Isak and Even meet on a train and spend a night exploring Paris, losing themselves and finding each other.

Or, a Before Sunrise AU.

SKAM is over and I may finally go back to not waking up through the night in case there's an update, so here is the result of sheer self-indulgence and my three greatest loves: Paris, the Before trilogy and Isak Valtersen. Whereas setting this in Vienna would have been truer to the script, I've never actually been. You'll also notice I know nothing about doctors other than season one of Greys Anatomy, and even less about space. Title from Sonnet XXVII by Pablo Neruda: "Naked you are blue like the night in Cuba, you have vines and stars in your hair."

See the end of the work for more notes.
They meet on a train to Paris.

It’s early, sky bright but a little dusty. It feels like it should be warmer for late August; the south had been punishing, the kind of heat that bubbled beneath his skin, no care for cold showers or weak hostel fans. In comparison, France is hot, but it’s bearable.

For once, Even isn’t fighting for an inch of floor space. He’s not sitting on his bags in a doorway, stuffed onto overbooked trains with poor air conditioning and windows sweating with condensation. There’s no friendly Argentinian backpacker sharing wafers and travel stories, or Brit in a fanny-pack groaning about having to climb over luggage to reach the suspicious-smelling bathrooms. This time, the compartment is sparse, Paris empty while its people make their way to sunnier spots for their own holidays. There’s still hours to go before they reach their destination, before his trip is over and Even is back to the cold embrace of coursework and an uninsulated flat in Peckham.

He has his camera slung low across his chest, blankly scrolling through the pictures he’d taken in Toulouse. They’re not great, but admittedly, nothing from this trip has been anything to write home about. Holiday-wise, not bad — he’d got laid easily enough, and he’d managed the difficult feat of not exactly getting a tan, but not getting sunburnt either.

But when he thinks of the hours spent lugging film equipment around East London for a measly wage, to pay for a measly backpacking trip around Europe, searching for the lost spark that made him apply for film school outside of Oslo in the first place… it doesn’t quite add up.

And it sucks, because Even truly, madly, deeply loves film. He loves writing and directing and storyboarding, all the boring stuff people ignore down the credits roll. He loves watching movies and discussing camera techniques and reviewing and making people listen to his opinions on mumblecore and colour palettes. He even loves film school; or he does in theory. He’s not sure anymore. It’s got lost in the pulsing greygreygrey of London: the single square of blue sky he sees a week, the constant bustle that excited him at first but now makes getting out of bed every morning a battle in self-discipline. The fact that he’s two years into a film degree at Goldsmiths and he’s barely touched a tripod.

Not to mention, the water tastes like fucking limestone.

All the dreams and inspiration that used to fizz out of him like a coke can are disappearing down the drain, and now he’s here, on a half-empty train to Paris with a maxed-out credit card in his wallet and nothing to show for it.

He’s aware that he’s being a bit dramatic, but in a way, Even’s always sort of felt like his life were a movie. Logically, he knows it isn’t, and he knows people don’t always appreciate when he plans out plot, dialogue or emotion that the characters in his life can’t always deliver on. He knows it’s a big pressure for someone to expect more than you’re able to give, but it doesn’t stop him from craving it. Craving the control of the director, control over his life, control over himself.

He just wants something more.

More than this, at least.

More than sustaining himself on cornershop curry and Tesco meal deals because London is so
fucking expensive; more than having nothing to talk about with his friends and family other than how tired he is all the time; more than churning out what his professors want to see instead of what he wants to make: drama and fury and explosive love. When Even writes, he writes **big**.

He also knows that it’s stupid to pin all his hopes and dreams on a lonely night in Paris, but at this point, it’s all he has left. Once he’s back to the usual grind of film school, it’ll be ‘gritty realism’ and short films on dealing with depression through ham-fisted metaphors. One time a guy in his class made them look at a black and white picture of a battery-farm chicken for twenty minutes while Mozart’s *Lacrimosa* played in the background. Nobody was allowed to speak.

He *needs* to find something to write about.

So he’s doing the artist thing: walking around all night, (hopefully) breathing in inspiration, living his last hours in slow motion. This is mostly because he’s so goddamn broke he can’t even afford the shittiest hostel in the dodgy corners of Gare du Nord (favourably described as ‘Dante’s Inferno’ on TripAdvisor — thanks Mike Beebe from Seattle), but his train’s at nine AM tomorrow morning, and there’s an equal chance of getting mugged as there is of finding inspiration.

Ultimately, it’s a risk he’s willing to take.

He stares out at the blurred countryside for a while longer before a bickering German couple steal his attention. He’d been planning on doing some exploring, ending up in the food carriage and figuring his way through limp train food. These two seem more interesting though, and he pulls out a worn sketchbook to try and capture their movements. The woman has wild, corkscrew curls and checks her phone like it’s a nervous tick. The man is bursting out of his trousers and trying to ignore her for a Stephen King paperback. Without knowing a word of German, he picks up that they’re fighting about a sister-in-law and something to do with a Sacher torte. He looks around again, and this time he lands on someone much more appealing.

It’s a boy, probably not much younger than he is. He’s blonde, hair falling in waves across his forehead and behind his ears, with a cute, upturned nose a bit like a pixie. He’s sprawled (rather selfishly) across two train seats, back against the window as he flicks through something dense with what looks like size 2 font. The title’s in Norwegian.

Even doubts there’s a God up there, but if there were, she’s pulling through.

Before he even knows it, he’s looking for reasons to talk to him. He could come up with a flimsy excuse, pretend he’s deeply fascinated by *Space, Time, and the… Texture of Reality*? And yeah, that’s not happening. The other route is to find a semi-legitimate reason, such as the Germans being too noisy, or the dust gathered in his window being so thick he can’t even see the fascinating rye fields outside and *wouldn’t you know*, the view from golden boy’s window is just so much better.

Ultimately, there’s no better conversation starter than the fact that they’re both Norwegian and conveniently stuck on a direct train to Paris for the next four hours.

Even makes his way over.

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The problem is, it takes a little while to actually gain his attention. For all that it sounds like literal hell, the texture of reality must be a lot more interesting than he previously thought, because Even’s been staring at the boy like an idiot for almost five minutes before he finally looks away from his book. He startles, almost dropping it in shock. Even does his best impression of a winning smile.
“Hi,” he says.

The guy stares at him for a beat too long, wide eyes almost all pupil and, if Even were feeling cocky, he’d wonder if it’s because of him. There’s a faint red patch on his cheekbone from where he’s been leaning on his hand and Even wonders if he was actually using the book to hide the fact that he was sleeping. Personally, Even hasn’t felt this awake all morning.

“Uh, hi,” the boy says, kind of breathless. His head is tilted slightly, like has no fucking clue what’s going on.

Even is usually smoother than this.

“How’s it going?” He asks, still smiling brightly. Maybe too brightly, judging by how the boy winces in response.

And then he just stares. Continues to stare. Exhales. “Good, I guess… You?”

Even shrugs, settling in. “Been better, really. My window back there was all clogged up so thought I’d move to a better view. I’m also pretty hungry, but if that food trolley earlier was any indication of the food they’re serving on here, I’ll probably just starve.”

This time, the silence stretches out into something almost uncomfortable, growing heavier with the subtle rise of the boy’s shoulders as they ascend into his neck like a heckled cat. Even watches him, hoping for something, anything. But the longer he waits to speak, the more Even feels like he needs to: incessantly, uselessly, filling the air between them with noise he’ll regret later because despite what they say, silence isn’t golden and sometimes it’s louder than bombs.

Finally, he snaps. “Great conversation, though.”

It’s a stupid thing to say and he regrets it the moment it’s out (willing the seconds to rewind, for the boy to relax), but miraculously, it breaks the tension. The boy laughs, a small, helpless sound like he’s not sure he meant to make it. He peers up at Even through thick, dark lashes, apologetic.

“Sorry,” he rasps, even though he has nothing to be sorry for. “Guess I’m still a bit dead from the early morning.”

It’s eleven, but time is a construct. Either way, he finds his sleepiness intriguing: the tired circles under his eyes; the slight delay between his answers, as if his words are something worth deliberating over. Now that he’s close, there’s something generally rumpled about him. It’s more than just the creases in his bomber jacket, odd in the context of late summer but a necessary shield against the unpredictability of compartment air conditioning. More than his tousled hair and sluggish responses. Really, it’s nothing to indicate more than needing a solid night’s sleep, but a surge of protectiveness still races through Even: the desire to soothe and caress.

“Don’t be,” he says, smiling again. “I was just lonely and needed to get away from all that tension over there,” he flicks his head towards the Germans. “To be honest, I saw that the book you were reading was in Norwegian and saw salvation. I didn’t mean to startle you.”

He can see the boy silently contemplating whether or not to check the book cover, as if needing confirmation that it really is in Norwegian. Even can’t tell whether he should be charmed or offended by this, like it’s something worth making up for the chance to speak to him. He’s not exactly wrong, but the boy quickly dispels these fears by nodding. Even’s going to write a thanks to whatever nerd wrote *The Fabric of the Cosmos* for doing him a solid.

“That’s fair,” he says, after some thought. A man of few words, then. Another beat, furrowed
eyebrows. “What tension?”

Even nods at a table behind them, where the woman is sending pointed glares over the top of her phone. The man is still engrossed in his Stephen King. “See over there?” He asks, watching the boy stretch to peer behind him. He’s blatantly obvious in his staring, but fuck if his side profile doesn’t belong in the Louvre. It could be a Michelangelo.

His brows furrow, taking in the scene. They’re very nice, Even notes. Shapely and dark, but amateur enough Even doubts the boy’s ever touched them. “She looks mad,” he says, then ah’s. “Good book, though.”

This startles a laugh out of Even. “Stephen King, really?”

“He’s good!” The boy says, a little defensive. His voice pitches higher ever so slightly. “I mean, he’s famous…”

Even scoffs, but the grin that’s fighting to take over his face (and winning) likely defeats the sound. “Famous doesn’t mean good!” he cries. “And anyway, considering what you’re reading right now looks unbelievably dull, how can you be trusted?”

Golden boy’s mouth falls open, revealing perfectly gapped teeth. He pulls the book closer to his chest, scandalised. “This is a great book!”

“It’s on…” Even studies the cover for a hint, because to be honest, he has no fucking clue what it’s on. His grimace must show, because the boy smiles indulgently, still hugging the book.

“Theoretical physics,” he says, resting back against the glass. The book lies on the table between them now. It feels like it’s laughing at him.

“It’s on theoretical physics,” Even repeats. “And I’m betting you’re reading it for fun.”

“It’s a great book.” He says solemnly.

Even gives him a look, long enough that the boy huffs out a laugh, rolling his eyes. It’s a practiced move, but not malicious. “I like space,” he says simply.

“I suppose,” Even wrinkles his nose. “A bit big, though.”

“You could say that,” he laughs. He tilts his head back against the glass, the morning light catching on his hair, lighting it up like a halo. When he turns his head, Even sees double. It feels like he’s being studied.

“What do you like, then?” The boy asks.

“Anything. Everything.” His eyes narrow. Even snorts. “Film.”

“That’s cool. Do you make them or just watch?”

“Both, though right now neither.”

Even is quickly coming to learn that when the boy tilts his head to the left, it means he has a question. The look he gives Even is withering, and he feels like he should be taking notes. This one would say ‘no vague answers’.

Even sighs, dramatic, waving his arms as if to encircle all of ‘this’ (backpacking, fancy camera, stuck on a train with a pretty boy) and enjoying the way the boy’s eyes flick, albeit quickly, to the
gaping collar of his shirt. “That’s sort of what this whole thing is about. I’ve been travelling all summer looking for inspiration, y’know? Cliché, but I hoped something would come to me, and now I’m heading back to London and still nothing.”

The boy starts. “London?”

“Starting my last year of film school at Goldsmiths next Monday. I’m actually supposed to have a concept for my term project already.”

The boy nods, contemplative. “Sucks.”

Even snorts. “Wow, you’re so empathetic.”

He grins something wicked. “I’m the master of empathy.”

Even kicks him gently under the table.

“What about you, then?” He asks. “What brings you here?”

“Going home,” the boy shrugs. It’s languid, like everything he does. “Was interning at a hospital in Barcelona over the summer and now I’m heading back to Oslo. I’m in my second year.”

“High achiever,” Even teases, genuinely impressed. “Gonna be a doctor?”

“Yep,” he says, popping the ‘p’. There’s a subtle confidence to him that wasn’t there before and Even can’t help but imagine him in that white doctor coat, holding a clipboard and explaining x-rays, or alternatively, hooking up with him (Even’s a sexy nurse in this scenario, or a sexy patient) in a supply closet. “Got a while to go, though. And a lot of debt to look forward to.”

Even grins. “I wouldn’t know what that’s like, sorry, being a film student and all. Arts really yield a profit.”

This time, he’s the one being kicked under the table, and not quite as gently.

“I bet,” the boy grins. “Maybe you could help me out when you make it big. Direct that movie about disturbing some guy on a train and mocking him for his poverty.”

“I will. In fact, I’ll call it…” In an ideal world, Even would be able to think up something clever on the spot, something so impressive the boy would swoon delicately, but deeply into his arms. Typically, in this world his brain actively hates him. “Actually, I don’t know what I’ll call it but it’ll win every award. Best Picture, Volpi Cup, Palme D’Or. 100% Rotten Tomatoes rating.”

“Don’t know what those are but glad it all works out for you.”

“Thanks, I try.”

They fall into a comfortable silence; two boys with twin grins sitting patiently in the in-between.

“I’m Isak,” the boy says.

“Even,” he replies. “What kind of doctor do you want to be, Isak?” The name tastes delicious on his tongue.

“Surgeon, probably.”

“Shut up.”
“I’m serious!”

“Should I be calling you McDreamy, now?” He likes that Isak doesn’t bother pretending not to know who he’s talking about, just rolls his eyes fondly. “This is bringing a whole new perspective to our movie! Maybe you’ll be on your way back home after a romantic getaway with a beautiful stranger, only to get to work and discover that she’s your sexy new intern—”

Something decidedly pointed collides with his shin. Again. “Shut up!” Isak groans, face hidden between long, pale fingers.

“I’m not finished yet! You try and stay away because you’re actually still married to your ambitious and sexy-in-a-strict way pediatric surgeon wife, who you’re currently estranged from—”

“Have you ever actually been an intern? Because it’s not sexy at all.”

“Stop lying, I bet it’s sexy as hell. You’re probably having an affair with three different doctors right now, and they all probably look like runners-up for the Spanish national football team.”

Isak peers out. “Is that right?”

“Yes, and they’re all called something like Ramon. Or Cristiano. Enrique.”

To be completely honest, at this point Even doesn’t even know what he’s saying anymore, but he’ll keep running his mouth if it means Isak looking at him like he doesn’t know whether to laugh or hit him.

Isak shifts one pale hand so that he’s leaning his cheek onto it, grinning lazily. “And I’m sleeping with all three of them?”

“You are,” Even nods wisely. “You’re their hot Scandinavian sidepiece. You seduce them with talk of Ikea because they think Sweden and Norway are the same place. You’re not a threat because we’re shit at football. They’re idiots but you’ll usurp them all.”

“You’re having fun with this, aren’t you?”

“Lots. And they all buy you gifts, more and more outrageous as they fight for your attention. The other students hate you, but with Ramon, Cristiano and Eric on your side—”

“I think it was Enrique, actually.”

“Right, Enrique. Anyway, they don’t stand a chance. But Enrique’s wife, Carmela, who wears red and has a gambling problem, is on to you. She exposes you while you and Enrique are fucking mid-surgery—”

“Mid-surgery? Are we fucking on the patient?”

“You are; it’s scandalous.”

“That’s… so unhygienic.” He says, nose wrinkling at the thought.

“It’s also a kidney transplant.”

Isak’s eyes widen, giddy with suppressed laughter. “That’s like, the least sexy operation ever.”

“Well, you two are pretty kinky. So now you’re on the run because Carmela wants blood and Ramon and Cristiano are ready to leave their wives for you too.”
Isak sighs helplessly. “What can I say? No one talks POÄNG like I do.”

And just like that, Even’s in love.

He points a finger at him. “You’re dangerous, Isak.”

When Isak laughs it should be dainty, with his narrow hips and pretty mouth, but instead it’s hoarse and boyish. Even warms at the sound, down his throat and through his lungs, unfurling in his chest like the summer breeze.

“It sounds like you have your movie, Even.” He says softly.

And see, Even’s spent his whole life thinking his name is ordinary, one-syllable, forgettable, containing a particle of the sheer life and vibrancy Even feels in his head alone. When Isak says it, it sounds like a promise.

A comfortable silence engulfs them, miles from the raw nerves of before. Even is leaning on his forearms, having become more and more animated throughout his spiel. Isak has turned to face him too, head leaning back against the dirty window. His eyes are smiling, both in person and through the looking glass, reflected in every surface, every glance, every heartbeat. Even shivers at the thought.

“I guess I do.”

They chat as the train brings them closer to Paris, and it’s easy, an effortless exchange like Even hasn’t experienced in years. It hits him — in between rounds of Scum they keep messing up because they’re missing a Queen, lost in a ruin bar in Budapest; spilling salted cashews between them that Isak found in his pocket, expired but edible, still bearing a Danish logo from a field trip last spring — that this is the first proper conversation he’s had in weeks. It’s depressing to think that he hasn’t really connected with anyone in a long time, hasn’t felt like he can be himself without constantly second-guessing everything he says and does, like a nervous, toxic tick.

Maybe it’s simply being around another Norwegian. It’s what he hadn’t considered about London, how you can be at the centre of the universe and still feel so alone.

It sucks then that, in a few minutes or so, he and Isak will be going their separate ways. Or, Even will. Isak’s staying on through Frankfurt till Copenhagen, then flying the rest. Even had tried to gauge his reaction when he told him he was disembarking in Paris; hoped he didn’t imagine the dimming of his smile, how Isak’s surprise read hollow. Not that it matters — they’ll probably never see each other again, and that’s life, isn’t it? Sometimes you meet perfect boys (green eyes, golden hair, laugh that could launch a thousand ships) and you just. You just deal with it. You go back to your cold, empty room with your boring, tired flatmates and you order in greasy pizza and watch ‘Take Me Out’, pretending you don’t wish you were the one going on a mystery date to the Isle of Fernando’s.

Or. Or.

You ask them to come with you.
“Get off with me in Paris.”

Isak, mid-sentence — something about a late-night YouTube video conspiracy theory phase that his best friend took a little too seriously — stops.

“What?” He squeaks.

“Get off with me in—” Even sees the issue. “I mean! Get off the train with me in Paris, not— like, you could also get off with me in Paris, if you wanted, that would be chill, but also if you don’t want to that’s fine! But—”

Isak giggles, and thank God that cuts Even off. He really has no indication of Isak’s taste in partners, nothing to go on but a lack of reaction to several Spanish fantasy boyfriends. Potentially, the fact that they’ve been shyly but surely flirting all morning, and Even’s roughly 70% sure that Isak’s been staring at his lips just as much as he’s been staring at Isak’s.

He looks Isak in the eye. “What I’m trying to say is,” takes a deep breath, “I know we’ve just met, and I know this could be nothing but a scream in the void but, I like you, and I feel like we could have something here.” He pauses. “Right? It’s not just me… right?”

He waits.

And waits.

It’s suddenly glaringly obvious that Even is alone in this; that once again, he’s read all the signs wrong. He’s invented a narrative Isak never once agreed to and— what is he thinking? Of course, Isak doesn’t feel the same way. He’s beautiful and funny; he reads physics books for fun. He wants to be a surgeon, for fucks sake. He probably has a hot girlfriend at home who’s about to pass the Bar, sings like Nina Simone and is experimenting with paleo. She collects cactuses and can drive stick-shift and spends every summer teaching blind orphans to read. Or a boyfriend: funny, plays rugby. Isak’s family loves him and they have a designated date night every Thursday, trying dishes from around the world, even the spicy one’s Isak can’t handle because it’s cute when his face goes all red like that. They’re thinking of adopting a puppy. He’s not fucking crazy—

“It’s not just you,” Isak says, so soft Even almost doesn’t hear it over the sound of his internal monologue; a tick away from imploding. “It’s not just you,” he says again, louder, decisively. The smile he gives Even is terrified, but genuine.

It’s like Even can breathe again.

“That’s chill,” he hears himself say faintly, because he’s an idiot.

“That’s chill,” Isak repeats, blushing profusely.

They spend an untraceable amount of time just looking at each other, because they can, because sometimes there is nothing more gratifying than the simple act of liking and being liked in return.

“Come with me to Paris.” Even says again, voice soft but sure. “My train to London doesn’t leave till tomorrow morning so you can get on another train to Oslo before your Eurail runs out. And I’m broke so I was just planning on walking around and seeing the city at night. It’s warm and it’s ending and it’s Paris. It’s just for a night. Keep me company.”

Isak’s stare is disbelieving, and he leaves it for so long Even can feel himself bursting at the seams, one by one, up his sides and down his legs and across the insides of his thighs. They reached Paris a while ago, but it only feels real now that he can see the uniform buildings; café’s and bistro's and
graffiti spilling over balconies. Gare de Lyon is visible in the near distance, and even when outside is rushing around him, Even feels like they’re standing still.

“Okay,” Isak says.

When they smile, it’s reflected tenfold.
Isak, 15.17, Sainte-Chapelle du Palais/Le Marais

Chapter Notes

Hi hi sorry, just have to update this to give a massive THANK YOU to the incredibly lovely anon who's messaged me on tumblr twice now!! I'm not sure if you'll see this but I've realised too many people I know irl follow me on there and I can't really be bothered telling them that my ass is 22 and writing fic so JUST KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU AND THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR WONDERFUL MESSAGES THEY MAKE ME SO HAPPY TO READ AND PLEASE IF YOU WANNA KEEP CHATTING SO I CAN FULLY CONVEY MY LOVE COME OFF ANON AND I'LL LOVE U TILL MY HEART'S CONTENT ok psa over thanks for listening everyone all my love!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Isak has no idea what he’s doing.

It’s sort of like that scene in the Leonardo DiCaprio movie, the wolf one, where he’s doped up on finely aged quaaludes and totals his Ferrari at five miles per hour. It’s the expectation versus reality, except Isak accepted his fate less on expectation and entirely on whim, on a foreign notion called ‘spontaneity’ or ‘taking a chance on a beautiful boy on a train’ and now he’s here and he’s? What is he?

He forces himself to slow down, to think about this logically.

One, he’s in Paris with a beautiful boy. Two, he’s going to spend the entire night exploring Paris with said beautiful boy. Three, beautiful boy likes him, and Isak likes him back.

On one hand, instinct is telling him to flee; to run like he’s used to, like it’s all he knows. To get on the next trainplanebuscar and return to Oslo, to his warm flat and spartan bedroom, stained sheets and cloudy mirror. Return to Eskild’s obtrusive form of TLC, Jonas’s silent worry and Eva’s deafening love. To go back to boredom, drowning in distractions lest he forget even for a second that he’s scared and alone, watching life happen to other people and doing nothing about it.

It’s not lost on him that of all the times he could have picked to try and reinvent himself, to take a chance and live a little, it just happens to be the time he’s in a foreign country with a foreign boy. (Why can’t he get his kicks hand-grinding exotic beans for his morning coffee, or investing in Amazon Prime, like a regular person? Why does he always have to do things backwards?)

But here he is, trailing a river — the Seine, he’s told, as if Isak’s never opened a textbook — through cobblestone streets and beautiful buildings, perfect and orderly in a way Oslo comfortingly isn’t. Even walks with him, his paces slightly longer due to the sheer length of his legs, but Isak doesn’t have to try to keep up. They seem to fall into a natural step, the sound of their footsteps lost between the beeping of cars and the distant hum of tourists.

On the other hand, Isak just really wants to freak out. I mean, he’s obviously not like, zen right now, but it could be worse. A lot worse. Considering it took three days before he was okay enough to leave his Airbnb in Barcelona due to that particular brand of Unexpected Shattering Homesickness, it’s actually sort of a miracle that he’s not ready to throw himself into the Seine.
Which is good, because the water is more brown than blue, and there’s a constant stream of boats passing by and he’s not in the mood to ruin anybody’s holiday.

One passes just then, a passenger on the deck waving vaguely in their direction. Even waves back.

And then there’s Even, and what the fuck is up with that.

Even, with his interested eyes and sharp canines, silky hair fashioned into a quiff Isak is half in awe of but mostly wants to run his hands through. Long legs and a soft laugh and this way of looking at Isak like he’s the most interesting thing in existence. It makes Isak want to climb him, or dig himself a grave to lie in for the foreseeable future.

And it’s total bullshit because Isak is like, top ten most boring people on the planet, easily. If there’s about seven billion people out there, and Isak can let up on the self-hatred for a few minutes to admit that okay, he’s boring but he’s not a total weirdo who collects Soviet Union-era paperclips or geotags his Snapchats, then maybe he can concede to being top 100. Roughly #72 most boring person ever. But that’s still 7,347,668,027 people more boring than Even, who’s at least top tier of actively un-boring people.

He doesn’t know how long he’s been silently working himself into a meltdown when Even tugs at his sleeve, once, twice, three times. Even’s watching him expectantly, obviously having asked a question that Isak stupidly ignored in favour of his dickhead thoughts. He shakes his head of them, pretending it makes a difference.

Even stays clutching his sleeve; it’s ticking like a bomb.

“What’s up?”

“You alright there? You’ve gone all quiet,” Even asks kindly. Everything he does is kind.

How?

Isak runs a hand through his already messy hair. “Yeah, just, y’know…” freaking the fuck out, building myself into a panic attack, giving in to the boxes upon boxes of ‘Do Not Open — Anxiety!!!’ stacked in his brain, buzzing beneath the surface like angry bees, “thinking.”

Even hums. “What about?”

And Isak could probably tell him the truth, has a feeling Even would understand, or at least be nice about it. Be kind.

He could tell him that he’s never done this before, that he doesn’t know how to do it, that he’s not sure he ever will. That he wants so desperately for Even to teach him. That this is him being brave, can’t Even see that?

Instead, Isak takes a moment to properly situate himself. He looks around him, catching colour-wheel Smart cars rushing past them, pretty little cafés with scarlet awnings and loopy gold writing in their windows. There are old men in cheese-cutters walking comically fat dogs. It looks straight out of a movie.

Fuck, he’s in Paris.

“It really looks like it, doesn’t it?” He asks, his voice gone embarrassingly dreamy. “Like Paris.”

Somehow, because Even wasn’t making up what he said on the train — there is something
between them, something neither of them know how to define right now, but there, glowing and glittering and growing stronger by the second — he gets it. He even nods like what Isak just asked isn’t just worth acknowledging, but pondering over too, which honestly, is a bit overkill.

