that... that was pretty great," Darren says after a spell. "Don't you think so?"

"Of course I think so. We just established that," Chris says.

"Yeah, but I mean like... *really*."

Chris clears his throat a bit and does his best Shrek impersonation as he says, "Really really," and Darren huffs out another laugh against him.

"Man, I could really go for some food right now," he says as he smooths his hand over Chris's belly and then further up, affectionate.

Chris wriggles and rolls his eyes. "You'd think you're the one out of the two of us that's kinda high right now," he says, closing his eyes for a moment. It's a little harder to open them again, his lids heavy, and he stretches out with a sigh.

"Want me to get you some Captain Crunch, stoner? I'll let it soak in the milk for a while so it's not like eating broken glass."

"Fuck off," Chris retorts, without any heat. "Actually, though, that does sound kind of good. Thank you." Darren smacks a kiss against his neck, and Chris figures that means *you're welcome*. He doesn't get up, though; instead he presses more kisses against Chris's neck, feather-soft. "Stoned makeouts and soggy Captain Crunch. The epitome of a burgeoning romance."

"Oh, is that what this is?" Darren pulls back to meet his gaze, a wide grin splitting his face, and Chris can't stop himself from smiling back.

"Something like that," Chris says. He flops back on his back, and Darren does the same, his shoulder pressed warmly against Chris's as they grin at the ceiling.

"We'll figure it out. We've still got two whole days left without obligation," Darren says. His pinky brushes against the back of Chris's hand, and Chris grins a little bigger at the ceiling.

"Especially if someone doesn't give me my phone," he says after a moment, following it with a hoarse laugh.

"Don't even think about it," Darren says. With a sigh and then a stretch of his arms over his head that travels down the rest of his body all the way to his toes, he sits up, his hair sticking up everywhere. "So," he says, "about that cereal."

"Go on without me, the room is still a little spinny."

Darren grins down at him. "I'm gonna bring it back, duh."

Even after all of this, Darren's still taking care of him. Chris thinks maybe he could get used to it. "Okay, then. I'd like a big bowl, please, I'm starving."

"Okay." Darren slips out of the bed, then winces. "Right after I get new pants."

It strikes Chris suddenly that he's still lying there with his pants down, and that's so funny that Chris can't stop from cackling behind his hand. "Oh God, I'm still naked."

"That you are, my high-flying friend, that you are." Darren leans down to kiss him, their hands colliding as they work together to get him covered up again.

"Cereal. Don't promise me things you can't deliver on," Chris murmurs against Darren's mouth, and Darren mimics him, his voice whiny, before he delivers one last kiss and then climbs over Chris and off the bed.

"I'll be back," he says just like the Terminator, and reaches in his bag for some more sweats as he heads out the door, leaving Chris to watch him go through half-closed eyes and a stupid, silly smile on his face.

~*~

"Look who's back from the dead!" Darren announces as Chris follows slightly behind him onto the lot. Lea is there with cupcakes in a box, half picked-over already by the early risers, but she holds the box out to Chris with a smile.

"They know," Chris says as he picks out the one with the most icing.

"You already texted all of us," Lea says to Darren as she dips her finger into the icing on another of the cupcakes and licks it off. "Twice."

"And tweeted it," Cory adds, holding up his phone.

"See also: Facebook," Harry chimes in as he cruises by, Mark right behind him on his skateboard. They both snag another cupcake as they pass, and Chris raises his eyebrow, gently grabbing Darren's elbow so he can spin him around and level him with a suspicious stare.

"What!" Darren says. "I was excited. You know how I get when I'm excited."

"We know," everyone says in a chorus, and Darren laughs sheepishly under his breath and ducks his head.

"Ugh, fine, I know too," Chris says after a minute. Darren grins up at him just as Chris is licking some icing off his cupcake, and Darren's eyes grow a little wider. Chris smirks and then exacts even more vengeance by licking his thumb clean too, his lips sucking around the tip of it to get all the icing off.

"I hate you," Darren says happily. "Here, you've got a little -" He points to some icing on the corner of Chris's mouth that Chris doesn't think is actually there, but then Darren is standing on tiptoe and kissing at the spot before licking at the corner of Chris's lip with the tip of his tongue. There's a chorus of whistles from behind them, and Chris casually flips off the group at large over Darren's shoulder.

Darren's laughing against Chris's mouth, and he murmurs, "So rude. And to our *friends*, Christopher," before he tilts his head and captures Chris's bottom lip between his own. Chris's eyes flutter shut, and he kisses Darren back even as he's keeping his finger firmly in place. He hears the distinct chipper click of Lea's camera on her phone and sighs into the kiss.

"Our friends are *horrible*, Darren. They deserve it."

"Less talking, more kissing," Darren says as he snakes his hand up between them to tug on the crook of Chris's arm until he's no longer flipping everyone off. His arm drops to his side, and Darren's fingers skate down until he can tangle them up with Chris's and squeeze his hand, his fingertips rubbing at the center of Chris's palm. It's a little weird, but it still makes funny things happen to Chris's insides, and Chris leans in for one last peck of a kiss. Just because.