“I’ve only ever seen it in movies, you know?” Isak continues, watching as another boat sails by, this one advertising gourmet meals and Paris’s best views by night, all for just 60 euros, complimentary flute of champagne included. It’s filled with couples smoking over tiny black coffees. “And I don’t know why I’m surprised that it actually looks like how it’s meant to, but it’s something else actually being here… It’s like I know it’s real but it still feels like a movie. Do you know what I mean?”

Even’s watching him again, that laser beam gaze that makes his palms itch. Slowly, he lifts his hand, giving Isak enough time to move out of the way if he wishes to. (Isak would stand there forever.) It comes to push his fringe out of his eyes, gently, Even taking his time running his hand through the silky strands. They shine yellow in the sunshine, and Isak leans into the touch.

It’s their first touch.

“I know what you mean,” Even says softly.

The things is, Isak’s never been eloquent. He has more trouble stringing together words than they’re worth. It’s different when he’s working. He’d impressed in his studies because he loves what he’s doing, knows what he’s talking about, even when all that was is photocopying reports and shadowing harried (and definitely not sexy) doctors. But when it comes to this: to friendship, to romance, to bearing your soul in front of a stranger and letting yourself be vulnerable before them — well, that’s uncharted territory for Isak.

Most of his friendships are happy accidents: seated alphabetically next to Vasquez, Jonas on his first day of kindergarten; Eva, Mahdi and Magnus through him, his most beloved social crutch. At sixteen, rescued shitfaced and miserable from a gay bar by Eskild, adopted by him, Noora and Linn thereafter. Even Sana wasn’t deliberate — their godawful high school Bio teacher set them up as partners on account of bad (great) timing.

So, it’s amazing how instantly he and Even seem to click. Isak’s not kidding himself, it’s not exactly effortless. He’s still petrified, still overthinks everything he says and does, but this time it’s a different kind of terror, one lined with excitement, with want. It’s almost unconscious now to take a breath between speaking, slowly and difficultly composing his thoughts into words, those words into clunky, esoteric sentences. But Even, miraculously, seems to get them. He reads between the lines and understands and God, is that what Isak’s been waiting for all this time? To simply be understood?

Even’s hand is still in his hair, brushing softly, and he notices when Isak comes back to himself, eyes catching on a pale wrist, fuchsia bracelet tied messily around it. Cubed beads spelling out R-O-M-A twist through the thread. There’s so much he doesn’t know about Even, and so much he wants to find out.

Even beats him to it.

“Tell me what movie you feel like you’re in.”

He’s talking about Paris, and Isak doesn’t even consider his answer for a second before he blurts it out.

“Ratatouille.”
The hand in Isak’s hair stills.

“Rat-” Even clears his throat. “Ratatouille?”

And holy fuck, Isak wants to die. There’s little he can do but go with it, anchor himself to the sinking ship that is his dignity until there’s nothing left but a few mortified bubbles floating to the surface. Even slowly removes his hand from his hair and this is it: he’s opting out, saying sayonara, hasta luego, arrivederci never, bitch! ‘Sorry, but I seem to have talked to the wrong boy on the train, this one’s obviously faulty.’

Even’s still looking at him incredulously and the seconds seem to stretch out into hours and Isak really wants to take it back, pretend it never happened, but another part of him sort of… unashamedly loves Ratatouille, watches it cuddled up with Eskild not exactly when he’s feeling down, but on enough occasions when he’s been upset or tired enough that it’s almost Pavlovian now, so in a way, to deny it would feel like a betrayal.

For the second time that day, Isak finds himself defending something he’d never in a million years want to be discussing with a hot guy on their first (arguable) date.

“It’s a great film,” Isak says weakly, and somehow Even’s smile grows even bigger.

“I mean… yes, but also,” a breathy laugh escapes him, and his eyes are twinkling in this sweet, fond way and Isak can’t breathe, “it’s about a rat who wants to be a chef. How do you feel like a rat who wants to be a chef, right now?”

Isak squints, looking around at absolutely nothing to not have to witness his own damn self. Finally, he mumbles: “He follows his dreams, and stuff.”

At some point, Even’s gotten a lot closer to Isak, so much so that their height difference is pronounced, Even having to lean down to look him in his eyes. That loose lock of hair flops over his forehead, tantalising and distracting in equal measures.

Even’s smile dials down, leaving something small and soft. “He follows his dreams and stuff?”

“Yes,” Isak huffs, rolling his eyes because everyone’s fucking seen Ratatouille, okay? “He goes to Paris and lets himself dream of becoming a chef even though he’s a little rat and a lot of shenanigans and self-discovery later, he—”

“Are you following your dreams right now?”

Even’s question brings him to a halt. Is he? He’s not sure he ever specifically dreamed of this, meeting a boy on a train and following him to Paris. His dreams tend to be a lot less romantic. To be honest, they’re mostly sex dreams if he’s gonna dream of love at all, and they almost always start mid-action and end before the climax, usually with stressful patches in which Isak suddenly realises it’s forbidden and then it’s like he’s underwater, every movement like dancing through molasses.

Typical that even in his dreams Isak can’t get laid in peace.

But to an extent, Even’s right. Isak’s not one of those people who thinks he’s never going to be fulfilled until he’s in a romantic relationship, knows it doesn’t work that way, but it’s not like he’s had much experience as a useful comparison. And anyway, it’s more like a general desire for love. Isak hasn’t had the easiest childhood, had outright crap teenage years and has only just grown into himself, into his body, his sexuality and his interests on the cusp of twenty. He’s not sure he’ll ever
feel settled in his skin, but this is a start.

Isak finally looks up, Even watching him, patient and sun-kissed. “I guess I am,” he says, soft but sure, and watches Even light up like summer itself.

“I’m glad I get to share this with you,” Even says, impossibly earnest.

Isak’s glad, too.

/ He doesn’t even realise where or for long they’ve been walking until Even makes a ‘ta-da!’ sound, gesturing ahead of them where a cathedral lies, poised on an island splitting the river.

It’s Notre Dame, he registers, mortified when he realises he knows this from watching the cartoon *Hunchback of Notre Dame* with Lea a few years back, when of all the singing princesses and talking cutlery, *that* was her favourite. It’s just as beautiful in real life, flying buttresses coiling around its back like a spider, arches and black windows leading up to its spire. Isak isn’t particularly religious, not anymore, but he can’t help wish his mother could be here to see it. He’ll have to take a photo for her.

He tries to remember where they were in their conversation, Even mostly ribbing him about movies he’s never seen and will now make an active effort to never see in his life.

(“Moulin Rouge?” Even asks, voice lilting hopefully.

“Is that the weird singing one?” Isak asks uncertainly, to which Even pulls a strop that lasts them several street crossings.

Isak agrees to more of his weird game just to get him to shut up about Ewan McGregor. Turns out he’s the jealous type.)

Even nudges him. “That’s Notre Dame.”

Isak swallows. “I know.”

After the *Ratatouille* fiasco, he’s almost scared to see Even’s face.

“Yeah?” Even smiles, and Isak can tell it’s wicked even in his peripheral vision. “Did you see it in a movie?”

Isak doesn’t even bother dignifying that with an answer. Not that there’s any point because Even barrels on, setting himself up for his own joke. It shouldn’t be cute.

“Was it Ratatouille?” And God, he can literally *hear* the smile in Even’s voice.

“No,” he replies petulantly, but his lips are fighting a smile, giving him away.
“The Hunchback of Notre Dame?”

And there we go.

“Shut up, Even!”

Even laughs like he’s the funniest thing in the world.

(“How about Midnight in Paris?”

“Don’t you hate Woody Allen?”

“Yes, so you’re never allowed to tell anyone that I cry every time I watch it.”

“You’re so problematic.”

“Isak, let me remind you that you’ve seen two movies about Paris and they’re both cartoons, so I’d be very careful about wielding the judgement card.”

“…still problematic.”

“Isak!”

Île de la Cité, Google Maps calls it.

There’s a bustle on the island, but not as bad as it could be. The perks of visiting in August, he supposes. Regardless, he eyes the line of people stretching from the mouth of the cathedral, a lazy loop that wouldn’t take ages to wait out, but too long when all they have is a precious few hours.

It’s even more beautiful up front, and incredibly detailed. The stained-glass windows stand high and proud, colours bouncing off like kaleidoscopes. There are statuettes carved into the rock, grotesque and exquisite. It makes Isak wish he were the kind of person who had opinions on art more complex than “It looks great!”, but ultimately, he doesn’t really care enough. The cathedral does little more than remind him of his childhood, stuffed into packed churches twice a week for boring, stagnant sermons. He used to have to go to three before his dad took pity and let him stay at home some weeks under the excuse of looking after Lea, regardless that Isak was only eleven at the time.

Really, the only bits he liked were the singing and when they received communion, even though the bread didn’t actually taste like anything and he was never allowed to drink the wine. By the time he was of age to he’d already moved out, didn’t want anything to do with his parents, let alone a religion that told him that to love another boy was sinful, that there was no place for him but Hell. He’s eased up on himself since then, knows religion is what you make of it, but there’s a part of him that still mourns for the red wine he never got to taste, for the son he was never going to be.

Even tugs at his sleeve again. “Do you want to go in?”

Isak shrugs, hoping his entire past hasn’t broadcast on his face. “Not really.”

Even grins. “Perfect. Follow me.”
(“Last Tango in Paris?” Even asks, eyeing him suspiciously.

“Do I look like I watch dance movies?” Isak splutters.

Even positively hoots with laughter.)

“You know, when you told me to follow you and lead us away from one church, I didn’t really expect you to take us to another.”

They’re standing in the doorway of a second church, this one significantly smaller, tucked into a long, unassuming building a few streets behind Notre Dame. There’s railing outside to indicate that on any other day there would be a line trailing out, leading back to the river, and a faded banner invites them to Sainte-Chapelle du Palais. Today, it’s them and some tourists who ask where they can buy cigarettes. They’ve been mistaken for Parisians and Even is thrilled, replying in questionable English that there’s a Tabac across the street. He just about guides them there personally when Isak tugs him into the chapel instead.

If he thought Notre Dame was beautiful, this is something else entirely.

The ceilings are tall and arching, a canopy of royal blue with tiny golden fleur-de-lis etched into every space available, creating the illusion of being under a clear night sky. Stained-glass windows occupy almost every wall, ornate and delirious and lined with mahogany, dyeing the room with a purple light. The images are so intricate Isak can barely concentrate, lost in the silence of the place, the thick scent of holy water and candle wax. By some miracle, they’re alone, and Isak is wasting it being in awe of a church, of all things.

“This one’s special, though,” Even finally says. His voice carries through the air, echoing in the lofty heights of the room. “It’s one of my favourites.”

“You have more than one favourite church?” Isak asks, voice matching the quiet without even realising it.

“It’s Paris, Isak,” Even laughs like this should be obvious. When he says Isak’s name it chimes like a bell, a private hymn he could sing every Sunday. “Of course I have more than one favourite church.”

And for some, Isak supposes, it must be that easy. Maybe for Even, who isn’t religious, whose never had the fear of God etched into every fibre of his desires, it’s nothing but art caught in time. It just feels strange to him, is all, that after years of actively avoiding being anywhere near a church, he’s come to one of his own volition, and what’s more, with a boy. (And not just any boy, a boy he likes.) There’s something deeply sacrilegious about this whole scenario, and it settles fluttery and uncertain between his lungs.

He stares at Even, at the flowers on the ceiling, at the particles of dust floating around them, visible in the amber light shining distorted through the windows. He stares and he stares and he wonders if he’ll ever stop being afraid.

(“Ok, how you answer this will define my opinion of you forever, are you ready Isak? This is a test.”

“I guess?”)
“Good enough. Casablanca?”

Even’s watching him, going for playful but missing by a mile, too invested in the answer for Isak to be honest. He’s not sure what it means to Even but he knows he’s not ready for whatever that is yet, needs to delay the inevitable just a few more hours. He lies.

“Never seen it.”

Even lifts his hand to his heart like this physically pains him. “Never speak to me again.”

Even takes him to Le Marais and Isak breathes in the fresh air like he’s been cooped up for centuries. Even can tell something is up, that Sainte-Chapelle affected him more than as just an enchanted visitor. It doesn’t seem right to bring Even down with him, to unleash this weight onto someone as bright and positive as him.

Luckily, Even doesn’t let him.

“What’s going on in there?” He asks, tapping gently at Isak’s temple. They’ve been walking in silence for a little while, or at least Isak has, lost in thought. Even has an incredible talent for talking even when no one is listening, but in all honesty, Isak finds it comforting. The constant chatter leads him like Ariadne’s thread, a reminder that there’s a way out of his head if only he cares to follow it.

Still, it takes him by surprise, Even noticing him, wanting to know his thoughts. Years of conditioning mean his friends know that the best way to get Isak to open up to them is by simply waiting for him to be ready, as frustrating as that can be. Isak is a bitch on a good day, would go his entire life without talking about his feelings if he could. But, even he cracks under the pressure eventually, usually messily and overworked, with tears and cheap spirits that strip his throat like turpentine. It’s basically a cycle at this point, an ugly one he wishes no one had to see.

It’s weird then, that Even can pick up on his moods so easily, that he asks like he cares. What’s weirder is that Isak wants to tell him.

Tell him about his schizophrenic mother, his absent father, the little sister that makes all of it worth it. The shadow of a cross always looming like an omen, stored away in chat histories, in the curls of guilt that surface whenever he sees his mother’s name flash across his phone. Tell him that they’re better now, that the worst is over, that he can look her in the eye and not hate her like he did at seventeen. That she loves him; that he loves her. That he always will, even when she hurts him the most.

He takes a deep breath, and for the first time in too long, he lets himself be honest. In some language, it’s probably called growth.

/ 

“I’m sorry I took you there,” Even says after, voice so thick Isak could collect it in a jar. “I didn’t know…”

Isak rolls his eyes, nudging Even’s shoulder, careful not to dislodge the falafel they’re sharing
between them. It’s a perilous task navigating the narrow street of Rue des Rosiers, every bump in the pavement causing their fingers to brush over the greasy paper, hot sauce licked off knuckles as they silently compete for the salty cuts of eggplant at the bottom of the bag. It’s as gross as it is perfect.

“I didn’t tell you to make you feel bad,” Isak says reassuringly. The phrase ‘to have a weight lifted off your shoulders’ has always seemed so trite, the words of someone who doesn’t know what it’s like to be crushed under the weight of your own demons. It takes on a new meaning now that he’s experienced it. “It was beautiful, really. I get why you like it so much.”

“You do?”

“Of course.”

“That’s good,” Even smiles something tender. “How’s your mum doing now?”

“Great,” Isak means it. “She’s great. She’s in a facility just outside of Oslo at the moment, but she likes it, she’s made friends. I try and see her every week but it’s been harder this summer, with me being in Spain and all. I promised I’d send her postcards, though. Actually, I probably should of…”

He regrets having rushed out of the chapel now, right past a dusty stand of postcards and prayer cards set next to a donation box. He fingers the loose euros in this pocket, thoughtful.

Even extricates the last slice of eggplant, dangles it above Isak’s nose like he’s about to feed him. “Open up.”

“What are you doing?”

“You deserve it for telling me all that, plus I know you’ve been eyeing it this entire time.” He can’t really deny that. “Open up.”

He doesn’t actually think Isak’s going to allow him to feed him in public, does he? He pours out his heart and Even creates some sort of emotional rewards system. Fuck. Isak already knows he’s going to let him.

He opens his mouth, slowly, and with the way he and Even are maintaining eye contact it’s becoming unbearably intimate. He almost wants Even to pull back, yell Sike! and eat it himself, but then Isak wouldn’t get to watch him move closer, spot the grey flecks in his eyes and smell him, sweat and laundry powder and boy. A sharp hint of grapefruit.

It’s so intoxicating he barely registers it when Even drops the eggplant in his mouth. He swallows it mechanically, too busy watching Even watch him, the eyes that trail down with the bob of his throat. The air is so thick Isak doesn’t realise he’s been holding his breath until Even steps even closer, swiping his thumb over Isak’s wet lips. He sucks it back in his own mouth like he’s chasing the flavour. Of the falafel or of him, Isak’s not sure.

“Tastes good,” he mumbles, and Isak couldn’t speak if he tried.

Even seems to notice this, as after a few more moments, he steps back. Isak misses him immediately, but it’s a relief too.

“If you really want that postcard for your mum, we can go back and get it,” Even says patiently, as if Isak isn’t on the verge of a conniption. “But there’s hundreds of more to choose from, if it just needs to be of a church. I could take you to my favourite, if you like.”
He thinks he’s had enough of churches for a day. “Maybe.”

“Think about it. We don’t ever have to look at another one, if that’s what you’d prefer.”

Somehow, he doubts even Even has any control over that; every bloody corner in Paris seems to be a church. He shrugs. “Let’s just go where the night takes us.”

Slowly, Even grins. “That sounds good.”

They smile at each other for more than a little long, having come to a standstill, miraculously uninterrupted by the strangers rushing around them. The air smells sweet, hot from the boulangerie, tangy from the branded boutiques Isak can’t even afford to look at. It’s an odd place to have ended up in, an odder place to be having this moment.

It’s nice, though. Everything’s smaller here, not necessarily cramped but ancient and winding. It’s a far cry from the wide-set streets by the river; an ode to the medieval. This is the Jewish Quarter, affectionately called the Pletzl, meaning ‘the little place’. It’s one of the oldest areas in the city, and Isak can feel it from the peeling paint jobs to the glowing menorahs drawn into shop windows. Unfortunately, it’s not something he knows much about, but he’s sure that if he asked, Even would tell him all about it.

“Thank you for sharing this with me; you didn’t have to.”

Isak doubts he’s talking about the falafel. “I wanted to.”

Even looks at him in interest. “Why me?”

It’s a good question. Isak’s not sure he has the right answer, but if he’s been honest thus far, he can continue to try.

“Because when I’m with you, I don’t feel so alone,” he says, and he knows it’s the truth.

Beside him, Even exhales, shaky, so loud Isak is sure he could hear it from the other side of the world. It doesn’t take long for Even’s face to transform into something delighted, and Isak doesn’t even have to look to know that he feels the same way.

A hand takes his own, warm and a little greasy. It’s solid like a tether, and Isak doesn’t want to let go. It sends a thrill down his spine to know that technically, there’s no reason why he should.

Chapter End Notes

The more I read this, the worse it gets, so I’m just gonna publish it now and move on with my life. I’m not sure whether these chapters comes off disjointed, but Isak and Even’s narratives are meant to be quite different. Even’s is more cinematic, observational and adoring; Isak’s is more self-absorbed, in the same way season 3 narrowed down to just him. Does it work?

The falafel place they visit in the Rue des Rosiers is called L’as du Fallafel, and I cannot recommend it enough.
Even, 17.43, Le Centre Pompidou/Montmartre

Chapter Notes

In case my lovely tumblr anon hasn't seen: sorry if I haven't replied to your messages! I have a lot of irl friends on there so it's just easier through here, or you could come off anon and I will shower you with love <3 Up to you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I don’t get it.”

“Of course you don’t.”

“I mean it! Anyone could have painted this. *I* could have painted this.”

“Anyone could of— Isak, this is a Rothko. Have some damn respect.”

“This isn’t art. It’s some guy who only had two tins of paint and no imagination.”

“Let me get this right. We’ve been here less than twenty minutes and you’re already the expert?”

“Yep. And I mean it, a baby could have done this.”

“I thought you just said you could have done it. Does that make you a baby?”

“Shut up, Even.”

“You started it!”

“Taisez-vous, s’il vous plaît!”

It’s a truth universally acknowledged that nothing makes you revert back to being a child more than being told off by an adult.

Poorly suppressed giggles give way to helpless grins, and Even sticks his tongue out at the woman’s retreating back. On any other occasion, he’d be the one scolding the annoying patrons. Hell, all someone has to do is breathe too loudly in his vicinity at the cinema and he’s onto them. But here, standing before countless masterpieces with the world’s least qualified art critic (Isak), he can’t help but become that person.

The one having too much fun to care what others think.

“…See, even she’s telling you to shut up.”

“Isak, I swear to God.”
Le Centre Pompidou is Even’s favourite art gallery in Paris and, considering the competition, that’s a pretty big claim. It doesn’t mean he likes the rest any less, but he’s always found modern art to be much more him, focusing less on capturing an image, and more on creating one in itself.

According to Even, this makes it more meaningful.

According to Connor, his flatmate, this makes Even insufferably pretentious.

Isak knows less than nothing about art, genuinely asked if the Pollock in the previous room was a Van Gogh. It shouldn’t be cute (this is like, common knowledge), but Even’s whipped, finds himself giving Isak increasingly adoring looks with every stupid question he asks and insulting opinion he gives.

It’s possible Isak is playing it up a bit, that he likes the attention just as much as Even likes giving it, in the same way that Even acts up a bit for him, too. Even doesn’t even like Rothko, finds he’s boring and repetitive, but if it gets a rise out of Isak, he’ll be Rothko’s personal prophet.

Still, these roles they’ve taken on make things easier, to an extent.

It gets Isak out of his head, for one, coaxes him out of his shell until he’s playful and sweet. Not that Even wouldn’t be spoilt to spend the night with him anyway, even if he did nothing but glower and scowl, didn’t speak to him directly or told him his favourite movie was Avatar (either one, Even shudders at the thought).

But this Isak, the teasing, thoughtful, slightly insolent one, with his gap-toothed smile and utter, total loveliness that draws Even in like the sweetest siren call, is better than any fantasy.

Shit-talking in an art gallery is a surprisingly effective method, then, even though the façade occasionally breaks. Isak had recognized a Matisse before, went as far as saying he had a print of it in his flat. It was ‘La Blouse Roumaine’, bold and primary, and Even had seen it twice already, even spent several minutes inspecting it on earlier visits, but it’s never made an impact until now.

Maybe it’s because this isn’t the one he wants to see.

(He dreams up an A4 cutout on the wall of a shabby Oslo flat, stark against pale walls, frost caked to the corners of a window. Hushed voices share breakfast over a cluttered table top, their fingers intertwined with nothing planned for the day ahead.

It’s so vivid it almost tastes like a memory.)

In real time, they’re ridiculous, bickering through hushed laughter like children left unsupervised. They’re still holding hands, refuse to let go even though they keep trying to inspect different paintings, probably deliberately, meaning one always ends up pulling the other until they collide, ricocheting gently into each other’s arms.

It’s definitely just an excuse to touch each other more, feel Isak pressed against his side, warm and solid like a promise. Occasionally, if the angles right, Even’s will pull harder, causing the fabric of his flannel, tied haphazardly around his waist, to catch on the hem of Isak’s t-shirt, rucking it up so a slither of pale, perfect skin is on display.

(It’s awesome.)

They’ve moved on from the Rothko now, made their way through enormous rooms with minimal paintings, narrow corridors of pencil drawings. Isak keeps up a constant litany of complaints throughout, so much so Even is almost impressed.
Isak is genuinely insulted by ‘IKB 3’ (“It’s blue.” “It’s Yves Klein blue!”), keeps asking where Napoleon’s grave is (Even groans, that’s Les Invalides), wants to know when Even will finally take him to the ‘Mona Lisa’ (Isak knows damn well it’s in the Louvre). But he’s grinning the whole time, doing a poor job of hiding his Google Image-search of ‘famous paintings Paris’, huffing and pushing Even, hovering nosily, out of the way when it just shows flat paintings of Paris itself.

This leads to more specific searches, which in turn leads to ten minutes of ribbing about all the famous paintings Even’s making him miss out on in favour of “weird abstracts” (Kandinsky) and “disgusting old toilets” (Duchamp).

It goes on for a while.

But he doesn’t actually sound like he minds that much, which Even is grateful for, because as much as he can take a joke he doesn’t actually want to ruin this for Isak. Paris isn’t far from Oslo, only two and a bit hours by plane, but Isak doesn’t strike him as a frequent flyer, only stopped here because Even persuaded him to.

Yet, aside from the slightly wistful tone he gets looking at the Monet’s at L’Orangerie, Isak’s fine. Decidedly perky, in fact.

He’s asking Even where the vegetable people are (and what?) when they reach Even’s true destination.

In his hazy Parisian memories, Even had last entered le Pompidou free of charge, exhibitions and guidebook included. Naturally, he’s discounted that in these memories he was a fresh-faced minor, and under European law all minors enter most attractions in Paris for free. When pretending he forgot this didn’t work, Isak, in a breakthrough in continental communication, sussed them out with cheaper tickets using nothing but a smile and a Norwegian passport. It was pretty sexy.

So here they are.

Yayoi Kusama’s retrospective exhibition has been touring the world for decades, but this is the first time Even’s been able to catch it. The last time it touched Oslo he’d been fifteen and stupid, too preoccupied with girls and hair gel to give a shit about some polka dots. To see it now is spectacular; even more so to share it with Isak.

From the moment they reach the first installation, he knows he made the right choice.

Half of an enormous room is yellow, filled with equally enormous yellow balloons, all in abstract sizes. Everything is covered in big black spots. The other half is its direct opposite: everything the same, but inverted black and yellow.

Isak moves to the centre of it. They gasp as one.

“Holy shit,” he breathes. His eyes are wide with wonder, and the hand holding Even’s tightens a fraction.

“Holy shit,” Even repeats, just as enchanted.

From there on, it’s just as trippy. Every room they walk through holds a universe of its own, one identical to the spotty room but simulated in red and white, another featuring long, winding tentacles climbing out of the ground, blocking their way, like a fairy-tale forest.

It’s when they reach the Obliteration Room that things begin to click.
It’s a plain white room, filled with regular household furniture in the same, clinical white. However, almost every surface is covered in technicolour polka dots, primary colours creating an ultraviolet glow. Where one half of the room is overwhelmed with dots, almost blindingly, the other half is decorated sparsely, too white, too clean.

It’s almost like peering directly into his own mind.

“It’s beautiful,” Isak says, voice soft in awe. He’s inspecting the bed springs, white and red and yellow and blue and green. They’re not meant to touch anything, but he’s so close, his nose almost peels off a sticker.

“You think so?” Even asks. Aesthetically, it’s undeniable, but his heart is pulsing so loud in his ears he can barely appreciate it.


And isn’t that the million-dollar question.

In Even’s more wistful fantasies, he sometimes wishes that he could explain his bipolar like this: a room full of colours, and a room full of none. The colourful room is beautiful, but it’s overwhelming, devastating, on the verge of too much. The white room is haunting, cold, made lonelier by its long blank walls. On a day to day basis, he dances on the threshold of both, sometimes more vibrant and sometimes less.

When he’s manic, he is every colour of the rainbow, he is red and yellow and blue and green and he’s sticking to the walls, to the ceiling, to the bed springs.

When he’s down, he is nothing.

There is little stopping him from telling Isak this. His bipolar isn’t a secret. In fact, it’s almost beginning to feel like a given.

(His name is Even and he has blonde hair, blue eyes and bipolar disorder.)

Everybody knows: his family, his friends, his flatmates, his professors. The guy who owns the Snappy Snaps down the road where he develops his photographs. The couple downstairs who bring him soup and Yorkshire puddings every time he’s in a bad state. The girl who interviewed him last year for a piece on dealing with mental illness away from home, who occasionally still calls him for sporadic clubbing sessions at the cheesiest bars on their side of London.

So, it’s not a secret. Really, it’s not.

But.

“I think,” he swallows audibly.

He thinks, just for once, it’s nice not to be the mentally ill guy. Just for a few more hours before reality sets in and he’s Even Bech Næsheim again, bipolar and dealing with it. Not this Even, who’s free and exciting, who makes pretty boys laugh and roll their eyes and leave their comfort zones to enter his.

He wants to be this Even for a little longer.

“I think,” he starts again. “I think it can mean a lot of things. I think it means whatever you want it to mean.”
As expected, Isak rolls his eyes.

“Wow Even, thanks for clearing that up.”

You’re welcome, he thinks.

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The last stop of the exhibition takes place in a windowless room at the centre of the floor. There’s a queue: bored couples and antsy photographers, a group of girls wearing matching black puffer jackets and Adidas Superstars.

They join them, leaning against a wall as they watch the red lightbulb on top of the door flick on and off, people ushered in as others come out. It reminds him of the doors in De Wallentjes, the red light district of Amsterdam. He almost says so, but it seems a tasteless sort of anecdote for a time like this.

They chat idly while they wait, going over what they’ve seen. Even loves the big and bold, could wax poetic about the interactive Café Little Boy exhibit. He sent up a thanks to his genetics for his height, allowing him to scribble his name easily — and alarmingly messy — onto the blackboard walls.

Despite it all, it turns out Isak liked a lot of it too.

The Kandinsky, for one, which he doesn’t get but likes to look at. ‘Hotspot’, the LED globe, is another highlight for more obvious reasons. Isak also gets stuck on a piece on the floor above, a small mirror with ‘You Are Still Here’ etched onto its front.

Even gets it: it hits him hard, too.

It’s their turn before they know it, and they enter into a small, dark room, the door shutting quietly behind them.

Except it’s not small at all; it’s the opposite, it goes on forever.

It takes a little too long for Even to register that the walls are mirrors, reflecting themselves and each other. They’re standing on a narrow strip of floor, solid and matte, and around them is a moat of shallow black water. Reflected in it is the light of a million little stars, dangling fairy lights at alternating heights, gold and bronze, white and blue.

It’s a galaxy.

Isak inhales sharply, fingers flexing in his. His mouth drops as his eyes rove around the room, tiny but infinite. Even’s much the same: he can’t stop looking at himself, at the two of them, both the greatest presence in the room and the smallest.

It’s unlike anything he’s ever experienced before. The room feels timeless, like Earth has stopped spinning and the universe has stopped expanding and he doesn’t realise Isak’s saying all of this until the narration stops, trailing into opaque silence.

And of course, Isak likes space.
Even doesn’t, treats it with the same respectful disinterest as he does the bottom of the ocean, places he’s happy to never think about deeper than long-lost shipwrecks or the silvery stretch of the Milky Way.

But standing here, hand in hand at the heart of the universe, Even feels surprisingly at peace.

Isak moves closer, leaning his head onto Even’s shoulder, solid like an anchor. Even could let go, wrap his arm around Isak’s waist like he’s been itching to all day, but that would mean letting go of his hand, and that’s simply not an option. He settles his head on Isak’s instead, smiles at their reflection, watches the way Isak smiles back.

He thinks back to when they first met: Isak through the looking glass, Even through the lens. He stands amongst the stars and he breathes in the dark.

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It’s still light when they get outside, and the air is thick and warm and golden. They keep having to walk around rubbish bins, unnecessarily ornate lampposts, groups of tourists trying to get the perfect shot of some street art, other gross couples who refuse to let go of each other just like them because they physically cannot stop touching one another.

They’re like magnets, or they’re not, Even doesn’t know because he never studied physics, but it doesn’t matter, because Isak’s here and Even’s never letting go.

They reach the metro station in record time, Even pausing to admire the signage like every other time he’s seen it. He’s picked Étienne Marcel to avoid the rush of Châtelet or Hôtel de Ville. Though a popular station itself, there’s less of a chance they’ll be caught when Even sneaks them through the turnstiles.

As expected, tonight the coast is clear.

Isak follows him in silence until he realises what Even’s doing. When he does, he laughs loud and hard, the sound echoing in the chamber-like underground.

“We’re too old to not afford metro tickets,” Isak says, indulgent.

“Nonsense,” Even grins, wide like a shark. “We’re just young enough.’

Just then a woman comes through, pushing through the turnstile so quickly she doesn’t even notice them standing conspicuously beside it. Even swoops in immediately, holding it open so Isak can sneak in.

Isak, because he’s a dick, pushes up unnecessarily against Even’s front as he goes through, like there isn’t plenty of space for both of them.

(And fuck, he’s delicious.)

The 4 is comfortably full, leaving Even clinging one-handed to a pole as he crowds Isak into the doorway. He keeps having to move even closer whenever the train stops and the doors open, people hopping on and off, but they make no effort to sit down, enjoying the way the world narrows down to just the two of them against another dirty window.
By contrast, the 12 is blessedly quiet, and they stretch their legs over facing seats as they stare out into the evening, Sacré-Cœur lit up like a beacon.

By the time they reach Abbesses, Even’s conveniently forgotten that this is the deepest station in all of Paris, and if the fates have any say in it, the elevator will be broken again, just like it was last time, and the time before. From memory, there are 200 steps to climb, and he can already hear Isak’s bitching; almost looks forward to it.

Isak, old faithful that he is, delivers, loudly and bitterly.

By the time they make it above ground, they’re both breaking a sweat, Isak clutching his side at the stitch he undoubtedly developed from trying to carry Even up a flight of stairs. The ceilings were so low it made literally no sense to even consider it, as Even then had to crouch to avoid braining himself on the cold tiles. But it seemed hilarious at the time, and really, it still sort of is.

Even leads them through the bustle of Montmartre, watching the way Isak’s lips shape the words he’s speaking, weaving a stilted but lovely commentary on the streets around them.

This is easily one of Even’s favourite areas, and the reason he’s brought Isak here tonight. Originally, he’d thought of taking him to Sacré-Cœur, as the view you get of Paris is one of the nicest, even if you can’t really see la Tour Eiffel unless you really look for it.

That plan out the window, he’d been reminded of a place some girls from his production class had raved about after Christmas. It is dinner time, after all, and nothing but old cashews and a falafel shared in the past eight hours mean Even’s stomach has been grumbling since Barbès.

There’s something undeniably intimate about Montmartre, its heart beating loud through the hordes of tourists who inundate it daily. Weaving their way in and out of the busy little streets, cheeks tinged in the red glow of flickering LED signs, Even feels it again.

This thrum of something.

And the weird thing is, none of this is new.

Even’s been the guy holding hands with his lover in Paris: he and Sonja came here years ago on a high school Art History trip, three months off of their second official break-up. There’d been plenty of those (they basically invented on/off dating) but they’d been good in Paris, one of the memories that would play on loop like a stuck reel every time they’d break up again, inevitably propelling them back into each other’s arms.

It’s weird to think of how young he’d been back then. Not that he’s old now, but he can’t have been more than sixteen, spotty and besotted and still learning the ropes of this new body, one that crept up on him too quickly the previous summer, suddenly leaving him gangly and graceless.

He likes to think he has a better grasp on himself now.

(And he won’t deny that his height has its perks. Even now, he savours the two or three inches he has over Isak, likes the way he has to look up at him, that there’s a space already carved out at the juncture of his neck, just waiting for Isak to rest his head there.)

And while a lot has changed, not that much has either.

He’s no longer sixteen but Even’s still tall, still a bit spotty and he never quite mastered the inner poise his mum said he’d grow into. But he’s still besotted, just with someone else this time. Someone shyer and sillier and sweeter and lovelier.
Isak, the proverbial lighthouse.

He almost hopes it’s the last.

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They reach Le Refuge des Fondus before they know it, joining the long line twisting down a shadowy street off Boulevard de Rochechouart. The mix is eclectic, but roughly all in their twenties. Lots speak English, others Arabic and some French, and they settle in comfortably between a Nigerian couple and three American girls doing their Erasmus. They offer them long colourful cigarettes which Isak declines but Even accepts.

Even’s not a smoker, but that first drag has him sighing out in content. Isak watches him silently, expression caught somewhere between awe and disgust.

“Aren’t you going to tell me these are bad for me, Doctor?” He asks, tipping his head in Isak’s direction.

They’re leaning hip-to-hip against the building, stone cool against his neck, creeping their way up to the restaurant. It’s still light and despite the queue, the atmosphere is relaxed, the evening slowed down to a steady tempo Even breathes deep in to his lungs.

“I think you already know that,” Isak says, eyes never leaving his lips. “And anyway...”

A single curl of smoke drifts between them, disappearing into nothing.

“You look good,” Isak finishes. His voice has pitched lower, a lazy drawl that gives away nothing of the shy boy Even met on a train.

Even smirks, not smug but deeply, deeply pleased. He takes a few more puffs before flicking the cigarette away, enjoying the way Isak almost looks disappointed at the action.

He pushes off the wall, crowding Isak back into it so that he reaches out, playing with the loose material of Even’s flannel. Even leans one hand on the wall behind him, trapping Isak in.

They’re so close it would barely take a whisper to kiss him, run his hand through Isak’s hair and nose at his jawline. He’s tempted to, what with the way Isak is smiling crookedly up at him, one hand pulling him closer and the other pressed behind his back.

A tiny breeze blows between them, ruffling Isak’s hair in the process. He really does look a prince, golden waves straight out of a picture book.

Isak scrunches his nose. “You smell like smoke.”

Even leans his head down, pressing his nose against Isak’s, gently at first, before turning in to what can only be described as an eskimo kiss. “I’m sorry,” he says, not very sorry at all.

“It’s okay,” Isak breathes, and they’re close, achingly close, so close it would take nothing to lean that last inch further and—

“Are you going in or what?”
They both jump back, Even almost tripping off the curb and Isak banging his head into the wall behind him. The guy who interrupted them almost looks apologetic, or at least like he’s trying not to laugh. It seems they’ve reached the top of the line without even realising it, would have fallen straight into the doorway if no one stopped them.

Isak comes to his senses before Even does, grabbing his hand and pulling him into the restaurant.

Inside, it’s hot as fuck, moisture fogging up the wide window at the front. They’re seated in the middle of a long wooden table, rowdy groups on either side drunk off of the wine and the sheer heat of the room.

Only then does Isak seem to realise where they are.

“Fondue?” He asks, incredulous.

Even grins. “Fondue for two.”

Isak groans so loudly the girl on his right looks over in concern.

The whole thing is absurd in the best of ways. A heavy pot of dense cheese fondue gets placed between them, accompanied by baskets of slightly stale bread and little bowls with olives, salami, gherkins and chorizo. Then come the literal baby bottles filled with cold white wine, that have Even blessing the day Cara mentioned this place and Isak pulling up Instagram.

Even takes a swig just as Isak turns his phone onto him, before moving it back over the food.

“What are you doing?” He asks, spearing a square of bread.

“Boomerang,” Isak explains, brows furrowing as he picks a geotag.

“Ah,” Even says mildly, even though he has no idea what that is.

Within minutes, Isak’s phone is buzzing with incoming messages and Snapchats. Some make him roll his eyes, but a few he replies to, smiling absently as he guides his fork through long, leisurely circles of cheese.

“Can I follow you?” Isak asks, looking up hopefully.

Even grimaces. “Sorry, no Instagram.”

“Snapchat?”

“Neither.”

Isak frowns. “Facebook, surely?”

“Don’t have that, either.”

Isak looks perplexed, to say the least. Even can’t help but be too.

His lack of social media is a hangover from his Bakka days, when the shit he pulled in high school was so mortifying, the easiest way of distancing himself from it was by pretending it never happened. He could have started another one in London, but it was still too fresh a wound then. He let it be mistaken for a rejection of technology which, bizarrely, came off as cool to his classmates. Now, it’s purely out of laziness and an adherence to his personal brand of film school prick, which takes more effort than you’d think to upkeep.
“So how…” Isak begins, uncertain. The bread he’s currently got submerged in the fondue is taking more uneven laps around the pot; it will probably fall off soon from the sheer volume of melted cheese.

Even knows what he’s trying to ask, but it’s not like he has an answer for him.

Because yeah, it’s crossed his mind too that this could be more than a one night thing. That was all great in theory, when they were just two guys on a train who weren’t ready to go home, but now that they’re here, that he’s got to know Isak a bit—

(Got to learn that he only likes eggs when they’re poached, that he has a little sister called Lea who he’d die for, that he sneezes whenever he looks into the sun. What he looks like when he finds something embarrassing but still funny, the way he bites his lip when he’s concentrating, how he counts out any money he’s about to spend before he hands it over to the cashier.)

—well, he’s not quite ready to let go.

But what is there to do?

This doesn’t change a thing.

Even still lives in London, with a whole year of film school ahead of him, friends and networks and useless but meaningful crap piled up in his flat over the course of two years because he’s a hoarder and loves trinkets.

And Isak still lives in Oslo, with years of study ahead of him and his own friends and his sister and mum and probably a small library of boring science books tucked into the corners of a messy, chaotic room.

“I don’t know,” Even says, and he truly doesn’t.

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Things are a little awkward after that, but they come around again when Isak gets so distracted by his phone that he almost drops it in the fondue. Even laughs so hard that Isak kicks him beneath the table, causing Even to choke on the stupid baby bottle and gasp like a fish, leading them to the kinds of hystericsthat have their neighbours noticeably shifting away and the waiter sending annoyed looks that they cheerfully ignore.

“Stop ignoring me for your phone,” Even whines, when they’re back to breathing normally.

“Sorry,” Isak says, some final tapping before he places it on the table, screen black. “My friend is nagging me about keeping up our snap streak.”

Even smirks. “God, you’re such a teenager.”

“Fuck you, I’m twenty!” Isak cries, brandishing his fork like a whip. “And anyway, I’m surprised you even know what Snapchat is. Figured the reason you don’t have any social media is cause you’re too old to know how to use it.”

Isak’s eyes are sharp, sparkling like diamonds, and Even barks out a laugh.
“Look at you, getting brave with your elders. Just this morning you could barely look me in the
eyes.” Isak blushes, and Even considers it a win. “They grow up so fast…”

Isak goes to kick him again, Even dodging it just in time.

“Why…” Isak starts. He clears his throat. “Why aren’t you online? At all?”

He almost sounds petulant.

The look Isak’s giving him is sad and uncertain, and it makes Even feel utterly awful. It’s why he
tells the truth.

He takes a deep breath, a final gulp of wine for luck. “Back when I was in high school, at Bakka—”

“You went to Bakka?” Isak interrupts, surprised.

“Yeah, did you? I’m sure I would have noticed you, if you did.”

Isak blushes, pleased, but shakes his head. “No, Nissen.”

Even chuckles, a humourless sound. “I almost transferred to Nissen in my last year. We might have
met, in another world.”

Isak shrugs, self-conscious. “I don’t know whether I’d have been ready for you, to be honest.”

Even’s not sure what to make of that, so he doesn’t say anything.

“I mean—” Isak starts. Stops. “I just mean... the person I was at seventeen isn’t the kind of person
I’d have wanted you to meet. As bad timing as this is, I’m glad I met you now.”

Even smiles, soft and slow. “I get that. Me too.”

“Yeah?” Isak asks, looking at him through his eyelashes.

“Yeah,” Even says. He reaches over to squeeze Isak’s hand. “That’s actually when all this shit
happened. I did some stupid stuff in my last year of school, shit that hurt my friends, my girlfriend
at the time, my family. It hurt me too, and the easiest way to get away from it all was by
disappearing entirely, so I deleted my Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, you name it. The only thing I
kept was my Letterboxd account, but nobody knew me on there, so. I’ve never bothered remaking
them, and it’s… I mean it still fucking haunts me a bit but it’s over, you know? We’re all friends
again and my life’s back on track and now I know why I did the things I did but, nothing’s quite
been the same since. It’s why I went to London, it was easier just to start over.”

Isak’s been nodding through all of this, calm and constant like one of those bobbing-head dogs
people owned in the nineties. He flips his hand over, laces his fingers through Even’s.

“Thank you for telling me this,” he says a little stiffly, but sincerely. It’s not a stretch to assume
Isak isn’t great with feelings, but it’s nice that he’s trying.

“Tell me about London,” he says, and Even does, glad to change the subject.

“It’s big. I mean, obviously it’s big but it’s so big, I feel like nobody there and I love it but it’s also
really scary.” He pauses to scoop a disgusting amount of cheese into his mouth. “It was one of the
things I touched on in one of my projects last year, actually. Being in the middle of everything but
feeling so isolated, you know?”
Isak nods, like he gets it.

“But yeah, it’s cool. I live with two guys and a girl, and we’re from all over. Connor’s Irish, Jameel’s never left East London and Elsa’s from Kosovo. She keeps us all in check and she *hates* it, says we’re too old to need a babysitter and it’s only because she’s a girl. She’s right, obviously.”

“She sounds like she’d be right at home with my flatmate, Noora.”

“Yeah? What’s she like?”

“Pretty much the same. Way too good for any of us, but she can be a bit self-righteous too. She’s a bit like my mum, to be honest, although in that scenario Eskild’s my dad, and he can never know that I think of him like that.”

“Eskild?”

“Yeah, another flatmate. I’ve known him since I was sixteen, actually. He rescued me from a bar, drunk off my ass after shit went down at home and he let me live in his basement until a room in his flat came up. I’ve lived with him since. He’s pretty much the best and worst person I know.”

“He sounds great,” Even says.

“Yeah,” Isak smiles softly. “He is.”

There’s a pause and then— “It was a gay bar.”

“Sorry?” Even asks, confused.

“It was—” Isak closes his eyes, like he’s deciding on something. “The bar we met at, it was a gay bar. I just realised that for years I’ve never wanted people to know that, so I’d say I didn’t know. And to be honest, I didn’t, I don’t think, but. It’s—I’m not embarrassed anymore, so I’m telling you.”

Distantly, Even clicks that right now, Isak is baring his soul to him. The thought alone makes him feel warmer than any clammy bistro in Paris could.

“That’s cool,” he says, keeping his voice as neutral as possible. The thought of Isak sad and alone anywhere makes him nervous, but it’s soothed by the knowledge that wherever he was, someone like Eskild found him.

On the off chance that they should ever meet, he’s buying him a drink.

“And then there’s Linn,” Isak picks up, and Even scrambles back to attention. “She keeps to herself mostly. She has quite severe depression—” Even tenses. “—but she’s doing better nowadays. She has a job and actually like, leaves her room for more than just ‘Paradise Island’, so. Yeah, she’s good.”

“They sound great,” Even says, means it. “I wish I could meet them.”

Isak sighs, looking down at their hands, still linked together. “You could, if you wanted,” he says sullenly.

And just like that, the mood diminishes.

“Maybe…” He starts, hating the way Isak’s eyes shoot to meet his, so hopeful. Even sighs, too. “I don’t know, Isak. I’m still in London, you’re still in Oslo. We can share emails, numbers, but it’s
It’s not the same.

It’s not the same as having Isak here, being able to see him, touch him, feel his soft hair beneath his fingertips.

And he knows Isak gets it because he’s nodding, and it’s resigned but it’s the truth. Even’s never been the pragmatic type, lives with his head in the clouds, but there’s no point in false promises.

It’s very likely that after tonight, he and Isak will never see each other again.

That’s the bed they made, now they have to lie in it. Keeping in contact, maybe enthusiastically at first, but dwindling, slowly, inevitably, when Even’s too thoughtless or Isak’s too busy or when just a voice at the end of a line isn’t enough, when you need the touch of another body against yours and an email or text or Skype won’t do… It’s not fair to either of them.

So, they have to make tonight the best it can possibly be.

“Drink up,” Even says, cutting through the silence. Isak looks up in surprise, but he understands, gets on board remarkably quickly.

They skull the lukewarm bottoms of their current wine, made slightly difficult by the… nipple? He doesn’t know what the fuck baby bottle tops are called but whatever, and immediately start in on another one. Even barely resists calling their waiter ‘garçon’ (doesn’t because he’s worked hospo and knows how much it sucks, and also, he’s *not an enormous dick*) but between the heat of the room, the robustness of the wine and that intoxicating quality that’s purely Isak, they’re fairly tipsy within a neat twenty minutes.

It’s when they get the bill that they realise potentially, a miscount has been made.

It’s one of the things that he consistently forgets whenever he travels south, that the further down you go, the less likely they are to take credit card. Carrying cash just seems so *barbaric* — half the shit he pays for is via his phone, either online or through the chip on the back, completely contactless.

Now though, he regrets every penny he ever spent on shitty Domino’s, his last five euros that he gave a busker in Perpignan a few days ago. They weren’t even that good; Even just felt bad because they had a dog with them, eyeing him balefully.

“Fuck, this is such bad etiquette, but,” Isak says, picking through his wallet. “Do you have any cash on you?”

Very slowly, Even shakes his head, and very quickly, Isak panics.

“Oh god, holy shit, how are we gonna, we can’t just, *Even!*”

Even is suddenly very grateful that of all the people in here, they’re probably the only ones who speak Norwegian.

“We’re gonna dine and ditch, Isak,” he says solemnly.

“No, we’re not!” Isak hisses.

“I’m sorry, have you learnt to conjure money out of nothing, now? Did you magically acquire the
Midas Touch in the last few minutes?”

“Shut up,” Isak huffs, but he’s covering his face, trying not to laugh.

Fuck, they are so not sober enough for this.

“Listen,” he breathes in deeply, trying to clear his brain. The air is so thick that it only makes things murkier. “I know it’s a total dick move but… We’re only here for a few more hours, so. We may as well?”

Isak looks forlorn at the thought, but he nods. Suddenly, his expression clears, and he scrambles for something in his pockets before surfacing a slightly chewed pen. “Aha!” He says. Like, literally says it.

Even raises his hands in question, like something out of a sitcom.

“We’ll leave them a note!” Isak explains triumphantly.

“A note?” Even asks dumbly.

“Yes! Saying we’re very sorry and have no money but it’s technically their fault for only taking cash but it’s okay and we’ll send it when we’re home. How much do we owe?”

“Fifty euros,” Even says faintly.

“Cool,” Isak says cheerfully. “How do you say that in French?”

So follow the weirdest few minutes of Even’s life, translating their terrible note into terrible French, trying their best not to attract attention but probably being embarrassingly obvious. Miraculously, no one picks up on it, not even their suspicious waiter with his beady falcon eyes.

By the time it’s done, they’ve outlined a vague plan for Even to leave first, under the guise of getting something from his car (Isak is to loudly say “La voiture! La voiture!” at this point) and for Isak to join him a few minutes after. Then, they get the fuck out of there.

This all goes surprisingly to plan, even Isak’s awful acting (which doesn’t even make sense in retrospect because why would he suddenly change to French when they’ve been speaking Norwegian all night?) and then Even’s outside and the air is still warm but it’s almost cool in comparison to inside and even though he is undeniably a bit pissed, it’s like the fog is clearing and his body is lighter and he can breathe again, thank fuck.

The sun is setting, the sky a gorgeous melange of orange and pink, a familiar spotlight cutting through the night, still obscured by the low buildings. It’s pretty amazing they haven’t actually seen it yet.

He’s pacing surreptitiously around, trying to hide from view of the restaurant while not going so far Isak couldn’t find him, so he stands adjacent to its front door, hidden from view.

Only a few minutes later, Isak flies out, searching for Even and missing him by centimetres. He’s right there in front of him, and Even takes the opportunity to finally, finally reach for him, curling his arms around Isak’s waist and pulling him in, his back flush against Even’s chest.

It’s like he belongs there.

“Hey,” Even whispers, tickling the hair around Isak’s ear. Isak shivers bodily, and he feels every
last tremble. “Let’s get out of here.”

Giddy, they run down the street, keep running until Montmartre becomes Pigalle, the streets getting wider and dirtier. They run until they physically can’t anymore, almost collapsing against a kebab shop while they both regain their breath.

“I can’t believe we did that,” Isak gets out between heaving breaths.

Even can’t quite believe it, either.

He looks at Isak, panting, laughing, plain white t-shirt tucked messily into light blue jeans. His hair is everywhere, yellow and gorgeous, and his cheeks are pink from the exertion, from the wine, from Even, and fuck, he wants him so much.

He pulls him in, an arm wrapping back around that waist, his dying place, his lighthouse, his own private Idaho. Isak’s arms come up to tie around his neck, fitting perfectly like they’re made for each other.

It should be a scary thought, but it’s really not.

Even brushes his nose against Isak’s, loves the way Isak brushes his back.

“Where do we go next?” He asks, breathless.

Isak bats his eyelashes and, there’s really no need to be coy, Even would take him anywhere: to Tokyo, Brazil, Mars, the Dog Star, another galaxy, wherever the fuck he wants to go.

He feels drunk, drunk on the night and drunk on Isak, his touch stronger than any liquor.

“Take me to the Eiffel Tower,” Isak says, and his smile is so sweet Even has to smile back, falling deeper and deeper and deeper.

Chapter End Notes

The vegetable people are Giuseppe Arcimboldo's 'Four Seasons', and they’re at the Louvre. (If Isak had any sense, he’d want to see Liberty Leading the People, which just about bought me to tears, probably because I'm a massive Les Mis fan.)

If we’re being technical, Yayoi Kusama's show hasn't touched Paris since 2012, but I really wanted Isak and Even to see it so I took some creative liberties. The dotted rooms are part of an exhibition (aptly named) Dots Obsession. The room with the colourful spots is called the Obliteration Room. The final room, with the mirrors and lights, is the Infinity Room. If you ever have a chance to see this exhibition, please do.

I can’t actually remember whether you can see Sacré-Cœur from the 12 to Abbesses, but that is one of the closest stops for visiting and, from memory, I spotted it on several trains that went up to Montmartre, particularly any that passed Barbès-Rouchechouart (so definitely on the 4). Also, from memory, people refer to them by the first and final stops of the line, so the number 2 line would be called the Porte Dauphine-Nation line, but for fics sake, numbers are simpler.

Please don't dine and ditch, but I heartily recommend Le Refuge des Fondus! You’ll
probably have to wait a while to get in, but it's a lot of fun, even if it's cheesy as fuck.
Isak, 21.21, 7e Arrondissement/Shakespeare & Co.

Chapter Notes

I've updated the tags because there is no place for unhappy endings in fic <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Isak is looking at Even, and Even is looking right back.