"Okay, Darren, stop mackin' on your boy and get over here. The internet and its glorious cats have not taken time off like you have."

Darren finally pulls away a little. "I have to go look at cats for Amber now."

Chris smirks at him. "Cats are important, so I suppose I can allow it."

Darren gives him a lazy salute and then starts to walk away before pivoting around and rushing back up to cup Chris's face before delivering one last hard, smacking kiss before running off to catch up with Amber. Chris blinks at him as he leaves.

"Sooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo," Lea starts as she moseys over and stands up on tiptoe to sling her arm around Chris's neck. "I'd say *your* vacation went swimmingly."

"Oh yes, having the plague was a *jolly* good time," Chris says flatly, even if his lips are still tingling as he flattens them in a thin line at Lea.

"I'm not talking about the plague, I'm talking about that very lovely man who just had his tongue all over you."

"Oh, that?" Chris asks lightly as he buffs his nails on his shirt and doesn't quite tamp down his smirk.

"You always get so cocky after getting laid," Lea says, reaching up to pinch his cheek. "It's *adorable*."

He slaps her hand away out of habit. "Oh, you're one to talk, Miss I Broadcast My Sex Life To The Tri State Area."

"You love it," Lea says. She drops her arm from around him and grabs his hand instead, headed toward the trailers. "C'mon, we're actually about due for makeup, Mister."

She grabs the box of cupcakes and takes out the last two, handing one off to Chris. "One more for the road? And then you can dish to me every little thing Darren did over the past four days. And if you don't, I'm going to him next, and who *knows* what all *he'll* tell me," she sing-songs with an actual skip to her step.

"He'd probably write you an epic poem. Hell, he's probably already started it, the big sap." Chris unwraps the cupcake with a smile.

"I fully expect the guitar and an ode to a few of your body parts to make an appearance after we wrap today," Lea says. "And that'll be great and all, don't get me wrong, but I need the nitty gritty!"

Chris *hmmms* thoughtfully as they stop at Lea's trailer. "Let me get a couple Diet Cokes in me, and then I'll talk," he says.

Lea climbs up a couple of her steps and looks him straight in the eye, evaluating him. Chris calmly waits with one raised eyebrow until she's done and smiling again. "Okay! Fine, but I'm holding you to your word, Christopher." She pats him on the head before heading inside her trailer, and Chris sighs as he makes the short trek over to his own.

This is only the beginning.

He left his trailer a wreck of dirty tissues, and he suppresses a shudder as he grabs the trash can and starts to clean up. There's a knock at his door just as he's dealing with the last of it.

"Come in, the hazmat area is clear!"

"And here I was armed with face masks and Germ-X," Darren says as he peeks inside. He grins the second Chris looks up at him. "Hey, stranger."

"Hey, yourself," Chris says as he slides past with a tied-up bag of garbage. He can feel Darren's eyes on him, and when he looks, there's an amused expression on Darren's face as he leans against Chris's counter. He

turns his attention back to his messenger bag and makes a face at all the cough drop wrappers and tissues that are tucked away inside of it. Darren's beside him with his now empty trash can before he can ask for it, and Chris flashes him a wry smile before cleaning out his bag. "So, what can I do for you?"

"Well, Christopher..." Darren starts, his hands falling to Chris's hips, and Chris rolls his eyes.

"As I told Lea, let me get some Diet Coke in me first."

Darren blinks. "Before you... make out with her? Because that was my angle. In case you missed that. I know you're still recovering and all and probably aren't at your best. You know -" He taps Chris's temple. "Up here."

"Ha ha, yes, that's *exactly* what I'm planning. My clever plan of kissing all of the vertically challenged of our cast will soon be complete."

Darren's vengeful, wiggling fingers creep up Chris's side before he can stop them, and he squeaks as Darren dances his fingertips lightly over Chris's skin, up and down his sides and then across his belly where his muscles jump as he writhes and laughs. "Darren, Darren, stop it, *stop it*, I *hate* you!" he says as he grabs at Darren's wrists and holds them firmly in both of his hands, trapping Darren's arms between them as he whirls to face him. "You're *awful*."

"That's what you *get*," Darren says with a decisive nod, but he blows his argument to pieces when he can't stop his eyes from wandering to Chris's mouth every few seconds.

Chris sighs and draws out his impatience another moment just to make Darren suffer and then leans in and presses a happy, buzzing kiss to Darren's mouth. Darren leans forward, chasing the kiss when Chris pulls away, and a thrill shoots through him down to his toes.

"So, I was thinking," Darren begins, eyes dancing.

"The earth is doomed."

"Doomed to be more *awesome*, maybe. But, I was *thinking* it's about time you came to my humble abode, don't you think?"

Chris raises his eyebrow. "Oh, is it?"

Darren spins Chris by the hips until he's pressed back against his door, and then Darren kisses him, hard and smacking. "Yup," he says, crowding Chris in a little more. "It definitely is. I'll even let you pick the movie this time."

"Fancy," Chris drawls, even though he's smiling. "I guess it's a date."