He’s not even sure what day it is anymore, but it certainly doesn’t affect the crowds of people trying to reach the city at this time of night, pressed up like particularly cheerful sardines, yelling and singing or standing steadfast, ignoring the rising tide.

Somehow, he and Even have gotten separated, probably due to the procession of drunk French boys that hopped on at Saint-Lazare, waving miniature flags and singing along to Rihanna in surprisingly solid English. Now, they’re standing on opposite sides of the cart, Isak leaning against the doors behind him, pressed between a drunk girl who most definitely should have tapped out at the pre’s and a yo-pro giving an earnest effort at ignoring the guy singing loudly in his ear.

(Apparently, he knows he wants to see him naked naked naked.)

Even mirrors him, though he lucked out in companions: the girl on his left is quietly bobbing along to whatever’s playing on her headphones, the girl on his right more preoccupied with her phone. He looms over them like a giant, leaning against the wall of the cart as to not bump his head on the curved ceiling. The image makes Isak smile. Even smiles back.

Watching Even has its practical reasons: he’s being weirdly secretive about their destination, even though Isak already knows where they’re going, literally asked Even to take him there. Now that they’re no longer holding hands — he already misses the feel of Even’s palm against his, heat threading down to their fingertips — he needs to check on Even to know when to get off.

There’s also the fact that he loves looking at Even, loves the feel of Even’s eyes on him. He’s just so fucking handsome: deflating blonde quiff falling into clear blue eyes, long, long legs that have him towering over even Isak, skinny hips and wide shoulders and those lips to die for. The flannel perched on the taper of his waist is coming off, going on, and fuck, how does he look even better? He could be a model. Haute couture, or whatever Eskild calls it: New York, London and Paris.

Speaking of Eskild, his phone has been blowing up for the past hour, messages upon messages since he posted the story of Even with the fondue. It’s not just Eskild, but the boys, Eva, Sana, Noora, even Linn, weirdly enough, yet certain voices ring the loudest. Eskild’s is one of them, Jonas and Eva too. The texts range from enthusiastic to concerned to furious to betrayed, but he ignores most of them, sending off bland replies as to why he’s not back in Oslo right now and a quick reassurance that yes, he’s perfectly safe and no, he hasn’t been kidnapped by a hot stranger in Paris. Eskild almost seems disappointed by this revelation, which is mildly distressing, but other than a few fair warnings to be careful (and use protection) he’s happy for Isak. Jonas is slightly warier, but offers to pick him up from the airport tomorrow, kebabs on him. Eva sends nothing but eye emoji’s and eggplants, a single red heart amongst the mess, but that’s to be expected. He clicks
off his phone at relative peace with his decision-making, even though his friends evident care fills him up with something indescribably warm.

The drunk guys are gaining traction, Even joining in to multiple cheers and, between the staring and the words, Isak’s blushing like a damsel, hiding his face in the crook of the arm gripping the pole above him. Even can’t even sing but he’s just so wild wild wild, Isak can’t help that when he’s with him all he gets is wild thoughts.

God, maybe he’s tipsier than he thought.

They stop at Miromesnil just as the rapping begins, thank God, and a whole new batch of people get on, including some guy with a portable speaker who starts freestyling midway. The whole situation is kind of surreal, this whole night has been surreal, gets even more surreal when a couple of stops later the carriage empties a bit and an older man gets on with an accordion. He starts up something rising and familiar and it feels right out of a movie, from the harsh white light of the metro to the sharp notes of the music to Even, nodding along, laughing whenever the guy hits the kind of note that makes Isak wince. He’s mouthing something, something Isak can’t pick up no matter how slowly Even says it and it’s hopeless, really, but he keeps trying. Finally, when it’s obvious Isak isn’t blessed in the art of lip-reading, he just shouts it, voice giving way to laughter halfway through.

“Hey Isak, do you feel like you’re in Lady and the Tramp?”

Fuck, that’s where Isak knows this song from.

He doesn’t deign him with an answer, just rolls his eyes and throws up a finger instead. Even roars with laughter.

And not to be cheesy as fuck, but he loves the way Even laughs, how he throws his whole body into it, how he finds Isak so damn hilarious. In fairness, half the time Even’s laughing at him, but it never feels mean and really, it only makes Isak preen at the attention. Who knew he was so desperate for it.

Finally, as they ease into Trocadéro, Even signals him over. After a short battle getting off the train, they’re hand in hand again, weaving their way through small groups of excited tourists. When they reach the road, Even stops them, stepping behind him to cover Isak’s eyes with his hands.

“What are you doing?” Isak asks incredulously.

“Covering your eyes,” Even says, like this should be obvious. “We didn’t go the long way just for you to walk out and catch la Tour Eiffel on a bad angle, Isak, god.”

Isak huffs. “Thought the Eiffel Tower didn’t have bad angles.”

“It doesn’t, but you deserve to see it from the best. Come on,” he says, walking him forward. Isak, still blind, latches onto the first thing he finds. Luckily, this happens to be Even’s forearms, helping him orient himself.

“We’re on a tight schedule,” Even continues, and doesn’t Isak know it.

It’s sort of all he can think about, but Even’s made it obvious it’s something he doesn’t want to talk about, so, well, they don’t. And that’s totally fine, obviously. Tickety-fucking-boo.

(It’s not. It’s really fucking not. How the fuck is Isak meant to go back to his life after this? How’s
he meant to get on that train tomorrow morning and return to Oslo like nothing ever happened? Like he hasn’t been gone for Even since he sat down across from him on a train and made up some bullshit story about Isak’s illicit hospital trysts? Like just his touch doesn’t send a rush of blood through his veins hot like fire? Like the idea of never seeing Even again makes Isak want to lock his door, bury himself in blankets and never leave his bed again?

Fuck, why why why why why why why)

“Is this necessary?” He grumbles instead, but Even just ignores him, guiding him up steps and gratings with last-minute instructions that have Isak yelping and gripping onto Even even harder, probably on purpose, because every time it happens Even just giggles into his ear, pulling him back until he’s pressed up against his chest in an iron-grip.

He can tell Even likes it by how often he does it, and Isak’s not complaining, will take anything he can get. Yet his nerves keep making him stumble, often over nothing, and he can’t make himself relax. It’s not even the fact that he’s essentially blind; he can’t get the idea of never seeing Even again out of his head. It’s spreading like rot, clinging to the walls of his mind, thick with the smell of decay.

Even, like usual, seems to notice, because he stops, pulling Isak to him once again. Isak settles against his chest, breathing in, breathing out.

“Hey,” Even intones softly, “don’t you trust me?”

And despite it all, Isak does.

“I do,” he says, equally soft.

He doesn’t see, but he feels Even smile. “Good,” he says, kissing Isak’s cheek. It’s impossibly swift, but it warms him all over. “We’re nearly there.”

He’s telling the truth. A few more steps — this time with fair warning — and they come to a stop. The air is warm and crackles with the scent of fast food, which is weird, considering.

“Okay,” Even says, still behind him. “Are you ready?”

He wonders if Even can feel Isak roll his eyes. By the way he hip-checks him, Isak supposes that’s a ‘yes’.

He’s just about to say something insolent when Even lifts his hands and— oh fuck, there it is.

He can’t count how many times he’s seen this exact image, replicated on billboards and those rolling posters they have at bus stops, birthday cards and people’s lockscreens, movie establishing shots and his own laptop screensaver. Somehow, none of those compare to the real thing.

And really, it’s so cliché to be awestruck by the Eiffel Tower. It’s just about the most iconic building in the world and half the girls he knows have it in the background of their profiles pictures, either cartwheeling in front of it or pretending to touch its point. (Not that he can talk, his profile picture is a severely outdated Spiderman meme, but at least that meme isn’t posing in front of the Eiffel Tower.)

Yet, knowing all of this, regardless of all this, it’s still beautiful.

It feels like the sun has been setting for years but it’s still not quite dark yet, orange fading into pink fading into white fading into blue, and the tower stands stark against it, dark and angular.
Once again, Isak’s hit with that now-familiar burst of wonder, the disbelief that yes, he really is in Paris.

He gets now why Even made such a fuss about getting off here. Trocadéro is not the most direct route from Pigalle; Isak took one cursory look at a graffiti’d metro map and tried walking them to the 6 stopping at Bir-Hakeim before Even took action, pulling him away with a curt “Nope.” He’s grateful for it now, that he gets to see it like this for the first time, although he’s sure it’s just as impressive from any angle.

“Do you like it?” Even asks, whispers, murmurs. He’s hugging Isak from behind, nosing gently at his ear and yes, Isak does. So, so much.

“It’s alright,” he whispers back, going for aloof, and Even squeezes his waist in retaliation.

“You’re so full of shit,” Even giggles, pressing tiny little kisses down his jaw and the line of his neck, whatever he can get his lips on. It’s wonderful, no matter how ticklish Isak is there.

They’re not alone, haven’t been all evening, but somehow, he doesn’t care. Isak’s been out for a while and his sexuality isn’t anything he’s ashamed of, but it’s still difficult for him, usually, to not shy away from the attention. He used to hate it at first, when he was just getting a grip on his sexuality, watching the hurt in the eyes of the boys he rejected in public. He’d make it up to them later, in private, usually with kisses and hushed apologies, but he can still feel that paralysis, the way his body would lock down in fear whenever they came too close, were too obvious in their affections.

He’s gotten better with it now. He can go on dates without fearing every table is watching him, judging him, following the way he drinks and cuts his food like it’s stamped on his forehead. He can walk, hand in hand, and not care — no, that’s not right — not *react* when someone looks too closely, following the way their hands swing in tandem. He can even kiss boys for everyone to see, chastely, briefly, but properly, and the fear is creeping up his spine and through his hair and behind his eyelids but he still does it.

He can be brave.

He knows this.

Yet, Even makes him feel like he doesn’t have to.

With Even, it’s like no one exists in this entire world except them. Without him knowing, they’ve carved out a tiny space in the universe just for Isak and Even, no matter where they are. No one can trespass it.

Isak shivers and Even, mistaking it for cold, draws him in even closer.

“Do you want to see something cool?” Even asks, resting his chin on Isak’s shoulder.

“Cool by whose standards?” Isak asks lazily, reaching a hand back to run it through Even’s hair, marvelling at its softness.

How can anything be that soft?

“Cool by mine, someone with excellent taste. I’m sure you know the type,” Even quips.

“Hmm…” Isak pretends to think about it. He scratches idly at Even’s scalp, loving the way Even nips at his jaw, impatient. “Not sure I do, sorry.”
“Asshole,” Even sighs, but it’s never sounded so sweet. “Whatever, you’ll get to see it anyway.”

“I will?”

“Yes, you ungrateful thing, in four, three, two, one…”

Just then, cheers erupt around them and Isak is distracted by a faint twinkling in front of him. It turns out to be the Eiffel Tower, lit up like a Christmas tree, glittering with the light of a million shooting stars. It’s so stupidly pretty, Isak feels like a little girl cooing over her mother’s diamonds, suddenly understands his sisters’ obsession with anything that sparkles. Then, he feels guilty, because Jonas has given him enough speeches on the harm of gender stereotypes that he should know better by now.

Does know better by now.

Still, it’s so pretty.

“Smooth,” he tells Even, half sarcastic, mostly not.

Even just grins. “Thanks, baby.”

And just like that, Isak’s blushing again.

In the back of his mind, it sort of annoys him that Even can say this shit so easily, that he dishes out romance and affection like it’s second nature, when for Isak, just making eye contact is an ongoing effort. Even with how easy things are with Even, it still baffles him. If he were to think up an approximate, and if they had the time, it would be at least into the two-month mark before Isak could even imagine calling anyone ‘baby’.

Even does it in eight hours.

He wants to be mad at him, a bit, because Isak’s never been called ‘baby’ in his life, never knew he wanted to be. Now that he knows what it sounds like, rolling off of Even’s tongue, low and husky and unbelievably hot, it’s so fucking unfair that there will be a limit to it. That by next week, Even might be calling someone else ‘baby’, someone cooler and funnier and living in London, and Isak will be back where he started, just more miserable this time round. He didn’t even know that was possible.

So it’s a particular skill of Isak’s: being able to work himself into a huff without any help. His frustration at this entire situation is growing, a tight, unhappy ball rolling down the pit of his stomach, winding and unwinding, pulling Isak’s mood with it. Any liquid happiness from earlier is well gone, and he almost longs to stalk off, throw a tantrum just to see if Even would follow him, whispering excuses, appeasements, promises they know he’s going to break.

But even if he did, what would be the point? Discounting the fact Isak would just end up lost, it wouldn’t be fair to Even. Isak entered this arrangement knowing full well it was only for a night, and none of that is Even’s fault. If anything, him pulling a strop just makes things more difficult, wastes the precious time that they have left together, and Isak doesn’t want that.

Even’s right, they need to make tonight the best that it can be.

Before them, the twinkling lights come to an end, flickering abruptly into darkness. The show was short and sweet, but only a brief blimp in the hazy, endless night.

It’s difficult not to read it as a metaphor.
Despite an active effort at upping his mood, Isak’s never been a skilled actor. His feelings leak into their night like an oil spill.

Even’s doing his best at cheering him up — offers to sneak them onto a children’s carousel, tries to show him the bridge from *Inception*, digs around for a euro to buy them those tacky Eiffel Tower keychains in garish shades of gold and pink — but nothing seems to work, Isak lost in his thoughts, sadness drilling through his head like a broken record.

Eventually, they settle on walking up the river as Even prattles on about this and that, unimportant topics that Isak forces himself to listen to just to stop hearing himself. It’s an alright distraction, but it doesn’t help his mood, only dampened by the number of beautiful buildings they pass to which he can’t summon a single emotional response. First, the Grand Palais and the Petit Palais, cold and empty. Then a glimpse of the Arc de Triomphe, standing proud at the end of the off-putting Champs Élysées. A cursory look at the most extra Abercrombie & Fitch he’s ever seen and they’re back towards the Seine, and Even keeps talking and talking and talking. He almost misses the chaos of Pigalle, the tacky strip clubs, the guys trying to sell them coke at every second crossing. Weirdly, things felt warmer there.

It’s here that they cross a bridge, even better than the *Inception* one, and the fact that he notices is a cause to celebrate in itself.

“What’s this one called?” He asks, cutting off Even’s monologue rather rudely, but Even doesn’t mind. Looks relieved, in fact. “This bridge?”

“There you are,” Even breathes, ignoring his question and pulling Isak into a long, tight hug. Isak’s arms come up around his shoulders without even realising it and it’s nice, really nice. Even being taller, Isak curls into him like a kitten, Even’s arms folded over the expanse of his back, warm and solid.

Surprisingly, it makes him feel better, even though it shouldn’t, should only remind him that he won’t have this again after tonight. But deep down, he’s tired of brooding. He just wants to be held, exactly like this, till the fading of the light.

“That was a genuine question, y’know,” he says eventually, deep into the crook of Even’s neck.

Even huffs a laugh, bringing up a hand to stroke through his hair. “It’s Pont Alexandre III. It’s my favourite, I think.”

Isak breathes him in deeply, that touch of grapefruit so tangy he could drown in it. He wonders what it is: an aftershave, maybe. If he finds out the name he could buy it for himself as a reminder, a token. “It’s mine, too. I think.”

Even doesn’t reply, just spins him vaguely on the spot, lifting his head so that it’s resting on Isak’s.

The night is getting busier. A late-tour of people on segways speed past, running comical loops around them because they’re standing in the middle of the sidewalk. Across the street, two shiny Clydesdale horses are waiting patiently for customers, lugging a heavy-looking carriage with decadent, velvet seats Isak would be mortified to ever ride. The bridge is flanked by intricate black lampposts emitting an almost orange light, and there are touches of gold everywhere, from the
Pegasus’ at the top of the towers to the nymphs hanging off the side.

To their right, the Eiffel Tower glows like a firefly.

It’s 21.21.

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There are voices coming from somewhere below, a pair of floating bars beside the bridge, bright and noisy. Almost immediately, Isak can tell the first isn’t his vibe. It’s way too early for a strobe light, even for a club in the middle of a river, and they dart out just as quickly as they entered.

The second bar is long and vibrant, soft pink lettering spelling out La Rosa Bonheur. It’s packed: despite the early hour people are streaming in and out, hanging on the balcony and clumped around the entrances. It’s so loud, Isak can barely hear himself think.

It’s perfect.

He’s expecting a line, but the crowd is so unorganised, it’s not too difficult to slip by the beer garden and onto the boat. Only a few minutes later, they’re inside, and it’s even more packed, rapid-fire French coming from all angles while something reggaetón plays off the speakers. Trying to communicate with Even in this noise is useless, so he pulls him towards the bar instead, waving his credit card. He probably shouldn’t, but the shifts he can take up back home are almost a relief, long hours in which he’ll be too busy to think about his joke of a love life.

It’s a while before they get served, but neither of them is trying particularly hard, looking around curiously (Even) and desperately trying to remember how to order in French (Isak). He considers just pointing at a couple of Tuborg’s and saying ‘please’, but when the time actually comes, it hits him that maybe that’s a bit low-brow for Even. Even studies film, he probably drinks fancy organic craft beer. Fuck, he probably brews his own fancy organic craft beer.

Isak and his friends pretty much strictly fuck with the cheapest six-pack from the liquor store down by Mahdi’s — beer in a glass bottle is fancy to him.

He’s coming to the realisation that all beer looks exactly the same (why is so much of it green?) when a bartender saves him from inevitably working himself into an early grave. He’s handsome: thick dark hair deliberately messy over deep brown eyes, a sharp jaw and wicked smile. He gives Isak a once-over, apparently liking what he sees. Despite himself, Isak blushes.

“Avez-vous choisi?” He asks slowly, like Isak has any idea what he’s saying. (He took French classes for seven years, he should know this.)

It’s awfully ironic that Isak has gone literal months without a shred of action, yet one day in Paris and he’s being flirted with by some of the hottest guys he’s ever seen in his life. This truly is the City of Romance. Maybe he should move here.

The bartender’s still watching him, an almost predatory look in his eyes, and Isak, already anxious over the beer options, um’s and ah’s over it for a stupid amount of time, growing increasingly more flustered. It’s actually getting embarrassing when Even, obviously tired of this entire charade, steps forward.
“Deux Peroni, s’il vous plaît.”

For a sound so lyrical, it’s surprisingly curt.

Isak turns to Even in surprise, but he’s not looking at him. Instead, he’s staring straight at the bartender, who in turn, is looking between them curiously. He eventually settles his gaze on Even, and they stare at each other for an uncomfortable amount of time before he steps back, shrugging. He leaves to get their drinks, Even rolling his shoulders back proudly like he’s run a marathon, and Isak wonders if he just witnessed some sort of non-verbal pissing contest.

This is undoubtedly the weirdest night of his life.

But in a way, it cheers him up. Isak’s desirable.

The bartender wants him.

Even wants him.

They pay for their drinks and go, but not before the bartender sends Isak an enormous wink, so exaggerated Isak almost laughs. And if Even’s grip on his arm tightens a fraction, it only adds to the storm brewing between them, crackling in time to the music overhead. He wonders how it isn’t obvious to everyone in this bar, how the room isn’t on fire from the heat licking at his pulse point, embers burning in every place that they touch.

He’s not paying any real attention to where they’re going, too lost in thoughts of where Even ends and Isak begins, when they reach the balcony, long and narrow, encircling the entire boat. The fresh air is welcome, bringing him down a notch until he’s able to remember his name without immediately thinking of the way Even says it: warmly, teasingly, unbearably soft.

It’s busy but Even finds them a space, as secluded as they could be in a place like this. There’s nowhere to rest their drinks but it’s alright, keeping his hands busy so he doesn’t do anything stupid, like pull Even to him right now and claim his mouth like he’s been dying to all night. Not that he doesn’t think Even would let him, but the timing’s off, somehow.

Even’s turned that stare onto him and it’s searing, piercing, the air between them thick like jasmine and he’s being reeled in, in, in with gravity, the magnets of the earth aligned in their bodies, pushing and pulling, turning them out, out, out. Even takes a long drink from his beer, an amber drop escaping out the corner of his mouth. It slides down, down his chin and down his neck, pooling at his exposed collarbone like perspiration and Isak can’t tear his eyes away.

“Isak,” Even says, but he can’t hear him, too focused on the shimmering stripe, wet and inviting.

“Isak,” he says again, and when Isak looks up, the look in Even’s eyes is just as hungry as he is.

“Isak,” he says, one last time, and Isak listens. “It’s just you and me.”

“Yeah?” Isak asks, tipping his chin up. He’s grinning lazily, his anxiety fizzled away without him even noticing, or hiding at least, somewhere distant and dark. He hopes it stays there.

“Just you and me,” Even says again, wrapping an arm around his waist, pulling him forward until their hips are pressed together. “No one else.”

Isak rests his free hand on Even’s chest, absentely playing with a button of his shirt. Even’s watching him, and Isak takes a long pull of his drink, scrunching his nose at the flavour. He’s a pale ale man himself, but Even likes lager. This makes Even laugh, squeezing his waist.
“Okay, Romeo,” Isak giggles, and leans in. 

“Romeo?”

Even’s pushing him back, yet it’s not a rejection, because he’s not even paying attention, didn’t even seem to notice that Isak was about to kiss him. The hand around his waist comes up to cup his cheek, reverent. His eyes are shining, looking at Isak like he just said something marvellous.

What could be more marvellous that kissing is beyond him, but whatever.

“Yes, Romeo,” Isak says patiently. “You know who that is, right?”

“Do I know who—” Even scoffs, but he’s giddy, smiling like an idiot. “Does that make you Juliet?”

Isak grimaces, but it could just be the beer. “No.” Even gives him a look, and he concedes. “Maybe. It’s a figure of speech.”

Even grins slyly, pulling him closer. “Do you know who that makes the bartender?”

Isak rolls his eyes. “No?”

“Paris!” Even says excitedly, grin so wide his canines are showing, his eyes becoming pretty half-moons. “Which is—and we’re in Paris, oh my god! It’s perfect!”

Isak has literally no idea what’s going on, but that doesn’t seem to matter. Even can know for the both of them. “What’s he got to do with any of this?” He asks, tilting his head in confusion.

“Nothing, baby, forget about him,” Even says soothingly, like he isn’t the one who brought him up. “He’s Paris. He’s Paul Rudd in a spacesuit, and you don’t want him.”

Isak hates that in moments like these, his brain activity peters out until there’s nothing left but tumbleweed and every ancient meme he and the boys have ever sent into the groupchat. Right now, it’s that one of Nick Cannon and the question marks.

But Even’s sounding like something out of his conspiracy theory Youtube video days and he has to ask the obvious. “Wait, who’s Paris?”

“Paris! Juliet’s other suitor. The much less attractive one, obviously,” Even says, like Isak’s a particularly dense child.

“There’s a Paris in Romeo and Juliet?” He always thought it was set in Italy.

“Isak, you’re killing me right now.”

“I’m serious!”

“Have you never actually read Romeo and Juliet? Not even seen the movie?”

“No? It’s boring.”

The hand cupping his cheek shoots back, pressing against Even’s heart as if holding a wound. Isak wants to make some sort of joke about daggering, like they’ve been in a swordfight, but then the image of Even in tights crosses his mind and all logical thoughts escape him immediately.

Even shakes his head. “Isak, you’re fucking gorgeous, but you’re so wrong.”
Isak sniffs. “I don’t have to have read it to know everyone dies. That’s boring.”

Even laughs, high and bell-like. He gets his hands back on Isak and that’s more like it. “Yeah, but that’s why it’s so romantic! Love is big and dramatic and explosive, that’s how you know that it’s real.”

Except.

Except Isak doesn’t agree with that. Not at all.

“We’re not big and dramatic and explosive, and we’re still real,” he says quietly, looking down at his shoes. They’re a dirty white from walking around all day, and there’s a blue sticker like the ones they put on mandarins stuck to the side of the left one. He idly wonders how it got there.

Even’s gone quiet, but his touch returns, back around Isak’s jaw to lift him up until he’s looking again. His eyes are so bright and so soft.

(Isak’s not sure he’s ever realised how blue they are, and now that he knows, it’s going to haunt him forever, each time he’s at a swimming pool or drinking Diet Pepsi or simply looking up at the clear, blue sky.)

“You’re right,” Even says, gentle. “We’re not, and we’re still real.”

He pulls Isak closer, pressing a soft, lingering kiss to his forehead. Another one between his eyes, and another, right on the tip of his nose. Any lower and—

“You’re still reading Romeo and Juliet. Come on.” Even takes a final swig of his beer and then they’re moving again, dodging through conversations, Isak almost spilling his drink on a girl’s white sundress in their flurry.

When they make it inside, it’s even darker than the night, lights dimmed down until there’s nothing but red. Music is pulsing from the speakers, but the light is steady, tinting everything with it, deep like wine. They’re making their way through the crowd, Isak fighting to keep up, when the music changes into something cool and electronic. Around them, the crowd constricts even more, and he and Even are stuck, the walls pressing in until there’s nothing left but the two of them.

Isak tugs at his hand, and Even turns around.

He tugs again, and Even comes closer.

The beat of the song is hypnotic, sticky like honey, and Isak doesn’t dance but right now he is, hips shifting under Even’s hands, pulling him in and pressing him close. He starts singing, and Isak’s been waiting all night to kiss him, but for this, he’ll wait a little longer.

“Everybody here wants you, my love, my love,” Even croons, right into the space between their lips. “And I know that you want him too, my love, my love.”

It’s so easy to get lost in the moment, in The Weeknd telling them that he knows the secrets that they keep, and Isak loves this song, lets himself be sung to. Even is so close, he couldn’t be any closer, and Isak’s runs his hands though Even’s hair, over his jaw, down his chest and into the back pockets of his jeans. Even grins, singing into Isak’s mouth, his neck, leaving little kisses in the wake of his words.

For four minutes, all Isak breathes is Even, more addictive than oxygen, this heady gift of blood and stardust.
When it’s over, they step back into the night.

They reach Shakespeare & Co. with sixteen minutes to spare, and Even whoops like they haven’t just run the entire way. They must look a mess, mussed and sweaty and just about groping each other in public, but the shopkeeper barely gives them a second look, going back to her conversation with the tired cashier.

It’s almost 23, but the store’s not empty, rustling coming from behind the bookshelves as people peruse the floor. It’s so colourful: literally everything is covered in books, stacked so closely together they almost create formations of their own, towers and archways and packed into every inch of wall visible.

He flicks briefly through a Hemingway displayed heavily at the front, something about a feast. It looks like the kind of thing Jonas would like, and he considers buying him it. Isak doesn’t read much other than science textbooks, but this store makes him wish he did, fiction and crime and poetry, even just for the vanity of it. Even’s pointing out books that he loves, over here and other there and just under the Classics section, don’t you see? It all blurs after a while, but it’s still a lovely sight, glossy and mismatched, the air ripe with the smell of books.

There are multiple detours because as small as it is, the place is laid out like a labyrinth, but they eventually find their way to the Shakespeare section in the back corner, Even crouching while he runs a finger over clean, crisp spines. He finds what he’s looking for, pulling out a slim black volume, *Romeo and Juliet*. It’s a plain copy, nothing but the title and a pair of pink coffins on the cover. He hands it to Isak like it’s something precious, and Isak takes it just as carefully.

“What if I hate it?” He asks, just to be difficult.

“You won’t,” Even says, shaking non-existent dust off of his knees.

“What if I don’t like Shakespeare?”

“Have you ever read any Shakespeare?”

“Yes.”

“What’s your favourite?”

“Hamlet.”

Even snorts. “Of course.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing,” Even’s smile twitches. “Just of course you’d like Hamlet. It’s sad, gay and melodramatic. Right up your alley.”

Isak shoves him, Even catching himself just before he falls into a wobbly stack of hardbacks, but they’re grinning. Isak doesn’t register how hard he’s holding the book when Even reaches over, taking his hand.
“Do you want to see something cool?” Even asks, and Isak rolls his eyes.

“Really? This again?”

“Shut up,” Even giggles, leaning in to brush their noses together. Isak doesn’t even bother pretending he doesn’t love it. “Do you?”

Isak nods and, once again, he’s being dragged along by Even, this time up the rickety staircase, choppy words carved into the wood, each step stuffed with books of differing sizes.

Upstairs is empty; they’re alone together for the first time all night. It’s much quieter up here, darker too. The low-hanging lamps glow amber, warm with the messy rows of fairy lights tracing the ceiling, and Isak takes a moment to situate himself, breathing in the dusty air. Even’s standing by the window, beckoning him over.

Outside, the night is dark, a faded sort of navy that’s almost brown from the sheer amount of street lights. In front of them, Notre Dame shines bright, shimmering golden on the black river below. They’ve come full circle, he realises belatedly; back to where they started.

He wonders how much he’s grown since this morning. In some ways, he feels like a whole new person.

Even’s looking at him, probably waiting for confirmation that yes, it is cool, but Isak can’t wait any longer. It already feels like centuries since they’ve met, eternal lovers like Lancelot and Guinevere, locked in a fable that will keep on repeating itself endlessly, over and over again.

He leans in, kissing the words off of Even’s lips, feeling the way he sighs in relief, melting in to it right away. A hand comes to cup his neck, steady and grounding, and then Even’s pulling him in, closer and closer until not a single inch of them isn’t touching. His mouth is so, so hot, his tongue even hotter, and Isak’s lost in the sensation, in the feel of Even’s soft hair between his fingers, the heady touch of Even’s hands beneath his shirt. They’re hot like a brand, and Isak hopes they leave a mark, deep and possessive, for as long as he lives.

The glass is fogging up with the heat they’re emitting, and it’s intoxicating, Even’s intoxicating, Isak can’t get enough of him. Wants to pull him even closer, consume him, but they’re in a bookstore that’s closing in two or so minutes, so he forces himself to pull back. Even sighs, pressing quaint little kisses on Isak’s cheeks, his nose, his eyelids, the cupid’s bow of his lip, that have Isak letting out a soft, breathy moan. Even gasps, surging in again, but it’s less urgent this time, a slow kiss like Isak’s never experienced before. It knocks any club hook-up or Tinder date straight out of the park.

He never wants to be kissed like this by anyone else, ever again.

A final call rings through the quiet, too distant to be anything more than background noise, but they pull back. Their foreheads are pressed together, noses dancing something uncoordinated, and Isak is so, so happy.

Here, framed in the window of a bookstore in Paris, is a story they’ll never stop telling.
An earlier chapter than usual because I'm on holiday and the weather in Wellington is so bad I may never leave my bed again. I've also been listening to 'Secrets' by The Weeknd with almost feverish abandon, hence why it's included in here. I feel like I'm having issues with character consistency, and I'm almost embarrassed to know how many times the word 'soft' is used in this chapter alone, but whatever. I hope you like it! Let me know what you think :)

Destinations in the 7e arrondissement are La Tour Eiffel, Pont Alexandre III and La Rosa Bonheur. (Arrondissements are the official suburbs of Paris - the 7e is the most expensive and arguably the most beautiful.) Shakespeare & Co. is in the 5th, found at the tip of the Latin Quarter. This is such a typical English-speaker destination, but it's really, really lovely, and would it really be a Before AU if there weren't at least some reference to it? All my love <3
Even can’t stop kissing Isak, and it’s brilliant.

Sometimes it’s chaste, like when Isak pulls at their linked fingers, pressing soft kisses on his lips, interrupted by the giggles that can’t help but escape, like Isak can barely believe this is real. Other times, they’re desperate, like when Even backs Isak into a wall, hands clasping collars or threaded through hair and they’re kissing like it’s a race, like there’s a prize to be won.

They’re tripping over streets, over each other, and Even is in seventh heaven, on cloud nine, every space-related cliché he can think of. There’s no destination in particular, just the feel of Isak’s hands on him, in his hair and underneath his shirt, hot and addictive.

It feels like a fever dream, but it’s actually only eleven minutes since they left Shakespeare & Co., the last customers to leave the store. The shopkeeper looked unsurprised but unimpressed at the display: two boys spilling down the staircase, giggling and almost head-butting several low awnings. They’d bought the book with relative ease, and though the cashier obviously just wanted to go home, she still waved at them as they left.

They haven’t got very far.

They spent a fair few minutes just kissing outside the store, in the orange lamplight. When someone rode by, wolf-whistling loudly, they’d separated long enough to get moving, picking a route at random. Even’s sure that if he were actually to pause and find his bearings, he could tell where they are pretty easily. That would mean detaching himself from Isak’s lips, though.

Eventually, the choice is made for him.

Even has Isak pressed up against another wall, on his way to working a mark into Isak’s neck, deep and burgundy. Isak’s fingers tighten rhythmically in his hair, and he’s releasing quick little breaths for every sharp scrape of Even’s teeth, quickly soothed with a hot lick. It’s so easy to get carried away when Even’s like this, and just as he’s going in for another bite, a dull knocking just left of Isak’s ear pulls him back above water.

Isak looks just as confused as he feels, eyes still misty and far away. Even peers at the space next to him, and it’s then that he realises that he doesn’t have Isak up against a wall, but the front window of a busy Starbucks.

They’re in front of a woman seated at the window, hiding a laugh behind an enormous coffee. She must have been the one to knock. Behind her, a group of girls crowded around a too-small table are eyeing them, rapt. One lifts her drink in dismay, as if asking why the show stopped.

Even hides his blush in Isak’s neck, silent laughter shaking both of them. Isak, confused, takes one
look behind him and promptly freezes. His cheeks rush scarlet, even more so when the girls cheer, one giving him a particularly lecherous once-over that make his eyes widen. He immediately pushes off the glass, pulling Even with him, resulting in loud booing from the girls. Even can’t stop laughing, and he gives a quick bow as he’s being pulled away. It’s met with rousing applause.

Once they’re out of sight, Isak slaps him on his chest, but he’s laughing too. “I hate you so much, dude.”

Even wants to scoff at ‘dude’, but if anything, he knows when to pick his battles.

“I didn’t know!” He says.

“Still hate you.”

“No, you don’t,” he giggles, reeling Isak in.

“Nope,” Isak pushes him back. “None of that. I can’t believe I left my dignity in a Starbucks.”

“Technically, you left it against a Starbucks.”

Isak shoots him one of those looks Even’s rapidly come to love, the kind that says that, very reluctantly, he finds what Even said funny, but he's also this close to hitting him.

“Oh my god, Even,” Isak groans, fanning a hand over his eyes.

“The people loved it!” Even says, trying for his waist again.

“Let go of me, you fiend,” Isak slips out of his grip. “See if I ever let you kiss me again.”

“You literally kissed me first.”

“Hmm… sounds fake but okay.”

“Did you just… was that a meme?”

Isak sticks out his tongue, and Even can’t believe this is his life.

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They come to the agreement that Even can keep an arm over Isak’s shoulders, which he takes full advantage of, swooping in for cheek kisses and unnecessary (very necessary) nuzzling whenever he can. Eight out of ten times, Isak will duck out of the touch, but it unfailingly makes him blush, and sometimes the arm wrapped around Even’s waist will squeeze back.

Now that he’s no longer lost in the taste of Isak’s kisses, he can actually map out where they are. By the looks of it, it’s Rue Saint Severin, meaning they’ve covered a very small amount of distance in a remarkable amount of time. The street is narrow and lit up like a carnival, restaurants in the process of closing up. Waiters are picking up small, chequered tables, others shuffling dusty wine barrels stacked with wax-dripping candles back inside. One wheels home a fish tank crowded with lobsters, safe for another night.

They walk among them, Isak looking around with interest. Even didn’t intend to end up in the
Quartier Latin, but he’s glad they did. It is undeniably one of the prettiest areas in Paris, and one of the more lively. Even now, a little shy of midnight, the streets are full, loud with chatter and people stopping for late night snacks.

Even has an idea formulating in his head, one that doesn’t materialise until they reach Boulevard Saint-Michel, the familiar fountaine littered with smoking teenagers. If he remembers correctly, they’re not too far from la Sorbonne, meaning they shouldn’t be too far from Maxime, a French guy who did his Erasmus at Goldsmiths last year. They’d shared a module on sexuality in media, and even in London, he’d been a goldmine of weed.

This is one of those occasions in which Even can admit to himself that not having a Facebook account is more of a hindrance than anything else. But he’s sure there’s a phone number hidden in the depths of his inbox, and maybe even an address, saved for those vague plans to visit neither of them took that seriously.

Isak watches him for a bit as he scrolls through reminders to enrol in this semesters courses and Netflix monthly bills, but he doesn’t ask questions, switching to looking around them, at the lights and the cars and Notre Dame still visible where the street meets the river. Even’s just about given up hope when he finds it, a short email from Maxime Martichou, sending notes on an exam, a note at the bottom telling Even that if he’s ever in Paris, he can hook him up with the finest quality weed this side of Amsterdam.

Even flicks him a text, receives an enthusiastic response in less than a minute. He turns to Isak, now looking at the statue on the fountain. It’s the archangel Michael standing triumphant above the devil, wielding a sword, crooked like a lightning bolt. The devil’s tail stretches out in to a winding snake.

Isak’s lost in thought, his eyebrows furrowed.

“Isak?” Even asks, curiously.

“Hm?”

“Do you smoke weed?”

Isak’s face morphs instantly, and Even figures that if he wants to talk about whatever had him looking so contemplative, he will. Even just has to give him time.

For now, Isak grins. “Fuck yeah.”

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“So how do you know this guy?”

They’ve left the big city lights of Boulevard Saint-Michel for the quieter streets around le Jardin du Luxembourg, ducking in and out of alleys as they follow Even’s Google maps. It’s still fairly busy, mostly young people walking the streets or drinking at small, colourful tables spread out over any stretch of sidewalk available. It adds a nice, buzzy atmosphere to the night.

“We took a class together back in London, when he was doing his Erasmus there. We sat next to each other in a tutorial and got on pretty well,” Even explains.
“And you kept in touch?”

Even shoots Isak a look. Isak looks back innocently.

“Not really. But we’re still friends.”

“That’s cool,” Isak says softly.

Even squeezes his hand; wishes he could do more. “Tell me about your friends.”

Isak snorts, but the smile he’s wearing is warm, pleased. “They’re all idiots, but sure. There’s Jonas, and we’ve been best friends since kindergarten, basically. He studies politics and wants to save the world. He has a girlfriend, Eva, another of my oldest friends, and she’s like a sister to me. She’s more into partying, and she’s the nicest person I know.”

Even smiles, nudges Isak’s shoulder gently. “I like them already.”

“You should. They first dated when we were in high school but broke up, which was hard, because at the time they were pretty much my only friends. They’ve been back together since our last year though, and now they even own a dog. His name’s Lykke, because Eva named him, thank God. Jonas wanted Che.”

“Like Guevara?”

“That’s the one.”

Even barks out a laugh. “Wow.”

“Once,” Isak says, and he’s grinning so fondly Even’s heart clenches a bit; hopes that one day, when Isak will talk of him — if he even talks of him — that he’ll look exactly like this. “When we were on a school trip to London, Jonas made us skip on the tour of the Tower of London to go to Highgate Cemetery and find Karl Marx’s grave. We got lost like three times cause he needed to stop for flowers and everything.”

Even shakes his head in disbelief. “I need to meet this guy.” Pauses. “Wait, when was this?”

Isak hums, thinking about it. “About two years ago? It was our last year before uni.”

“Huh,” Even says dumbly. “I would have already been in London then.”

“We might have met…” Isak says, faux-dreamily. Almost subconsciously, they move closer together, arms brushing as they walk.

“Were you this hot at eighteen?” Even leers, curling an arm around Isak’s neck. Instantly, Isak brings up a hand to thread his fingers through Even’s.

“Nah,” he says easily, and Even gasps.

“How’s that even possible?”

Isak smiles at him, so warm he can literally feel his heart beating in time to their footsteps, smooth like a pendulum.

“I mean it,” Isak giggles. “My idiot friend Magnus dared me to shave all my hair off that summer, so I looked like a bowling ball.”
Even literally throws his head back, he’s laughing so hard. He doesn’t really notice how exposed his neck is until Isak swoops in, licking a long stripe up his Adam’s apple. This time, when he gasps, the hand holding Isak’s comes up to his hair, pulling tightly at the shorter strands at the base of his neck.

Exquisite, long blonde hair. Wavy and soft, bunching into curls at his ears.

“Keep it this length,” Even says huskily, pulling again, gentler this time.

Isak just nods, watching him through hooded eyelids. His face is tilted up, mouth tantalisingly open, and Even doesn’t even think about it before he’s leaning in, taking Isak’s bottom lip and biting.

The kiss is messy, and Even loves it. Isak tongue is wet, and he knows how to use it, reducing him to savage nips that have Isak fisting at his shirt in an effort to get closer. Isak smells so, so good, like Christmas, cinnamon and salt and the remnants of expensive cologne. He’s panting in desperation, almost grinding into Isak’s thigh in the middle of a dark street, wild like an animal. His phone chooses this moment to interrupt, chirping out directions in that vacant voice that always makes him want to mimic it, and Even wonders, not for the first time, just how much Google really sees.

“We’re close,” Isak whispers, breathless. His grip loosens on Even’s shirt, and he leans his nose in to touch Even’s.

“We are,” Even agrees, and kisses him again.

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By the time they reach Maxime’s they’ve calmed down, back to walking separate but close. Isak’s finished telling Even about his friends—

(Magnus: “You know how every friend group has the one friend who everyone picks on? He’s that, with very hidden depths.”)

Mahdi: “I thought he hated me for the first year we knew each other, but he’s actually a massive softie. Always has great weed, too.”

Sana: “Terrifying, but I would lay down my life for her.”

Chris: “She used to be into me before I came out, and I can never look at spoons the same.”

And Vilde: “She’s… Well, she’s Vilde.”)

—and Even’s even told him about his. Or about his ex-girlfriend.

Same difference.

The topic of Sonja is always a difficult one, not because they don’t get along, but because explaining a four-year relationship with the girl you still regularly keep in touch with isn’t as easy to explain to conquests as one would think. It doesn’t help that she’s literally a fashion model working on her master’s degree in early-childhood education.
So, it’s something Even approaches with relative vagueness, but Isak takes it remarkably well. He asks how they met (in the summer before high school), why they broke up (“We’re better off as friends”) and if they still see each other (in January when he was in Oslo over Christmas).

He even asks about his Norwegian friends, and Even gets lost in traipping descriptions of his boys back in Oslo: Mikael, Elias, Yousef, Mutta and Adam. He knows Elias has a sister called Sana, even that she’s Isak’s age and went to Nissen, but it seems too much of coincidence that she be Isaks’s Sana. To be honest, Even’s almost scared to know the answer, so he doesn’t ask.

Now, he sends a quick text up to Maxime to buzz them in, and in a shockingly small amount of time for a guy who tokes more than he breathes, they’re let in, climbing a slippery marble staircase because these old ass buildings don’t have elevators. It’s so narrow they have to go up single-file, but the way Isak glares at him every time Even swats his ass is worth it.

Maxime’s waiting when they reach the fourth floor, pulls Even in for a bear hug that literally lifts him off his feet. He goes for Isak next, who tolerates it, laughing incredulously when he receives the same treatment. Inside, the air is thick with smoke and dank with the smell of weed, a group of guys his age lounging across couches as they watch football. They all wave when he and Isak enter, but quickly go back to the game, someone yelling at a penalty.

He loses Isak to them almost immediately, perching himself on the arm of the nearest couch, already engrossed in the game. “Bullshit!” He cries in English when a guy in blue scores, and the boys nod approvingly. One offers him a beer, saying something in French, and when it’s clear Isak doesn’t understand, he switches to English.

“Sweden is getting stronger,” he says darkly, and Isak nods solemnly in return.

Yeah, that’s Even cue to leave.

He follows Maxime to where he’s disappeared into a cramped kitchen, rolling a joint with practiced ease. There’s pizza on the table, American-style, with würstl and French fries littered on top, and Even helps himself to a slice. It’s a tad cold, but it takes him back to nights spent with the boys, talking shit and driving Mama Bakkoush to an early grave. It hasn’t been too long since he saw them — he and Mikael caught up nearly every day when he was back — but he’s hit with a sudden longing, so tangible it almost winds him.

For all that he’s created himself a life in London, there’s nothing quite like the Bakka boys when they’re all together.

Maxime offers him the joint and he takes a long drag. The weed is good, or good for city standards, and they smoke in silence for a few minutes. Usually, Maxime is pretty talkative, just like Even, and the conversations they’ve had over a joint and French cinema are some of the more pretentious in Even’s life. It’s probably best Isak’s never seen him in movie mode.

“What brings you to Paris, man?”

Maxime is one of the few non-native English speakers he knows who uses slang as naturally as mother tongues. It’s something Even’s still not comfortable with, probably never will be, even when his Norwegian accent is weaker than Maxime’s heavy French one.

“My train back to London isn’t until tomorrow morning, so Isak and I are hanging out before we have to go.”

“Isak?” Maxime asks, inhaling. “Your friend?”
Even nods.

Maxime smirks at him. “More than a friend?”

Even rolls his eyes. “What gave it away?”

Maxime shrugs. “You watch him.”

“You’ve seen us for all of two minutes, what the fuck,” Even says, but he’s laughing, caught out. He does watch Isak, finds it impossible to tear his eyes away from him, and being called out on it leaves him with a swoopy feeling in his stomach, whimsical like the early days of falling in love.

“How long have you been dating?”

Even pauses. Inhales. Watches as the tip of his joint glows orange. “We’re not.”

“You’re not?” Maxime asks, lowering his own joint in comical shock.

“We just met this morning,” Even giggles, even though he’s not sure why he is. It’s not particularly funny, but he supposes it is interesting. “On the train here. Isak was on his way to Oslo, but I asked him to stop here with me for the night. And he did.”

Maxime whistles, low and tuneless. “Putain...”

And yeah, ‘putain’ just about sums it.

Maxime moves to the small window, opening it wide to let some fresh air in. It doesn’t do much, the evening being so warm, but it clears his head in an almost physical way, like when you’re hungover and that first sip of cold water tastes crystalline.

“Does he go to London with you?” Maxime asks. His joint is on its last dredges, smell turning bitter as he seeks a few final puffs.

Even just shakes his head.

“So, he goes home?”

Even nods.

“And you’re going to let him?”

This time, Even scoffs. “What am I supposed to do? I’m in London, he’s in Oslo. We have separate lives, man.”

Maxime brings his hands up, a peace offering, and Even waves him off but it’s frustrating. It’s tiring feeling like the bad guy, like he’s the one who’s holding them apart. Isak sulks, and he hates it but he understands. Obviously Even wants them to stay together, but it’s just not realistic. Is one of them really going to upheave their entire life just for this? One night in Paris?

And the problem is, Even’s beginning to wonder.

Not anything practical, no. Just ideas, feelings. Half-baked dreams of dating, sex, calling Isak his boyfriend. Owning a pet. Meeting Isak’s parents, Isak meeting his. Being around his friends, being back in Oslo, being with Isak. Cooking for him in a tiny kitchen, their clothes mixed in the washing machine because neither of them care for colour-separate washes. Sharing a bed, a home. A love.
The overwhelming want leaves him shuddering.

They chat a little longer, moving onto lighter subjects like Even’s course and the short film Maxime’s trying to make, some sort of southern gothic transplanted to Provence. Maxime asks what he’s working on, and Even’s honest, tells him about his fruitless search for inspiration across Europe.

“Nothing’s inspired you?” He asks, raising an eyebrow.

“No!” Even says. “That’s the thing, nothing seems to—”

Maxime interrupts him. “Nothing at all?”

He’s getting at something, and Even’s going to take a wild guess and say it’s Isak. They’ve barely even spoken a word to each other, yet here Maxime is, vouching for the boy on the train. Even never knew he was such a romantic.

“Well…” Even gets out. “Maybe something.”

Maxime nods, urging him to go on.

Even does. “A love story, of sorts.”

Maxime grins, lighting another joint, and that’s that.

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The game must end, because Isak eventually comes and finds him, gasping in mock-offence when he sees Even smoking without him. There’s barely anything left of it, but Maxime takes pity on them, handing over two masterfully rolled joints wrapped in crinkly tinfoil. They leave soon after, the guys in the living room standing one-by-one to pull Isak into hugs, wishing Norway luck in beating the dastardly Sweden. It’s all very sincere, and somehow, Isak’s learnt all of their names. Maxime looks on proudly, like this is all just proving his point, but Even doesn’t need the display; he already knows.

They miraculously get downstairs without breaking their necks, and then they’re back on the street, so far south they’re almost in Montparnasse. The weed, slow as always, is finally getting to him, and despite having eaten only a few hours ago, Even steers them toward Rue Mouffetard. He’s never actually been, only heard tales of its late night food joints, and he uses his phone to guide them there. As they walk, Isak tells him about the game (Paris Saint-Germain lost, but Isak won the gift of friendship) and about some of the guys. There’s a likely chance half of the information is wrong, seeing as Isak’s English isn’t bad, but it’s definitely not fluent. In general, the French are, but they just pretend not to be out of spite. It seems with Isak, they made the effort.

He’s in high spirits, and the thought makes Even smile, stopping him in the middle of an empty street just to press a soft kiss on his lips. Isak lets him, and it’s lovely. They don’t even get interrupted; a cherry-red Mini Cooper drives around them instead, tooting cheerfully as it passes.

They hear Rue Mouffetard before they reach it, laughter and shrieking loud through a cacophony of voices, pressed into a narrow street lit up by busy bars and stalls. Half of the crowd looks to be waiting for souvlaki, a messy line leading all the way around the corner they’re standing at. The
other side of the street is just as busy, and they walk up it, stopping when Isak tugs at his sleeve.

He’s looking intently at the chalkboard for a small crêperie, options of ice cream and berries and Grand Marnier. Simple Nutella ones are only €2,50, €3 with added banana, and he orders them one each, watching as the guy behind the glass ladles thin batter and spreads it wide, crisping golden in seconds.

They’re delicious, Nutella always is, and Isak’s a messy eater, managing to smear it over his nose before he’s even properly bitten into the crêpe. Even half eats, half watches him, chewing slowly at his own. Isak seems so content, all thoughts of tomorrow gone, so Even tries to, too.

Finally, when Isak’s managed to scrape most of the Nutella off of his face with the help of his front-facing camera, he turns to Even. “It’s only one, where to next?”

Even takes a second to admire him. Isak’s hair is fluffy from a long day of fingers running through it, and the olive-green bomber jacket is back on, cool and fitted. He has rips at the knees of his jeans, and a last fleck of Nutella caught at the corner of his mouth. Even kisses it right off, even sweeter when it’s coming from Isak, feeling Isak blush beneath him. The look he gives Even is so fond, and Even can feel every single one of his reserves slowly crumbling around him.

“Where do you want to go?” He asks instead.

Isak shrugs. “You’re the one whose been here before, you choose.”

“That’s no fun,” Even whines, throwing his arm around Isak’s shoulders as they begin walking again. “Come on, la Tour Eiffel can’t be the only place you want to see in all of Paris. Think about it, baby.”

Isak blushes again, but he goes quiet, the cogs almost visibly working in his head. Something about this street is distinctly Paris, the sprawling bars lit up in red, outdoor dining extended so far, it’s spilling onto the street. Any car that makes the mistake of driving it will end up waiting a fair century for everyone to move out of its way, and the atmosphere is buzzing with life, even out of term-time. Not too far, Even knows, is the Panthéon, France’s greatest buried deep within its walls, and just behind, Saint-Étienne-du-Mont, quaint and graceful, the phantom chime of its bells like a lullaby in his memory.

A soft, twinkling tune, jazzy and old, drifts out of one of the busy bars, familiar yet he can’t place it. Isak smiles though, closing his eyes.

“I know where we’re going,” he says, and for once, Even follows.

For all his confidence, Isak doesn’t actually know where they’re going, has to do some quick researching on his phone while Even patiently allows himself to be towed around. They end up at the Place Monge metro station, sprinting for the final train of the night, the carriage empty aside from the two of them.

Even pulls Isak into his lap, long legs curling together as they make themselves comfortable. It’s so quiet, nothing but the white noise of the train hurtling them across the underground. Absently, Even starts humming, the same slow song from before.
Isak, tucked into his neck, sighs in contentment. “My mum loves that song.”

Even smiles, pressing a kiss into Isak’s hair. “Yeah?”

“Mmhm,” Isak’s breath tickles his throat. “She played it all the time when I was growing up. She always says that the first thing she’d do in Paris is go to this place, so that’s where we’re going.”

“Are you going to tell me what it is?” Even asks, curious.

“It’s a surprise,” Isak says, going for mysterious.

Even lets him have it, leaning his head back against Isak’s. The rest of the ride is quiet, nothing but soft murmurs shared between them, and no one ever gets on, their own intimate bubble under the busy streets of Paris.

They reach Opéra in record time, probably because no one’s fighting for a place on the train, and they’re the only ones walking through the empty station. Even’s been here before, but the view from the mouth of the metro still takes his breath away, beauty in brick and mortar.

Palais Garnier is the home of the Paris Opera, and though Even’s not as attached to it as he is the Moulin Rouge (which almost brought him to tears the first time he saw it) it’s still a sight to behold. This is obviously not what Isak intended to show him, because he looks just as mesmerised as Even feels, staring open-mouthed at the building before them.

“What’s that?” He asks, dumbfounded. It’s a pretty nice thing to stumble upon.


“Phantom of the what?”

“Seriously, Isak?”

“You know I don’t watch your weird movies.”

“It’s not even a weird movie,” he groans. “I mean, it is, but it’s based on a book from like, the 1910s, and a famous musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber.”

Isak wrinkles his nose. “Didn’t he do Cats?”

“Wait, so you know fucking Cats but you don’t know Phantom of the Opera?”

Isak shrugs, but it’s obvious he’s trying not to laugh. “I think Eskild plays some song from it sometimes. He gets really emotional over it.”

If it’s ‘Memory’, Even can’t blame him. He needs to meet this Eskild.

“Actually,” Isak continues, “he might have sex to it.”

Okay, now he really needs to meet him.

“Who is this guy?” He asks, incredulous.

“You don’t even want to know,” Isak sighs, but he’s back to his phone, bringing up the directions again.
They begin walking.

“What’s it about, anyway? Phantom of the whatever?”

Even rolls his eyes; he knows Isak knows what it’s called by now. But he answers anyway, because Even will always take the opportunity to talk about the things he loves. “Basically, there’s this girl, Christine. Her father was a famous musician but he died, leaving her orphaned, so she’s grown up in the Paris Opera, training as a ballet dancer. But she’s also been training as an opera singer, taught by a faceless presence, the notorious Phantom.”

Despite himself, Isak looks interested, and he motions him to go on.

“When the Opera gets new owners, they decide to shake things up a bit, and don’t believe the Phantom’s threats, refusing to believe he haunts the opera house. One by one, weird things begin happening to their production, including the awful prima donna—”

“What’s that?”

“The leading lady of an opera. Her voice starts acting up, people get hurt and a guy actually dies, all so the new owners finally obey the Phantom’s demands and make Christine the new prima donna.”

“God, he sounds creepy.”

Even snorts. “You could say that.”

“So, what next?”

“Thought you said this was weird,” Even sniffs, just so Isak will tell him to shut up.

“Shut up, Even.”

Bingo.

“So demanding,” Even teases. Isak just leans in and kisses him, brief but delicious.

“Keep going,” he says, ignoring Even going in for another.

“Fine. At the same time that all of this is happening, Christine’s childhood crush Raoul comes back into her life, now as a wealthy Count. They immediately fall back in love, but the Phantom grows jealous, luring her down to his dungeons beneath the opera.”

“What does he do?” Isak asks, alarmed.

“Well,” Even says. “Not much, really. He just plays the organ in a threatening kind of way and then screams at her until she falls asleep.”

“The fuck?”

“Yeah, he’s a bit weird. Anyway, some other stuff happens including Christine and Raoul getting engaged and the Phantom vowing to get revenge, and a masquerade ball but I can’t remember the context, and it ends with the Phantom killing another guy and kidnapping Christine and threatening to kill Raoul if she doesn’t agree to marry him. She agrees, but there’s this big thing about not wanting to marry the Phantom because of his deformed soul, not his face—”

“What’s wrong with his face?”
“Oh fuck, I forgot. It’s like the reason he was screaming at her that time. He was tortured as a kid because of how ugly he was or something, so he always wears a white mask over one side of his face to hide the scars.”

“Oh shit.”

“Yeah, he’s like a tragic figure, babe.”

“Still a weirdo.”

“Well, yes. Anyway, when she says this the Phantom realises he can’t force Christine to love him, so he lets her and Raoul go, waiting to be captured by the police coming after him. They sing this really sad song, and he covers himself in a blanket and when the police arrive they lift it, but there’s nothing there except for the Phantom’s mask.”

“That’s… a lot.”

“It is. And it’s weird, because despite it all, you still sort of root for the Phantom at the end.”

“God, Even! What’s with you and these tragic ass love stories?” Isak asks, eyes wide in disbelief. “Oh wait, that’s right,” he puts on what is probably meant to sound like Even’s voice, but to him it just sounds like a bullfrog. “Love is big and dramatic and explosive, that’s how you know that it’s real!”

Even rolls his eyes, but he’s actually kind of flattered that Isak remembered, word for word. Yet.

“I’m not sure that’s true, anymore,” he says, and Isak freezes.

“Really? Why not?”

Even shrugs. “Met you, didn’t I?”

Isak raises an eyebrow. “And I didn’t die at the end?”

“Fuck, I hope not. Better not jinx it.”

Isak rolls his eyes, but his smile is the loveliest yet, shy and rosy. He stops walking, and Even thinks he’s going to lean in for a kiss again, ready to meet him halfway, but instead Isak nudges his shoulder. “We’re here.”

‘Here’ happens to be an empty Japanese restaurant, dark and decidedly closed. Even looks at it uncertainly. “This is where you wanted to bring me?”

Isak looks at him in confusion, before rolling his eyes again. He’s going to sprain something if he keeps going at this pace. “No, idiot. In front of you.”

Across the street, a small, wooden bar stands out from a dark building. Neon lights spell out ‘Harry’s New York Bar’, and the lighting is so dim Even can barely see inside. He’s never heard of it, but he’s intrigued, and he follows Isak in.

They swing open the heavy front door, and it’s like stepping into a piece of history. Everything is rich mahogany, that vintage kind of luxury reminiscent of old Hollywood movies, Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart.
“Humphrey Bogart used to come here,” Isak says, apparently not noticing the way Even’s jaw drops to his ass. “So did Hemingway, and Coco Chanel, and…” He appears to be thinking. “And Rita Hayworth, I think.”

“Rita Hayworth…” Even repeats faintly.

“Yeah, do you know them?” Isak asks cheekily.

“Do you know them?” Even shoots back.

Isak blushes. “No, I just read it on the Wikipedia page,” he mutters.

And God, Even just has to hug him. The bar is only half-full, and everyone there is chatting quietly, ignoring them completely, so he pulls Isak in, the long line of his body beginning to feel like second nature.

“I did know about Humphrey Bogart, though,” Isak whispers, low into his hair. “It’s why my Mum wants to come here. She loves Casablanca.”

Casablanca, Casablanca. Wait. “I thought you’d never seen Casablanca?”

Isak pauses. “I haven’t,” he says.

Even lets it go, pulling away from Isak so they can check out the bar. The drinks list is long and interesting, bound in brown leather. He’d usually settle for a beer, but Isak’s waving his card again and they’re sitting where Humphrey Bogart once sat, for fuck’s sake.

“Un Copper Manhattan, s’il vous plait,” he tells the bartender, this one old and sensible-looking, thank Christ. “And for you, mon chéri?”

He can tell Isak wants to shove him but he resists, checking the menu. “I don’t know… the Bellini?”

“A peach for a peach,” Even says sleazily, and this time Isak really does hit him.

“I’m serious,” Even giggles. “I’ve seen that ass! You’re positively peachy, Isak.”

Isak looks absolutely scandalised, but the bartender continues on as normal, making their drinks as Isak swipes his card. Even sort of feels bad about Isak bankrolling their night, but it’s no more than about 15 euro, and Even’s happy to reimburse him when he’s earning again. He already has a shift lined up for the next Tuesday, and the thought is so depressing he has to drink it away.

They make their way to a table at the back, everything still dark wood. The walls are covered in American college pennants, those triangular ones like something out of The Catcher in the Rye, Yale and Dartmouth and Oregon and Penn State. Below them are wooden shields, neat in a row, British heraldry or something similar.

Even takes this opportunity to check out Isak’s ass, just to confirm that it is indeed peachy. It is, so he gives it a quick squeeze. Isak almost spills his drink, but he’s gone bright red, so Even gives him a brief kiss on his cheek.

“Get off me, you perv,” Isak whines, but the moment they sit down he’s pretty much on Even’s lap. It’s fairly private here, so they settle in comfortably, one of Isak’s thighs over his. Even grips it one-handed, balancing his martini glass in the other.
This is what James Bond must feel like.

“I love your thighs,” he tells Isak, quite seriously.

Isak rolls his eyes. “Thanks,” he says drily.

“I’m serious, they’re a work of art,” he squeezes Isak’s thigh again, soft and meaty tapering into long, lean legs. “Forget Pompidou, these are the real masterpieces.”

“You’re so weird,” Isak laughs, almost to himself.

“You love it,” Even says automatically.


Even gasps. “Isak! Do you have to wear those tiny shorts?”

Isak takes a long drink from his Bellini, smiling into it. When he surfaces, he licks his lips. Even bets they taste like peaches. “Yes, I do,” he says finally.

“Fuck,” Even groans, savouring the image. “Describe it to me.”

“You want me to describe my gym shorts?” Isak asks, like Even’s just sprouted another head.

“Isak, this is going to be my jack-off fodder for the next year. Of course, I want you to describe your legs in short shorts to me. In excruciating detail.”

Isak giggles, mouthing ‘wow’ to himself like Even being deeply, deeply attracted to him is breaking news. “You know, this is not what I thought we’d talk about in here,” Isak says.

“What did you think we’d talk about?” Even asks curiously.

“I don’t know,” Isak shrugs, going shy again. The tips of his ears turn pink, and how has Even never noticed this before? “I mean, you made me buy this play, so I thought you might like, read it to me or something.”

“Isak,” Even grins, pressing in close until Isak’s just a whisper away. “Do you want me to read Romeo and Juliet to you?”

“Not all of it!” Isak cries, blushing profusely. “I just… I just want to understand why you like sad endings so much, I guess.”

Even sighs. This train of thought is inescapable, and he hates how much it hurts Isak when it hurts him too. “Baby,” he says, but Isak won’t look at him. “Baby,” he says again, and Isak meets his eyes, but it’s reluctant. “Do you know what I like more than sad endings?”

“What?” Isak asks dully.

“You,” Even whispers, sealing it with a kiss. “You’re better than any tragic love story. You’re the happiest ending.”

It’s perhaps not the wisest thing to say, because Isak looks uncertain. “Are we ending?”

Even thinks about it. “Yes, we are,” he says, and Isak winces at his words. “But this is our beginning, too.”
Isak watches him for a moment, expression unreadable, and when he finally smiles, it’s weak, but it’s something. “That’s just about the most pompous thing you’ve said all day.”

It breaks the tension. Even’s laugh is shocked out of him, so loud his drink shakes at the vibration. Isak laughs with him, his smile genuine again, and Even presses their noses together, giggling when Isak’s crumples under his.

“I’m a very pompous person,” he says solemnly.

Isak sighs, feigning a put-upon expression. “Just read me the damn book, Even.”

“As you wish.” he recites, reaching for the book on the table, already afflicted with a condensation mark from one of them resting their drink on it. For that, Isak kisses him hard, tongue slick and peach-flavoured, and Even melts right into it, hitching Isak’s thigh higher, gripping so hard it’s bound to bruise. Isak’s mouth is the hottest thing he’s ever tasted and he chases the flavour, like a hound after a fox, until Isak’s gasping into the kiss, gulping breaths like Even stole the air away. Even’s going to keep it forever.

“No, I mean the book.”

“Here you go.”

“Thanks.”

“Welcome.”

Isak takes the book. “If you must.”

“Just read me the damn book, Even.”

“As you wish.”

Even holds the book open, flipping through the pages until he finds Scene One.

“Two households, both alike in dignity, in fair Verona where we lay our scene, from ancient grudge break to new mutiny, where civil blood makes civil hands unclean. From forth the fatal loins of these two foes…”

A pair of star-cross’d lovers.

Chapter End Notes

I feel like a lot of this chapter is very Isak says then Even says then Isak says then- you get it, but ultimately this is tagged Conversations and Conversations is what it is. Third to last chapter! Which is scary, because Chapter 7 moves around a bit, but still! I pretty much wrote this all in a night because winter here is freezing and I'm too poor to go out. Anyway, tell me what you think and I hope you enjoy <3

Footnotes:

Maxime is obviously an original character, although much of him is based on one of my Parisian friends. I should probably tag that, but it didn't really make sense for any of their friends to be in Paris, and the Bakka boys are pretty straight edge, so I doubt there'd be much smoking. 'Putain' technically means whore, but if it's said with the
right affliction, it takes on the same meaning as 'fucking hell', or 'fy faen'.

Boulevard Saint-Michel is lovely at night time, and the Latin Quarter is my favourite in all of Paris. Rue Saint Severin is AMAZING for food (5 euro souvlaki amirite) and all the streets around there at night are beautifully lit up. I would also highly recommend walking around le Jardin du Luxembourg during the day, as it's very pretty and romantic. When I'd originally storyboarded this fic, half of this chapter was meant to be spent in Montparnasse, which is a very nice area as well, but perhaps slightly less romantic.

The souvlaki place on Rue Mouffetard is called Au P'tit Grec, and I've never seen a longer line for anything than I have for this place at 3AM on a cold Wednesday in January. It's possible that it's actually a Greek-influenced crêperie, not souvlaki, as I never went, just stayed in the line for a few minutes before finding other arrangements.

I would have loved to include the Panthéon and Saint-Étienne-du-Mont in here, but other than a mention, there was no place for them in the story. Saint-Étienne is probably my favourite church in Paris (and Even's too), mostly because it's beautiful but also because I read Anna and the French Kiss at a very formative time in my life and fell in love with her descriptions of it.

The jazzy song playing at Rue Mouffetard is “As Time Goes By” by Dooley Wilson, from Casablanca.

The view from the mouth of the Opéra metro station in Paris is incredible, especially if you don't expect it. (I went to Paris incredibly ignorant, and like Isak, saw le Palais Garnier for the first time completely by accident. It blew me away.)

There is an amazing (and cheap!) Japanese restaurant across the street from Harry’s, Restaurant Sapporo, and I heartily recommend the chicken katsu curry.

Harry's New York Bar is very close to my heart, and I still own one of their Geppeto coasters to prove it. I ordered a Sea Breeze, and my best friend a Dark and Stormy, but follow your heart.
Isak, 02.58, Canal Saint Martin/Parc des Buttes-Chaumont

Chapter Notes

A chapter a tiny bit late, but still technically an update once per week. This is the result of just about every moment of free time I've had all week, which has been a total of like, 3 minutes, but hopefully, it's not completely awful. Tonights biggest achievement is a) not killing myself from uni stress and b) not ditching this to watch Love Island, so bear with me and I hope you enjoy. All my love <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Isak loves the stars.

Loves them like corny Coldplay lyrics and those inspirational quotes Vilde tacks to her walls, like the glow-in-the-dark constellations still stuck to the ceiling of his childhood bedroom, faded and dusty but left like a relic. Andromeda and Ursa Major and Orion frozen in flaking white paint.

They’re not out tonight – or they are, but they’re hidden – but the moon is high up in the sky, a waxing gibbous, solid and predictable like waves upon the shore. It’s steadying, a reminder that even far, far away from home, he is still here, tiny and alive on a breathing, spinning planet.

Isak doesn’t talk to the moon or anything weird, but it’s comforting knowing he can look up and always find it there. It’s not the same as the stars, the methodical way he can find and link them together, but it’s still a better tether than the blood rushing through his veins, infinitely more tangible than his own beating heart.

So Isak loves the stars, but right now, he doesn’t need them.

Right now, he has Even.

/

They’d been kicked out of Harry’s at two on the dot, still snuggled together in the darkest booth in the corner, the ice in their drinks melted down to tepid water and Isak half-dozing off on Even’s shoulder. He gave an earnest effort at Romeo, got through some confusing scenes with Benvolio (Even with a Bergen accent) and even met Juliet (Even fluttering his eyelashes excessively), but the night is winding down and they’ve been walking since morning.

As luck would have it, they’re still walking.

Wherever they are is no more dangerous than Oslo by night, but Isak’s been whinging and moaning for almost an hour and Even’s still making him traipse across Paris like this is the Tour de France. He keeps telling Isak that they’re close, inching closer, but the streets all blend into one and it’s not until they reach a wide riverbed that he’s even able to identify any change in their surroundings.
Even at this hour it’s fairly busy, young people sprawled in uneven lines down the river. Most of them are smoking, boxes of wine accompanied by a small orchestra of chatter and crinkling chip packets, and Isak greets his second wind with the charm and goodwill with which he approaches the rest of his life.

“Please tell me we can sit down now,” Isak groans, and Even tugs him along with the grace of someone whose drink was laced with uppers.

He still has no idea where Even gets all this energy from, but he supposes some people are just like that. Isak is the first to admit he’s lazy, lives for his bed like it pays the bills. (He’d been a late baby, well overdue in the haze of midsummer, waiting until a warm night in late June. It all happened so fast, his mum didn’t even have time to leave his parents’ bed.

They like to joke that Isak hasn’t left his since.)

“We can sit down now,” Even says patiently, right at the edge of the river, so close Isak immediately reaches for his phone out of instinct. It’s sat snug in his front pocket, safe from murky water, and Isak releases a subconscious breath of relief.

“You are so obsessed with your phone.”

There’s not much Isak can say to that except, well, yeah. If the way he cradles it to his chest like the most precious of jewels is any indication, Isak would list his own phone as his emergency contact if he could.

Ultimately, he shrugs. “Aren’t you?”

“Nope,” Even pops the ‘p’. “I live in the moment.”

Isak rolls his eyes, laying back against the cobbled pavement. Not too far, another guy is doing the same thing, folding up his jacket to cushion his head as his girlfriend rests her head on his stomach. On any other day, he’d be bitter at the PDA; has vivid memories of giving Eva and Jonas shit for the exact same thing. Now that he’s guilty of it too, it’s embarrassing how chill he is with it.

He turns back to Even. “Thanks for your input, old man. You gonna lecture me on the arrogance of millennials now?”

“You know it. Get off your phone and talk to one another. Pretend it’s 1995.”

Isak snorts, flicking Even’s wrist. He’s peering down at Isak, messy fringe falling over his eyes and fuck, he is so, so beautiful. The smile Isak gives can only be described as smitten, and he reaches up a hand to push Even’s hair back into the last traces of his quiff.

It immediately falls back down again.

“Jokes on you,” Isak mumbles, trying again. This time, the entire quiff comes down with it. “I wasn’t even around in 1995.”

“1996?” Even asks hopefully.

Isak shakes his head.

“Your loss,” Even sniffs, leaning back so Isak can no longer reach him without contorting himself into a sit-up. “You just missed out on the best movie ever.”
Flopping back down, Isak raises an eyebrow. “Do I even want to know?”

Even gasps, and his slap at Isak’s chest shakes through him, wobbly like jelly. “You literally just read it, Isak!”

“What? Romeo and Juliet?”

“Duh!” Even literally says, like something out of the American movies he watches with Eva sometimes. The one where the main girl wears a yellow plaid skirt and owns a phone bigger than her head.

“There’s a movie of that?”

“Fuck me, Isak,” Even sighs, and Isak grins. “Not like that, asshole,” Even continues, but he’s grinning too. “Yes, there is a movie, ‘Romeo + Juliet’. It’s got young Leo DiCaprio in it.”

“Does he look good?”

“Fuck yeah, he looks good,” Even breathes. “Made me realise I liked boys, I think. Hold up, I’ve definitely got a picture of him saved somewhere, let me find it.”

How either of their phones still has battery is a mystery, and Isak watches Even navigate 7% on the dimmest lighting possible, still stark against the blue night. He skims through photos upon photos, too fast for Isak to properly scope any, and when he finds what he’s looking for, he shoves it in Isak’s face, so close it almost smacks his nose.

“There he is,” Even says, with a voice so affected it’s like he’s talking about a husband gone to war. Isak resists the urge to roll his eyes.

Once his eyes have gotten used to the light, he’s able to discern a very young – and very handsome – Leonardo DiCaprio clad in silver armour, peering through a fish tank at a pretty girl dressed as an angel. Isak nods appraisingly, particularly at the hair falling before Leo’s eyes. He and Even don’t exactly look alike, but Isak sure wouldn’t mind seeing him in knight’s armour.

“So?”

“He’s hot,” Isak says simply, and Even shakes his head in disbelief.

“You’re unbelievable,” he mutters, mostly to himself. “Just hot? Fine, tell me who’s attractive enough for the enigmatic Isak, then. If it’s not young Leo, it better be good.”

Even’s still shaking his head, absently now, and he reaches into the breast pocket of his shirt, pulling out Maxime’s joints as well as a bright pink lighter. He makes himself useful at sparking one up and, for a moment, Isak almost stops him, the fear of getting caught engrained in his behaviour like a nervous tick. There’s no need to though – Isak’s picked up on the scent of weed since they got here, and nobody around them is bothered.

“Go on, then,” Even urges, and it takes Isak a moment to realise what he’s talking about.

In truth, there’s no one guy that made Isak realise he liked boys, it’s just something he’s always sort of known. Girls were gross and then they were fine and then they were nothing but fine, chronic disinterest wrapped up in flashes of pecks and abdomen he’d glimpse in locker rooms, v-lines and strong jaws and the prickling drag of facial hair that made Isak weak at the knees. The first person he ever had feelings for was Jonas, but he’d noticed boys for years.
Still, he can think up some examples. Namely, one from a film he’d watched with Eskild years ago, back when he had newly graduated from the kollektiv’s basement into a room of his own. Isak’s pretty sure he had fantasies about this guy for weeks, a brief reprieve from the utter stress of the period, and he still holds a torch for him today, buried deep within his heart (three sizes too small) for revealing games of Truth or Dare Isak can’t get out of.

Even’s succeeded in lighting the joint now, the smell as comforting as a night back with the boys. He takes a long drag that has him throwing his head back, neck exposed to the pale moonlight.

When he exhales, he looks angelic.

“Have you ever seen A Knights Tale?” Isak asks.

Even grins, eyes closed.

“Shit,” he says, taking another pull. “That’s a good one.”

“What’s-his-name in that—”

“Heath Ledger,” Even says immediately.

“—was fucking unreal, dude.” Isak continues, making grabby motions at Even until he stops hogging the weed.

“Stop calling me ‘dude’, dude,” Even sighs, but he passes it over, their fingertips brushing in the exchange. Isak’s pretty sure they both let them rest there a little longer than necessary.

“I remember watching that and thinking ‘holy fuck, he’s hot!’” Isak giggles, breathing smoke deep into his lungs. When he exhales, he grins dopily. “It was like, there I was, sixteen and so depressed, and out there, some dude looked like that in medieval dress-up. I was like, ‘I am in the wrong universe...’”

It’s difficult to tell through the smoke swirling around them, but it seems like Even is looking at him curiously. Isak turns to him, a lazy shift of the head, still resting uncomfortably against the pavement, and meets his eye.

“What?” He asks, watching as Even’s lips curl into a fond smile. Finally, Even joins him, leaning back until he’s adjacent to Isak, propped up on an elbow.

“Just funny, is all,” Even says, leaning in close, “how we both have a thing for knights in shining armour.”

Isak wants to laugh, because they’re funny in a cute way, and usually he’d balk at the entire concept of them being ‘cute’ but Even keeps coming closer and really, Isak would rather kiss him instead. He’s going in, just about pressing a palm against Even’s cheek to steady himself when Even swerves last-second for the joint, taking a drag straight from between Isak’s fingers.

His cheeks hollow out as he inhales, and Isak’s mouth goes dry.

There’s no way Isak’s high yet – he only ever knows when it’s far too late and he’s either out by the pre’s or can feel his heart beating out of his ass – so it can’t be cotton mouth, but it sure feels like it, this heady sensation that is Even alone. His body feels heavy, and he simply watches as Even’s plush lips unwrap from around the joint, shifting until they’re a breath away from Isak’s and finally, he understands.
When Even exhales, Isak inhales, and the rush of smoke goes straight to his head. He holds it in as long as he can, deep and pungent, and when he finally lets it out, it’s like he’s run a marathon. Even runs a hand through Isak’s hair, a long day of sweat taking its toll. His fingers keep getting caught in tangles, but he keeps at it, a soothing pace that has Isak melting into it.

Isak has his eyes closed, and it feels like there’s nobody here but them. Tiny silver disks carved into the ground told him that they’re not by a river, but by Canal Saint Martin, and other than a name, Isak has no fucking idea where they are. All he knows is that it’s pretty and lively and the streetlights shine golden on the water, reflecting phone screens and trees wrapped in fairy lights, some girls’ shoes that light up in different colours of the rainbow.

“Isak?” Even asks, fingers never stilling in his hair.

“Hmm?” Isak hums absently, barely holding onto the threads of the conversation. When he’s this relaxed, it’s like he’s floating in space.

“Do you know what another great Heath Ledger movie is?”

Unfortunately, Isak does. With his eyes still shut, he swats in Even’s general direction.

“I know exactly what you’re about to say, so I’m telling you pre-emptively: shut up.”

Even laughs, causing Isak to almost drop the joint on himself. He bids goodbye to his chill and lifts himself onto his elbows; better to avoid first-degree burns because Even has the stupid sense of humour of anyone Isak’s ever met, bar Magnus.

“How do you know what I’m about to say?” Even asks, leaning back over Isak and his voice is so fond, Isak almost can’t be a brat about it.

Almost.

“What’s a tragic romance starring Heath Ledger?” Isak asks, flicking Even’s nose with his free hand.

“And then you pretend to know nothing about film!”

Even takes up the pose of an anguished starlet, hand pressed backwards against his forehead, eyes closed and head tilted back in silent despair. “I’m so sick of these lies, Isak…”

Isak just laughs, hopelessly charmed. “You’re so predictable, dude.”

Even’s eyes shoot open, and he scrunches his nose before he dives into him, knocking the now dwindling joint out of Isak’s hand. It probably had a few more bitter puffs left to it, but Isak doesn’t give a fuck, focusing on not squealing loudly as Even peppers kisses all over his face and neck.

“Don’t,” he goes for Isak’s earlobe, “call,” his left eyelid, “me,” the underside of his jaw, “dude,” the space just right of his lips.

Nobodies watching them, and Isak doesn’t even try and stop him, just falling back down and winding his arms around Even’s neck into a loose hug. He’s laughing, they’re both laughing, and Even’s kisses are slowing into something more solid, slow and lingering as he maps Isak’s freckles with his lips.

“Whatever, baby,” Isak breathes, one month and 30 days early, and when Even finally finds Isak’s lips, he knows he’s no longer the same boy he was this morning.
He never knew it would be so liberating.

“What are you doing tomorrow?”

“Sorry?”

“Like, tomorrow, when you get home,” Isak explains. “What are your plans?”

Even looks surprised at the question, but he smiles. They’re sitting back up now, legs swinging over the water, and the people have thinned out a bit, one by one. Isak’s still amazed by how alive Paris is, well into the night, a companion in itself.

“Well,” Even starts, “my trains at nine so I’ll probably be in London just after eleven. I’ll get off at St. Pancras and switch to King’s Cross—”

“The Harry Potter one?” Isak asks curiously.

Harry Potter wasn’t a big part of his childhood, not like his friends who grew up with the books and swear by their Hogwarts houses, but it still rings a bell, and in a way, it’s nice to place physical locations to Even. London is enormous, Isak knows this from the sheer amount of time his class spent on the underground getting place to place, so mapping out Even’s routes makes this feel a bit more real, like Even’s not just some manifestation of Isak’s loneliness, Tyler Durden-style.

So even though he doesn’t actually recognise half these locations, it’s a pleasant thought. One day he might be there himself, and he’ll know Even stood here too once, on his daily commute or on his way home on a cold winters night. The thought is warming, even in the late summer air.

Luckily, Even is there to dampen that.


And oh my god, he is so annoying.

“You literally interrupted me reading a book this morning.”

“Yeah, hence ‘culturally relevant’.”

“Space is culturally relevant! Way better than wizard school.”

Even just shakes his head. “Spoken like a bitter Slytherin.”

Isak scoffs. “I’m not a Slytherin.”

Even looks up in interest. “Really? What are you then?”

“I don’t know,” he says truthfully, “I’ve never done the test.”

Even gives him a look like he knows Isak is being deliberately obtuse. For once, he’s not — he genuinely doesn’t care — but Even doesn’t take no for an answer, reaching for his phone. At the press of the home button, he swears softly.
“I was gonna get you to take the sorting hat quiz now, but I’m hanging on to 5%,” he says, disappointed. And the thing is, Isak can tell he genuinely is.

Harry Potter people are so weird.

“Oh no…” Isak drones, a shit-eating grin on his face. He’s off-guard when Even pulls him into a headlock, in no way aggressive and more of a full-body immersion in Even’s heavenly scent. He lets himself lean into it, clutching at Even’s forearms, feeling the way Even’s puffing himself up to ask a question. Isak already knows what it’s going to be.

Predictably, Even asks: “Can you guess what house I belong to?”

“Could it be Gryffindor?” Isak asks drily.

Even squeezes him in delight. “Where dwell the brave of heart! Isak, you’re so good at this!”

Isak blushes. “Whatever. You get to King’s Cross and then what?”

“Oh, right.” The sudden change of subject startles Even, and he blinks dumbly for a moment before collecting his thoughts, letting go of Isak. Fuck, that’s not what he wanted.

“Well, then I’ll switch to the Northern line, probably, which will take me down to Elephant & Castle, and get on the bus to Peckham to avoid the traffic. I’ll have to lug my stuff up three flights of stairs to reach my flat, and my flatmates will probably still be sleeping, except for Elsa, who promised we’d get brunch. I’ll call my parents and reassure them I’m still alive even though I’m an awful son who hasn’t checked in for weeks. I’ll take my first proper shower since Madrid, and then I’ll catch up on all the ‘Love Island’ I’ve missed, or try and work on the screenplay due in a few weeks that I haven’t even started.”

Isak nods, getting swept up in the narrative. He tries to picture Even in a foreign flat, catching buses and trains and throwing himself on messy sheets, bed still unmade from before he left. He wonders what the lighting’s like, whether Even owns any plants, if he studies at a desk or on his bed and what kind of art he has on his walls. He almost wants to ask what colour his sheets are, but it seems a bit intrusive.

“What about you?”

What about him? What does Isak have to say that Even hasn’t heard or done before?

He shrugs. “Jonas is picking me up from the airport, so we’ll probably stop for kebab in Grünerløkka. He might stick around for me unpacking, and I’ll get to hear about what he’s done to piss off Eva this week. We’ll probably Facetime with her, and Eskild will cry when he sees me, and I’ll complain about it even though we both know I’m happy to see him too. We won’t have to steal any of Noora’s fishcakes because she’ll be nice and feed us and then we’ll watch whatever’s on NRK until I fall asleep on the couch and Linn wakes me during her early-morning tea run to tell me to stop running the air con.”

When he finishes, Even’s grinning, so fond it makes his heart hurt a bit. He presses a brief kiss to Isak’s temple, and Isak leans into it.

“Fuck, that makes me miss home,” Even says, his voice creeping with wistfulness.

“London isn’t home?” Isak asks, genuinely curious.

Even shrugs. “It is,” he scrunches his nose. “Or, it was. I moved to London when I needed to get
out of Oslo and become a new person, and I loved it. I still love it, and it is home in a way, but I’m not sure I need the anonymity as much anymore. To be honest, I’m not really sure where home is at all.” He turns to Isak, uncertain. “Do you?”

“Oslo,” Isak says easily. “I didn’t realise how much I missed it until I left for three months, which is nothing really, but I found myself missing things I never thought I would. My friends, obviously, and my family and my bed. But stupid stuff too, like catching the tram in the morning and my mum’s kjøttboller and how the cashier at my local liquor store asks for my ID every time she sees me, even though I’ve lived in the same place for years. I even missed the cold, which is stupid cause I always complain about it when I’m home. It drives Mahdi insane.”

“I wish I had that,” Even says quietly, looking out upon the canal.

“Had what?”

“That sense of clarity, I guess. You know what you want and where you’re going. I’m almost at the end of my degree and I have no idea what I’m doing or what’s ahead of me. It’s scary.”

“I thought you’d find that exciting?” Isak asks, voice softened to match Even’s. This feels like something important, and Isak desperately hopes he doesn’t fuck it up.

“Why’d you think that?”

“Well, you know,” Isak says, because this should be obvious. The way Even’s looking at him says that it clearly isn’t. “You’re so confident. And spontaneous. It doesn’t seem like you worry about anything.”

Even chuckles, but it’s humourless. “Do I really come off that way?”

Isak shrugs, and it feels like somewhere, he went wrong. “Maybe to me, because I’m like, the least spontaneous person ever, so everything you do just seems so, I don’t know, effortless.”

Even scoffs, and it’s not mean, but it’s not kind either.

Fuck, damage control. Isak might as well go for honesty.

“Do you know what I was doing on that train this morning? Why I didn’t just fly directly to Oslo?”

Even shakes his head, confused.

“I was in Barcelona for three months and I never went further than the supermarket closest to my Airbnb. I spent every day between my flat and the hospital, and if I went out for drinks with any of the other interns, I’d spend the entire time counting the minutes until I could go to bed. I was on the phone to Eva a couple of days before I left and she asked me what my favourite part of Barcelona was and all I could think of was the hospital’s cafeteria, Even. I hadn’t even seen the fucking Sagrada Familia. And suddenly it was time to leave and I’d gone all the way to Spain to feel lonelier than I’d ever felt before. So, I cancelled my flight and bought an expensive Interail pass just so it could feel like I’d seen something, even if that was nothing but fields and train stations.”

Even’s looking at him, his gaze burning through Isak’s cheekbone, but Isak can’t face him, not yet. He watches a couple walking by the canal, talking quietly amongst themselves. He wonders what he and Even look from the other side, whether their baggage is as visible as it feels.

He continues. “You know, if I hadn’t met you I would already be home right now, probably lying
to my friends about Casa Batlló or some shit. Instead, I’m here, in fucking Paris, having had the best night of my life because of you, so…”

Even huffs out a breath, like that’s funny somehow, and it should be inappropriate but it strikes a chord in Isak. Suddenly, the whole situation feels deeply bizarre. Isak takes a deep breath, awkward despite his momentary bravery. “So, knowing all this, you can probably see why I’d think that of you.”

He finally turns to face Even, ready for pitying eyes and a half-hearted clap on his shoulder, because everyone knows boys don’t cry. Instead, Even’s eyes are sparkling, his expression unreadable.

“You know, I’m not sure you’re meant to say ‘fucking’ in the same breath as ‘Sagrada Familia’,” Even says and on auto-pilot, Isak reaches out and shoves him. Even only laughs, holding him off easily, but his hand snakes up to cup Isak’s cheek. Isak leans in without even thinking about it.

“I think that’s the most I’ve heard you say all day,” Even whispers, and there’s something bubbling in the timbre of his voice, an uncertain melody.

“Don’t get used to it,” Isak grumbles, ducking his cheek deeper into Even’s palm.

“I want to,” Even says quietly.

And fuck, he wishes Even wouldn’t say shit like this.

“What can I tell you something?” He asks when Isak says nothing.

Isak nods.

“I’m bipolar.”

Even though he literally just said it, Isak’s not sure what Even’s trying to tell him. Of course, he knows what bipolar means, has the dictionary definition filed away in his brain like dog-eared study notes—

bi • po • lar
Bipolar disorder (noun, psychiatry)
an affective disorder characterized by periods of mania alternating with periods of depression, usually interspersed with relatively long intervals of normal mood

—but the way Even says it like an explanation confuses him.

Even must pick up on this, because he shoots Isak a sad smile. “It doesn’t have to be a big deal or anything. You just told me something about you, so I wanted to tell you something about me.”

“Oh,” Isak says, surprised. “Thank you.”

Even chuckles, humourlessly but genuine. “You’re welcome.”

For the nth time all evening, Isak wonders what else he’ll miss out on when they both board their trains tomorrow. How many more secrets and quirks and passions and interests he’ll never know about and that Even will never know about him.

It’s bullshit, and if he’s honest, Isak’s sure Even knows that too.

“Can I have your number?”
The question surprises the both of them, himself probably the most, but the hesitance he expects to see in Even’s eyes isn’t there. Instead, Even looks relieved, like Isak’s answered the question both of them were too afraid to ask.

Wordlessly, Even reaches down, deep in to Isak’s front pocket, pulling up his phone with slim fingers. He huffs a laugh at the grainy lock screen image, Isak and Jonas holding a slice of pizza up to an illuminati eye, and he quirks an eyebrow in question at the passcode.

“2121,” Isak says quietly.

“2121,” Even smiles to himself.

Even Bech Næsheim, his contact information claims, a foreign number entered below.

Even Bech Næsheim, Isak mouths to himself, the stranger on a train.

Even Bech Næsheim, the final piece of the puzzle.

/  

“You should text me when you know.”

“When I know what?”

“What Hogwarts house you’re in. Promise me you will.”

“I promise.”

/  

Not far from the canal, quiet streets lead in to a long expanse of green. There’s a fence up, tallish and spiky, but it’s not difficult to find a way around it, and then there’s nothing but Isak and Even and an enormous, empty park.

They have to use their phone torches for a while, at least while they navigate their way down the hillside through dark trees and benches and unpaved paths trodden into the grass. It’s quiet but it’s not silent, the chirp of crickets and cicadas and what can only be the distant quacking of ducks.

At last they reach a lake at the foot of a mountain. The water is still, and there are lampposts here, warm and dim, that same shade of amber found all across Paris. It’s better mood lighting than their phones, and Isak basks in it, the light golden on his skin. It’s too dark to see much, but he can make out a carved bridge arching into the mountain. At its peak is a small temple, lit up like a star. It looks Greek, straight out of the mythology books he used to read in school, perched atop Mount Olympus.

(Regrettably, it also reminds him of Magnus, who once made the boys watch an old cartoon of Bugs Bunny dressed as a girl just so he could ask them if they found her attractive. When he tells Even this, Even nods in understanding, like this was a perfectly legitimate question and the sexual
confusion caused by Bugs Bunny with a dress and long blonde plaits was a staple of any growing boys adolescence.

Isak can’t believe he actually thought Even was cool at one point.)

It’s kind of baffling how every time Isak thinks he’s seen the most beautiful sight in Paris, he’s floored again. Yet something about how the alone they are right now, how there’s no one left in the universe except them, makes this place even more magical. Le parc des Buttes-Chaumont.

Suddenly, Isak’s tired of waiting. They've been holding off the inevitable for hours: the pure wave of want Isak feels every time he so much as looks at Even, the scent of his neck and the burn of his fingertips on Isak’s waist. He takes Even’s hand, pulling him to a sheltered spot beneath a willow, where they can lie down in the warm, dry grass. Even follows quietly, watching Isak intently, one half of his face illuminated by the light emitting from the temple.

If Isak’s honest, not once in his life has he been turned on by the idea of sex outdoors. His kinks – if he has any – are a lot less voyeuristic; he’s probably more aroused by the idea of privacy, nothing but him and Even alone and uninterrupted, fucking for days on end, filthy sheets and teeth marks and a place that belongs to no one but them.

In this moment, Isak would fuck literally anywhere.

This park, with its empty expanses of lush, bottle green grass, trees gently swaying to an invisible breeze, the soft bubbling of fish beneath the lake and the lonely light of the temple above, is perfect. They haven’t actually discussed it, but it seems like they’re both on the same page, judging by the way Even immediately turns into him, rolling over so that Isak is pressed deep into the grass, Even kissing him ferociously.

Isak grips him tightly, exploring Even’s mouth with tongue and teeth, the land of opportunity. He feels Even slide his palm up, surpassing his hip for his abdomen, riding his t-shirt up so that it’s exposed to the dense, warm air. Isak gasps at the contact and Even swallows it in a kiss, shifting lazily so that one of his thighs comes between Isak’s. The friction is heavenly, suddenly alerting him to the length of Even’s dick, hard and heavy through the fabric of two pairs of jeans. Fuck, he wants to touch it.

“Even,” he sighs, lost between kisses.

“Even,” he tries again, and Even grunts in acknowledgement, busy licking at the corner of Isak’s mouth, scraping his teeth across his jawline.

“What are we doing?”

This time, Even stops immediately. He lifts himself up on his elbows, hair messy like a birds nest. He looks concerned, like he’s done something wrong, a second away from flight.

“What do you want to do?” He asks uncertainly, biting his lip.

Isak just grins, slow and languid. “I wanna fuck.”

The way Even laughs settles every nerve in Isak’s stomach and he raises himself up to press a quick kiss against Even’s lips. It ends up closer to Even’s nose, but neither of them mind, Even falling back down to kiss him deeper.

“Oof,” Isak groans. “You’re heavy.”
“You get on top then,” Even just smirks.

Isak does.

The way Even lights up when Isak straddles his hips is worth the sudden ache in this thighs from the effort, unused to the exercise. He presses down until he feels Even’s dick again, watches the way he gasps at the feel of Isak pressed against him, arching his back wantonly. It’s good – great, even – but he needs something more. These clothes need to come off.

Even gets the memo, reaching up to tug Isak’s jacket off in uneven motions. It comes off easily, flying somewhere to their right, and then Isak’s t-shirt goes next, joining the pile. Even’s starting on his zipper and Isak really, really wants to help him, but he can’t when Even’s still fully dressed. Isak pulls at the hem of his shirt and Even does too, and it’s a brief struggle but eventually both shirts are off and all Isak can see is the pale expanse of Even’s chest, the tight taper of his waist and the dip of his collarbone.

He wants to marvel at the image before him, explore Even inch by inch, introduce himself to every freckle and mole and imperfection like an artist learning his subject, but Even’s too quick, pulling Isak flush to him and starting in on his neck. There will be a love bite tomorrow, several of them, and Isak can’t wait, already anticipates the slight edge of pain when he’ll press into them, keeping them as long as possible.

He’s running his hands over Even’s back, through his hair, until he’s reaching down over skinny hips to palm at Even’s dick, so hot through the fabric. At his neck, Even growls, a particularly vicious bite soothed by burning licks. He’s saying something but Isak can’t hear him, too lost in thoughts of Even, in his mouth and between his thighs and seated inside him.

Isak’s no blushing virgin, but he’s not massively experienced either. It’s the result of being closeted through most of his school-life, and painfully shy with boys thereafter. There have been blow jobs and hand jobs, and even the occasional fuck, but they’re nothing compared to this, and Isak isn’t even naked yet.

“I wanna blow you,” Even breathes, kissing up Isak’s neck. “Can I blow you?”

And fuck.

“Please,” Isak breathes, throwing back his head to allow Even better access.

Rather roughly, he’s flipped back over, and Even is at his zipper like a man on a mission. He pulls at his jeans until they give way, Isak having to lift his hips so Even can tug them down his thighs. It’s not that easy – Isak’s the first to admit his thighs are softer than they should be – and at mid-thigh Even gives up, pressing down into Isak’s briefs so that he’s nosing at his dick. It twitches at the contact, and Even presses a brief kiss to it, soft over the fabric. It’s weirdly sweet, and Isak actually blushes.

Then, Even’s peeling his briefs down, and all thoughts are lost at the hot swipe of Even’s tongue over his dick. He’s professional, starting from Isak’s balls all the way up to the head, and Isak’s hot enough he could melt into the ground, through the earth and down into magma, never to be seen again.

So starts the most incredible minutes of Isak’s life so far. Even is white hot heat and vacuum suction, a seasoned pro, and Isak wants to be jealous of where he got all this talent but it feels so fucking good, he can save that shit for later. Already, Isak is so close, doesn’t think he can last much longer, and Even is pulling out all the tricks, hollowing his cheeks and licking at his head
and fuck, did he just hum around Isak’s dick? Isak’s already mourning the moment this is over.

He doesn’t even realise he’s winding his fingers through Even’s hair until he’s pulling, and Even is whining, the sound caught around Isak and it’s so fucking hot. He’s not sure if he’s being rude, but Even’s not stopping him, only sucking harder with every tug and fuck, Isak’s definitely going to come in like, two seconds.

He can feel it, something dizzying deep in his belly, going lower and lower and Isak’s rising higher and higher and then suddenly the heat’s gone and what the fuck, where did it go?

He looks down and Even’s looking back up at him, his lips red and wet and so kissable. Isak reaches down, suddenly desperate, and Even’s up in moments, pressing deep onto Isak’s lips like all the oxygen he needs is between Isak’s lungs.

“How do you want to come?” He’s asking and Isak doesn’t know, wants it in every way possible.

“What are my options?” He asks, amazed he can even get that many syllables out, and what’s more, in the right order.

“Well,” Even whispers, running a hot palm back over Isak’s dick. “You could come in my mouth, or on my face, or on my fingers or inside me. You choose.”

Every single one of those is a winner, and for the next few years, he’ll probably imagine this exact moment whenever he wants to get off in a hurry. Isak hasn’t done too much fucking himself, but he enjoys it fine, would probably love it with Even, getting to know a body as well as he knows his own. Right now, though, he has other plans.

“Do you have a condom?” He asks, breathless.

“And lube,” Even giggles, pulling two foil squares out of the back pocket of his jeans. Isak sort of wants to roll his eyes at how presumptuous that is, but also, this is the best news he’s ever heard.

“How about you fuck me, instead?” He purrs, and the sound Even makes is almost pained.

“Fuck,” he growls, “you want that?”

Isak just nods, feverish, locking his arms around Even’s neck. “Wanna feel you in me for days,” he moans, straight out of the worst porn, and he’ll be embarrassed at himself tomorrow when he doesn’t have Even literally rutting against him at the words.

“Fuck,” Even says again. “Yes! Fuck, okay, I can do that.”

Even’s reaching back down, fighting a losing battle with Isak’s jeans that Isak’s too kind to comment on, and then Isak’s naked in the middle of an empty park in Paris and this is almost definitely illegal, fuck.

Even’s working at his own zipper, getting his jeans off in record time, almost tripping with eagerness, and all of a sudden, Isak is completely at ease. Even’s a dork, he’s just as keen as Isak is, and this entire night has been ridiculous but they did it together, step by step. He’s filled with that satisfaction you get when things fall into place, or when you do something kind and the world repays you with love, and even if Isak never sees Even again, if they leave on their trains and don’t keep in touch and are nothing but distant memories in each other’s busy, inescapable lives, Isak doesn’t mind.

Meeting Even was enough: being able to get to know him, discover the things that make him
laugh and those that make him cry. Learning about his friends and his passions and his home and his health, his grapefruit scent and the taste of his sweat on Isak’s tongue. The sound of his laugh and the shape of his teeth and the feel of his hair and his stubble, the blue of his eyes. The way he says Isak’s name, and the way he makes Isak feel: like he’s whole, like he’s loved, like he’s not alone.

In twenty-four little hours, Isak is a changed person, and he only has Even to thank for that. Even if he is never as happy as he was in this moment, he knows that he was able to feel this way, and for that, he’ll always be grateful to Even, even when he’s grey and old, having lived a life still ahead of him.

For the first time, Isak’s almost excited for it.

Above him, Even is finally naked, his fingers slick and pressing into the meat of Isak’s thighs, a hand gripping the roundness of his ass. His eyes meet Isak’s, sure and adoring, nodding for confirmation. Isak nods back, and Even pushes in.

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After, they lie in silence, nothing but the combined sounds of heavy breathing and the tacky feel of cum against his stomach. They’d cleaned up half-heartedly, too exhausted to do anything more than wipe with one of their shirts (and Isak dreads finding out if it was his) and now they’re back against the grass, wonderfully cool against their skin. The chilling breeze brushes at their skin, and it’s the best feeling ever, although that could just be the afterglow.

Even’s laying on Isak, his head pillowed on his stomach while Isak runs a slow hand through Even’s hair, sweaty and gross. They’re quiet, sharing the second joint between them, bartered with lazy kisses. Isak can feel his limbs getting heavier and heavier, the first joint and now the second finally taking effect, his mind slowing into a gentle lull, like dark blue waves.

“You know, I’m not actually that adventurous,” Even mumbles, when a kiss has turned into several. For a moment, Isak has no idea what he’s talking about, but then he does. “I mean, maybe more than you—” Isak shoves him lightly, too weak to do any more than jostle them, “—but like, I’m still really scared of tons of shit, all the time. Just because I’m more willing to walk around foreign cities and look at churches, it doesn’t mean I’m any braver than you.”

Isak rolls his eyes, but it’s probably no more than a long blink. “You don’t have to be nice just because you got laid.”

“I’m not!” Even says, waving the joint around dangerously. “You’re really brave, Isak. I could have been a serial killer but you still got off the train with me today, that’s brave.”

“That’s stupid,” Isak corrects. “But I get what you’re trying to say. And thank you.”

Silence engulfs them. Isak picks the joint from Even’s fingers, taking a drag, long and heady. Above them, the sky is that murky shade of brown particular to big cities, light pollution erasing every star in the sky except for the moon, still lovely and bright.

Even chuckles. “Wow, look at the stars.”

“So romantic,” Isak plays along.
“What’s your star sign?” Even asks, looking backwards at him. The way he shifts his neck digs uncomfortably into Isak’s stomach, but he ignores it.

“Gemini or Cancer, depends.”

“Depends on what?”

“On the year, I guess? I’m born on the 21st, so it’s on a cusp.”

“Huh. I’m an Aquarius.”

Isak snorts. “Figures.”

Even nips lightly at the skin closest to him, and Isak jumps. “What’s that mean?”

“You’re very Aquarian-like, is all.”

“Do you know a lot about that stuff?”

Isak shrugs, passing the joint back to Even. “Not really, but I like the constellations, so I’ve read a bit about them.”

Even smiles, and Isak can feel it against his skin. “Where is Aquarius in the sky?”

Without any point of reference but the moon, this is difficult to tell, but Isak loves the stars and he likes Even a lot so, for him, he tries.

“As you can see,” he giggles, because they can see shit all, “Alpha and Beta Aquari are two of the four yellow supergiants in Aquarius, but they’re not particularly bright, even though Alpha is six times bigger than the sun and 53 million years old. They extend across the centre, joining with several other smaller stars to form an ‘E’ shape. They’re meant to create the image of a water-carrier, and they belong to a part of a patch of sky called the Sea due to its proximity to other constellations such as Cetus, the whale and Pisces, the fish.”

“That’s so fucking sexy,” Even breathes, words caught in smoke. “You’re so fucking sexy.”

Isak just pets Even’s hair, grinning lazily to himself. “So are you.”

Things are silent for several minutes, nothing but the distant chirping of morning birds awakening, and it’s still dark but it won’t be for long. It’s almost five in the morning.

“I wish we weren’t leaving—” Even checks his phone and Isak wonders, not for the first time, how it’s still alive. He sighs loudly at the time, clicking it off and putting it back in his pocket, “—in four hours.”

“Me neither,” Isak says quietly.

“Tell me more,” Even pleads, almost desperately, pressing the joint to Isak’s lips. It’s an awkward angle, and he’s barely awake enough to function but if Even asks, Isak will make it happen. It’s not like they’re going to get much sleep anyway, with the sun rising soon and then having to make their way back down to the station. He takes a final drag, grinding the joint deep in to the ripped foil beside his head.

Even’s breathing has slowed, not completely but almost, soothed by the hand in his hair and the lull of Isak’s breathing. He wonders if he’s still listening, and he decides it doesn’t matter.
Isak exhales, and he begins.

Chapter End Notes

Locations are Canal Saint Martin and le parc des Buttes-Chaumont. Realistically, I doubt you'd be able to enter there after hours, especially easily, but this is fiction and that is the joy of fiction. Sorry for faking out at the proper sex scene, but I'm tired and have uni early tomorrow morning and I really need to go to sleep. One more chapter left! It will be a nice one, I promise.

Also, a massive thank you to everyone whose ever left a comment or kudos. You guys keep me going, and I love you so much!
Even, 07.43, Gare de Lyon, Paris

“This coffee tastes like shit.”

“Can’t be worse than the train kind.”

“You’d be surprised,” Isak says darkly, but he takes another sip anyway, grimacing at the flavour.

Even can’t blame him. He lucked out with his latte, but Isak’s espresso is the colour of dishwater. Even would be willing to give it the benefit of the doubt as Isak tends to pull a face regardless of what he’s drinking, but the barista looked exhausted when they’d sidled up to the counter, and at almost eight in the morning, the Paul in Gare de Lyon is nothing short of hectic.

Neither of them is on their A-game. Even’s exhausted and sweaty, his shirt sticking to his back like a remora. The station air conditioning is making his lips dry and all he can think about is a cold shower, his parents’ one back in Oslo, with the heavenly water pressure and the Waitrose grapefruit body wash he hoards each time he returns to London.

Isak isn’t fairing much better. He’s been quiet all morning, probably got less sleep than Even did and it shows: his hair is everywhere, and that’s not a complaint because Even’s into it, but it’s less sex hair and more a result of Isak constantly running his hands through it like a nervous habit.

There’s a cum stain at the hem of his shirt and it should be hilarious but neither of them are laughing.

Things aren’t awkward, not at all, but Even doesn’t really know what to say. Isak’s train leaves soon, and they’d retrieved their suitcases from the station lockers with relative ease so they’re already set, wasting time at a cafe before they have to leave. All going well, he’ll see Isak off at 8.06 before rushing to Gare du Nord, where he’ll catch his own train back home.

He can’t believe it’s come around so quickly.

Isak’s phone has finally lost the battle against its battery, and he’s shifting it through his fingers in quick, mesmerising motions. Even doesn’t realise he’s been watching, probably for several minutes, until Isak stops, nudging his foot against Even’s ankle.

“Even,” he says, “hey, Even.”
Even startles. “What’s up?”

“I’m calling my best friend, and you’re gonna answer, okay?” Isak says, bringing his phone up to his ear. He has an odd way of holding it; cradling it like a child with a conch shell, listening out for the ocean.

“I’m gonna answer?” Even repeats, confused.

“Yes, keep up,” Isak says, smiling uncertainly. He begins makes ringing noises, so unlike him even has to smile back. He wonders if Isak can tell how smitten he is.

“Brrrrrrring, brrrrrrring,” Isak chimes, looking at him pointedly until Even gets the hint, bringing his own phone to his ear, just as dead as Isak’s.

“Hello?” Even asks curiously.

“Hey dude, it’s Isak.”

Even spares a second to shoot Isak a look at ‘dude’, making him blush, before clearing his throat. “Hey Isak, good to hear from you.”

“You too,” Isak says, watching him intently. “Listen, Jonas, I wanted to apologise for bailing on you yesterday. I know you were all ready to catch up last night.”

“That’s cool. What held you up?”

Isak takes a deep breath. “I know this sounds weird, but I met someone.”

“Yeah? Tell me about them.”

Isak shoots him a small smile. “Well, his name’s Even, and he’s also from Oslo. He’s really tall and has blondish hair and he’s the most ridiculous person I’ve ever met.”

Even grins. “He sounds amazing.”

“He is, a bit. Knows it, too, but he makes me laugh, and I feel so comfortable when I’m around him, with him and with myself. It’s really hard to describe.”

“You’re doing a pretty good job of it,” Even says softly.

“The problem is…” He’s looking down at his coffee now, turning it slowly in its saucer as the sugar granules rise to the surface. “The problem is I really like him, more than I thought I would. More than I’ve ever liked anyone.”

“What do you like about him?”

Isak bites his lip, suddenly shy. “I like his hands and his smile and the way he says my name. I like that I can feel his eyes on me when I look away.”

He looks up at Even now, solid and vulnerable, and Even is very careful about picking his next words. “What are you going to do then?”

“I don’t know. We haven’t really talked about it.”

“What do you want to do?” Even presses, looking deeply into Isak’s eyes. It’s a loaded question, one he couldn’t even answer himself, and it’s unfair of him to expect Isak to be able to. Yet he
can’t help but ask, desperate for the words he both craves and is petrified to hear.

“I want to see him again,” Isak says, and everything stops.

Even’s gripping his phone so tightly it could morph into a diamond under the pressure. This is it, he realises. This is the moment that makes all the difference.

Isak is so, so brave.

“How?” Even asks, voice wobbly.

Isak shakes his head. “I don’t know.”

“Maybe,” Even starts, and Isak looks up, hopeless. “Maybe you could meet here again, a year from now. In this exact place, where it all began.”

He’s not sure where this idea came from, doesn’t even know if he actually endorses it: a year is a long time, but waiting a year to see Isak is still better than the prospect of never seeing him again. It gives them a chance to find their footing, for Even to finish school and rediscover his passions, and for Isak to find his happiness, in him and in the life he’s creating for himself.

(It’s also incredibly romantic, the kind of shit they write films about, lovers with the choice of returning, of beginning again. The waiting and the drama and the passion. This could be Even’s chance to be the romantic lead of his own life, just like in the movies.)

Ultimately, the shift is almost underwhelming after the past 24 hours he’s had. Even knows he’s found it, the inspiration he’s been seeking, on empty buses and packed hostels and in the arms of a beautiful boy.

Now that it’s back, it’s like everything’s falling into place.

“A year from now?” Isak’s voice is doubtful, but the more Even thinks about it, the better it sounds.

“A year exactly. If we still feel this way next August we come back and we do it all again, and then we see where it goes. No broken promises: if we decide to bail out we can. But if we don’t, then I’ll be here, waiting for you.”

Isak swallows. “A year?” He asks again.

“A year,” Even repeats.


“Ohay,” Isak says.

They put down their phones; they’ve come full circle.

/

In the end, it happens so fast Even barely has time to process it.
Despite having been at the station almost an hour early, Isak just about misses his train, having to sprint down the tarmac until they reach the first open doors, Even closely behind. They load his suitcase into the only free space available, tucked in between traveller’s backpacks and an empty dog cage. Then, they step back out for their final goodbyes.

Even’s not really sure what he was expecting, but this amicable exchange isn’t it. They kiss, and Isak promises to get in touch, Even reminding him to take the sorting hat quiz when he can. Isak wishes him luck with his film and Even wishes him luck for medicine, and then a whistle is blowing and Isak is looking back at the doors anxiously.

They kiss once more, and Even’s trying so hard to remember it, to immortalise this moment in his memory forever, that it barely registers. It’s over before its begun, and then Isak is out of his arms and onto the train and Even just stands there, watching it happen like he’s suddenly behind a screen, screaming at the hero to just do something.

For the life of him, he can’t.

His eyes follow Isak as he moves down the carriage, finding an empty seat easily. The window above him is cracked open, and Isak pushes it further until his arms are folded over the side and he’s peering down at Even.

“Hey Even,” he calls, voice lighter than it’s been all morning. “We’ll always have Paris.”

It’s enough to bring him out of his stupor, and Even grins, shielding his eyes against the glare of the morning sun, blinding on silver metal. The train is moving, slowly at first but gaining speed, and he finds himself quickening his pace to keep up.

“I fucking knew you’d seen it,” Even yells back, light glinting on Isak’s teeth as he laughs, falling in and out of shadows.

He’s fucking beautiful, and Even wishes he could have told him, once, twice, every day for the rest of their lives. He’s about to, the words caught on the tip of his tongue, but it’s too late.

When Even looks back, Isak’s gone.

Even, 17.54, Charing Cross Station, London

Even’s train is delayed and he can feel every second ticking slowly away, loud and languid like melting clocks in a Salvador Dali painting.

It’s not unusual to be trapped on the tube, especially at a station like Charing Cross where people are guaranteed to get off and on regardless of the hour, but there’s some sort of safety issue (or, more likely, some idiot’s thrown something on the rail line) and now everyone and their mum is stuck on the underground, the entire Bakerloo line pressed to a halt.

Even’s not in a rush, not really, but he’s tired and he wants to go home after another long day of heaving film equipment across the West End. He’s working sound on a campaign advert as a favour to his tutor and it’s fun, but it’s long hours for very little pay. A meal deal is thrown in there for good measure, but even he’s reached his limit on how many southern chicken wraps with
prawn cocktail crisps he can eat in a week. Paired with the fact that it’s almost October and Isak still hasn’t got in touch, Even wants nothing more than a quiet, dark room to muffle his screams in. Instead, he has a girl pretty much nestled into his armpit and his shoulder is about to fall off from the weight of his backpack.

All in all, he feels like shit.

It’s possible that he’s in one of his off stages, when the chemicals in his brain are sliding down the wrong end, but he doesn’t think so. He’s pretty good at recognising the signs by now, and he’s fairly meticulous with his medication, not needing a repeat of the Bakka drama. Of course, this doesn’t just eliminate his bipolar, but it does make it more manageable.

This doesn’t change the situation at hand though. The situation being that it’s 44 days, 8 hours and 56 minutes since he last heard from Isak.

Every single second weighs on him like lead.

Objectively, he knows Isak has no obligation to text him, just as he has every right to move on and leave Even behind. That was the whole point of the year apart: they’d be taking things a day at a time, no broken promises. But this decision had been made with the assumption that they’d be keeping in touch, at least occasionally. At the most, he’d have confirmation that Isak is still alive and ignoring him, rather than dead and ignoring him.

(And the thing is, Isak had asked for Even’s number, and it genuinely felt like he was as invested in this as Even was.

Even is.)

So, it’s a bit shit that nothing’s come of it.

It’s his fault for getting carried away, for dreaming up scenarios where they could text and Facetime, send each other stupid memes and watch movies together from separate cities; he’d even considered making an Instagram account if only to see Isak again, his golden hair and summertime freckles.

And it should be fine if Isak doesn’t want this anymore, really, because Even was the one to suggest it. Maybe he took Even’s one-year delay as him just wanting a commitment-free way of letting Isak down gently, because a year from now the pain of rejection will still be there, but it will be easier. Even knows he should have asked for Isak’s number, has known it since he watched his train leave the station, head full of things he forgot to tell Isak, anecdotes and jokes and how much he missed him already. Now, those are all just stacking in the back of his mind, folders in archives collecting dust while others replace them, a constant flow of IsakIsakIsak Even doesn’t know what to do with.

Well, other than go over it for the millionth time.

Around him, very little is happening. Some people are grumbling but most are used to the way London moves at its own pace, how it’s up to you to keep up. Even settles more comfortably against the pole he’s leaning on, remembers standing exactly like this with Isak leaning into his side. He closes his eyes and focuses on the memory: dense, hot air and the salty taste of sweat. The rumbling of the metro, the damp cling of his shirt, the feel of strangers jostling into them and the warmth of Isak’s breath on his neck.

He digs out his sketchbook and like magic, the right words appear.
Hi Even. The train’s left the station and I can’t see you anymore. I miss you already. Keep in touch, Isak <3

Hi Even. I’m back in Oslo and it’s still August but it’s already cold. Hope the weather’s faring better for you in London, but I doubt it. To next summer, Isak xx

Hi Even, it’s Isak. I know it’s been a while but I thought I’d hit you up cos I took that sorting hat quiz you were talking about. Turns out I’m a ravenclaw haha! How are you? Hope London’s treating you well, Isak <3

Hi Even. I’m out with the boys and it’s very cold and I wish you were here!!!! A boy tried to kiss me but he was nothing like you so I went home and watched your Romeo and Juliet movie alone. It was stupid and it made me cry :( text me Isak xoxoxxoxoxoxoxoxox

Hi Even. I watched Romeo + Juliet last night and it was weird but I think I liked it. How are you? Isak

Hi Even. Classes are killing me and it really feels like summer is over. I think of you whenever I see the stars. See you, Isak

Hi Even, how are you? It’s been a while. Things are fine here, same as usual. Isak

Hi Even, I don’t think I can wait a whole year to see you again

Hi Even, do you remember me?

Hi Even

I miss you

Isak throws his phone away, listening out for the muffled thud as it lands amongst his sheets. It’ll be a bitch to fish out later on, but he’s hardly in demand right now so a bit of anticipation before he checks his phone for the inevitable ‘no new notifications’ will only do him good. It’s not like there will be anything from Even anyway; he doesn’t even have Isak’s number, for fuck’s sake.

With almost hourly precision, Isak feels like the stupidest person alive. He’s not sure why he didn’t factor in his anxieties when he asked for Even’s number – was probably too lost in the heat of the morning – but it’s November now and he hasn’t heard from Even once since that night.

Or better, Isak hasn’t managed to send him a single text since.

And yes, he knows he’s probably more to blame for their lack of communication, but it’s not like it hasn’t crossed his mind that Even knows his name, could easily create a Facebook and find him, send him a message or a friend request.

It’s not really worth losing his head over, cause Isak’s got the power at his fingertips and he still
fails to do anything about it. Not to mention he’s left it so long that there’s likely no point to even contacting Even; there is no way a guy like him could stay single in a place as big as London. He’s probably already seeing someone, might have even met them on the train home.

Isak sighs again, running a hand through his hair. It’s getting longer, not noticeable but enough that he’s started tying it back into a silly little ponytail during football practice, at the top of his head so it doesn’t fall into his eyes. He pretends it’s because he’s trying out something new (“it was all the rage in Barcelona, boys”) but he knows he’s only kidding himself. The truth is that Even liked his hair long, and somehow that’s even worse.

It’s a typical winters night in Oslo, meaning Isak’s got the heat pump running full blast while he waits until he literally can’t anymore to go warm himself up a frozen pizza. It’s a Friday and usually, he’d be out with the boys, but with exams looming threateningly and a long day of labs behind him, Isak bailed out early to sit at home feeling sorry for himself.

And it’s actually quite nice, in a way. For one, he’s home alone, an occurrence as rare as rubies, with Eskild on a tinder date, Noora being out with the girls and Linn… well, Isak has no idea where Linn is actually, but he’s almost certain she’s having a better time than he is.

It’s also nice being able to spend an entire evening sulking uninterrupted. Despite occasional patches of loud sighing around the flat, Isak’s been… fine. He doesn’t spend every day pining miserably over his phone or mourning long lost memories – he sort of just gets on with his life, really.

Most days are normal: he goes to uni, work, practise, parties, and nobody spots the difference. He chills with his friends, talks shit at pre-drinks and finishes his nights in filthy McDonalds with a hangover sitting patiently at his doorstep. He watches movies with his flatmates, debriefs with Eskild after failed dates and successful hookups, visits his mum and Lea every Sunday and is up-to-date with ‘Game of Thrones’. He’s getting A’s and he even had a dentist appointment last week; he needs to keep up his flossing.

But some nights, like tonight, it’s nice to pretend like his life is nothing but misery and doom, wrapping himself up in nostalgia like a well-worn blanket. He thinks of a balmy night in Paris, narrow streets and amber lights and a boy born of stardust, and he remembers.

Absently, he’s reaching for his phone again, scrabbling a bit when he feels it caught beneath his duvet. He fiddles with it blindly, too tired to give it a proper effort, and finally, it’s back in his hand, a sequence of unsent texts saved in his notes like a failed poet.

He’s not sure why he can’t send them. Even explicitly said to text him once he knew what his Hogwarts house was and Isak knows now, literally did the test on the train to Denmark, latching onto the shitty carriage wifi that would peter out any time they entered a tunnel. It was boring, and the questions were stupid, but he’s a Ravenclaw and his friends say that’s a good thing and Isak doesn’t really care what any of them think except Even.

Even. Who he won’t contact.

Isak sighs again, shaking his head. It’s about time he made that pizza.
The kitchen is freezing, so cold he has no choice but to wrap a furry white blanket from the living room around his shoulders. It’s one of Eskild’s, with a ridiculous thread count and probably spun by babushkas high in the Siberian mountains, and Isak briefly entertains a fantasy of being the King in the North, a wolf skin on his back as he leads his men through the freezer for that deep-dish pepperoni pizza he’s been hoarding for the inevitable occasion when he has absolutely nothing on his shelf except tea bags.

He gets one going while the oven warms up, the familiar rise of the kettle comforting while he flicks through his snaps. It is nice being home, after all, and Isak’s missed this, the certainty that comes with your own territory, a place where you know you belong. He’s finally used to his old routines again, and everything’s the same but some things are different.

Nothing tangible, but Isak himself.

There aren’t really words to describe it, just this feeling like he’s not quite himself anymore. Like he left a small but intrinsic part of him in a night in Paris.

Instagram is blowing up: stories of Mahdi and Magnus getting blitzed at a house party, a brief one of Eskild in a noisy bar holding cocktails with little umbrellas sticking out of them, a longer snap from Eva, nothing but joined hands in front of a laptop screen playing ‘Fresh Prince’ re-runs with the caption “wild Friday night in with the boy”.

It’s the last one that makes him inexplicably jealous. Not of Eva and Jonas again, thank God (he’s had enough of that for a lifetime), but the simple domesticity that they share, boyfriend and girlfriend and no doubt of their feelings or where they stand in their relationship. It wasn’t until Isak met Even that he even realised how much he craved that sort of love and closeness, and now that he’s aware, he can’t stop thinking about it.

Namely, he can’t stop thinking about Even. Even in his arms, in his bed, in his room and in his life, meeting his friends and cooking for his flatmates and having dinner with his mum. Taking Lea to ski practice and walking Jonas’s dog and listening to Isak complain about his courses, running his long fingers through Isak’s hair like he did in Paris, soothing like rain against a windowpane.

Sometimes, Isak truly hates how much he indulges his sadness, how he schedules out time in which he can lie around being miserable for hours and the way he even looks forward to it. This isn’t one of those times, so he lets his eyes linger on the small print of *La Blouse Roumaine* stuck to the fridge with a magnet painted to resemble Gaudi mosaics.

(It was one of his gifts for Noora, who doesn’t let it show but misses Spain like a limb. He’d picked it up in his final days in Barcelona, suddenly scrambling for cheap gifts for his friends to at least prove he’d left his flat.)

Though beautiful, their *Blouse Roumaine* is the tragic victim of years of light damage, having been stuck above the small white table by the window since before Isak moved in. In a failed attempt at salvaging her, Isak had moved it onto the fridge, but the damage had been done years ago, leaving her dull and lifeless compared to the Pompidou’s.

(Isak was as big and bold and blue as her painting when he was standing before it. Now, he is as washed out as the one fading on his fridge.)

When the oven is ready it’s a welcome distraction. He finally pours himself the tea from the water he boiled a while ago, and it’s not as hot as he generally likes, but at least its immediately drinkable. He’s going in for another sip, ready to fuck around on his phone while his pizza cooks, when the doorbell rings from the other room, deafening in the silence of the flat.
For a moment, Isak looks around, as if he’s expecting someone else to get it. When several moments pass without anything happening, the bell rings again, and Isak snaps back into the moment, shuffling into the living room to get to the door. He’s weighed down by his blanket coat so it takes longer than it normally would, and like clockwork, the bell rings again.

“Fuck’s sake, I’m coming,” Isak mutters and briefly, it sounds like someone is laughing from the other side. The most likely culprit is Eskild, even though his date seemed to be going well. The other is Jonas, who evades fights with Eva by simply leaving their flat whenever he wants to smoke. This usually brings him to the kollektiv, where he and Isak huddle around his bedroom window like teenagers hiding from their parents because Eskild says the smell gives him wrinkles.

With this knowledge, Isak opens the door almost certain of who he’s about to greet.

Like most times in his life, Isak is wrong.

Standing before him is the last person Isak expected to see, probably ever, and for a moment, he wonders if he’s already reached the point in the night where his deepest fantasies kick in, Mills & Boon-style. There’s just no other excuse for why Even would be here, standing on his doorstep like this is a regular Friday night occurrence.

Somehow, he’s even taller than Isak remembers, dressed in tight jeans and a denim jacket that’s seen better days. It can’t have been much of a shield against the cold, and fittingly, the tip of Even’s nose is bright red, his breath still coming out in visible little puffs that get lost in the thick grey scarf around his neck. It’s woollen, the expensive kind, and Isak longs to touch it, just as much as Even’s hair, messy and unstyled across his forehead, making him look younger and impossibly soft.

Isak doesn’t hear himself gasp, but he does register the way Even’s eyes widen when they lock on him like even though he’s here, he can’t quite believe Isak’s real either.

It means Isak has no idea how long they stand there in silence, both as rigid as marble before one of them makes the first move. He wishes it were him, but unsurprisingly, it’s Even.

“Nice fur,” he says, voice as rich and baritone as it was in the summer, and Isak hears it in every single atom.

He shifts uncomfortably, pulling the blanket tighter around him like a shield, though he’s not sure against what. “It’s a blanket. My flatmates blanket.”


And just like that, Isak clicks that this is Even.

His Even.

Isak snorts, so suddenly he surprises even himself, and Even’s grin unfurls slowly like a Cheshire cat. “Shut up, Even,” he says, and Even just grins harder, leaning in until he’s basically through the doorway.

“Fuck, I’ve missed you,” he breathes, eyes glittering, and Isak smiles helplessly back, right back to square one. He wants to be self-conscious that he’s standing in front of the boy of his dreams in nothing but sweatpants and an expensive fake fur blanket – would surely have died at the thought three months ago – but now, at the threshold of his flat with Even, the real, physical Even waiting on the other side, he feels nothing but pure, unadulterated happiness, bubbling up his rib cage into his lungs.
“Hi,” he manages, breathless and glorious, dancing off his tongue into the air between them.

“Hi,” Even replies, before surging forward to kiss him.

Regardless of how many times they’ve done this before, it never stops feeling like the first time. Isak doesn’t even take a second to freeze before he’s giving it right back, winding his hands into the folds of Even’s jacket, climbing up its brass buttons until he’s clutching at Even’s face like a lifeline. The kiss is all tongue and no finesse, unbridled enthusiasm making up for technique.

It’s perfect.

Even’s fingers are flying across his jaw, scratching at the hair at the base of his neck and moulding over his exposed collarbones, cupping his neck until they fold around his shoulders. Isak can feel him everywhere, in every nook and cranny, as encompassing as the night. Without realising it, he’s reeling him in, through the door and into the warmth of the lounge, the front door kicked shut behind them. Even is just as bad, blindly walking him back until his knees catch on the couch and they go tumbling down.

They land with a bounce, Even heavy on top of him like their time in the park, and Even remembers too by the way his kiss turns wicked against Isak’s mouth. They range between hungry and tender, working their way through the kisses they missed, ones for first and second dates, for meeting the parents and drunk PDA at parties.

They kiss for so long, Isak doesn’t even realise something’s burning until the oven begins beeping angrily, so loud and so constant Isak’s tempted to throw a cushion at it. It’s only then that he remembers his pizza, most definitely on the burnt side of crisp, and he pushes Even off of him so suddenly he literally falls off of the couch.

He misses the cute ‘oof’ noise Even makes for the shrill cry coming from the kitchen, getting louder and louder as he opens up the oven and takes out an almost pitch-black thing that was once a pepperoni pizza. It’s rock hard, shiny like obsidian, straight out of those Buzzfeed lists of extreme kitchen fails.

He only has a moment to be fascinated before Even’s following him in, wedging open a window to allow the cold air outside to drive out the acrid smell of burnt. It takes a while due to Linn accidentally painting over the window opening last time they had a flat inspection, but soon enough the smoke is clearing and Isak can breathe easier.

Even’s leaning against the windowsill, looking at Isak fondly. “Didn’t know you were a trained chef,” he says, eyes full of mirth, and Isak just flips him off, poking half-heartedly at the black mass. He can count several unsettling black disks where the pepperoni once was.

“Come on,” Even continues, wrapping an arm around Isak’s waist so that he’s pulled back into his chest. “I’ll make you something better. What else have you got?”

Isak has absolutely nothing, illustrated by his empty shelf in the fridge that may as well be inhabited by cobwebs. Even gives him a knowing look, like he somehow had a sixth-sense that Isak never grew out of the ‘feed me, please’ stage into someone who can responsibly look after himself. Isak has the decency to look embarrassed, but Even just laughs, leaning down to press a quick kiss against his cheek.

Nonchalantly, he starts picking through the others food, eventually settling on some of Noora’s eggs, Eskild’s jumbo pack of smoked salmon and the tail ends of whole grain toast dug out from the deepest recesses of the freezer. Isak goes to stop him, but Even doesn’t let him get further than
a few feeble complaints before he’s planting a firm kiss on his lips.

“He’s staying till morning.”

Behind him, Even is making himself at home in Isak’s kitchen, searching through the clean pile of dishes drying by the sink until he picks out some plates and a pan, filling it with water. He sets about cooking eggs whilst Isak just stares at his back in shock, like it’s suddenly falling in place that this isn’t one of his bedtime fantasies of living with Even, having breakfast at midnight because they’re young and ridiculous, but absolutely fucking real.

He gingerly lifts himself onto the bench, as close to the action as he can be without getting burnt by a rogue droplet of boiling water, and immediately Even steps between his legs, gripping his thighs in possessive hands.

“You like your eggs poached, right?” He asks, and Isak can do nothing but nod, his throat as dry as parchment.

“How do you know that?” Isak croaks, reaching for his now freezing cup of tea. It slides bitter down his throat, but at least he can speak again.

“You told me,” Even smiles, stealing a sip of the tea and promptly wincing at the taste. “Don’t you remember?”

Isak doesn’t really, but that’s not the point. “I can’t believe you remember.”

Even’s gaze softens, putting down the tea to cup his hands around Isak’s face. “Of course I remember, Isak,” then his hands drop, voice going distant. “That night meant a lot to me.”

He’s stepped back from Isak now, and Isak’s not sure what he did wrong. Just a second ago, Even’s palms were burning through his sweats, and now they’re curled moodily around the pan handle, pouring in vinegar and cracking an egg.

“That night meant a lot to me, too,” he says, voice lilting in confusion, and almost immediately, Even wilts.

“You never got in touch,” he says quietly, eyes set on the odd shape of the egg white circling in the water. All of a sudden, Isak feels awful.

“Even—”

“It’s okay,” Even interrupts him, never looking up, “you didn’t owe me anything. I just thought you might, is all. Or hoped. I thought you felt it too, y’know? But like, it was stupid of me to assume. I just wanted to… double-check, I guess.”

“Even,” Isak tries again, and this time his voice is pained. Even looks up carefully. “Wait here.”

Even’s expression turns curious, but he stays put as Isak goes into the lounge and returns with his phone. He scrolls through his notes, timestamps dating up to a few minutes after they separated at Gare de Lyon with messages for Even, some short and cut off, others long and emotional; all unsent. He hands it over to Even.

Even is silent as he scrolls through them, and his face gives little away. He pauses at one point to sift out the eggs, placing them gently on the toast as he grinds salt and pepper onto them, at an
angle like they do on cooking shows. The salmon comes after, decorated with Noora’s parsley growing out the window, and they make their way to the small table while Even keeps reading, digging in absently.

Isak is so nervous he can barely breathe, can’t even enjoy the simplest but best poached egg he’s ever had because Even still hasn’t said a thing, scrolling and scrolling until he reaches the end, probably finding Isak’s depressing shopping lists from when he was still in Barcelona.

Finally, he puts Isak’s phone down, facing up on the table, dim light still illuminated on the most recent unsent text, a simple “I miss you”. Isak’s expecting questions, at least on why he never sent them, but Even takes his time, spearing into his egg until the yolk falls runny down the pile of toast.

“So you’re a Ravenclaw, then?” Even asks, voice warm.

Isak can suddenly taste the salmon on his tongue, smooth and tangy, and he smiles. “Wit beyond measure,” he mumbles, an aborted flourish to his hand like a wand performing magic.

Even grins through his food and it’s disgusting but Isak’s so happy to see it, he returns it just as sappily. Things are relatively quiet after that as they dig into their dinner and Isak may be biased and a terrible cook, but he’s pretty sure this is the best meal he’s had in weeks. He says so, and Even smiles a little sadly at the words, something Isak chooses to ignore for another day.

Eventually, their plates are clean and the air no longer smells like cinder. Isak settles back against his chair, looking up at Even who’s staring right back.

“What are you doing here?” He asks.

Even tilts his head a little, contemplative. “Do you want the real reason or the cooler one I came up with on the plane here?”

Isak laughs. “Both?”

Even nods. “Okay, ‘cooler reason I came up with on the plane here’ first. I finished my script and I wanted you to read it first.”

And that is not what Isak was expecting. At all.

“You want me to read your script?” He asks, baffled.

“Of course.”

“I’ve enjoyed every Fast and Furious movie.”

Even winces. “That’s okay.”

“No, you don’t understand,” Isak shakes his head. “I’ve seen the Lego Movie like eight times.”

To say that Even genuinely looks pained is an understatement. “Please just look at the damn script, Isak.”

He shuffles for something in his backpack, emerging with a dog-eared stack of paper with ‘Minutt for Minutt’ scrawled on the front in messy handwriting like Even only came up with it recently. He hands it over and Isak takes it carefully, feeling its weight in his hands. It’s heavy, and there’s a coffee stain tipping off the side. It still smells fresh.
“What’s it about?” He asks softly, opening to the first page. It looks like it was written on a typewriter, but he doubts Even had the patience. The first few paragraphs seem to just be establishing ones, but he picks up that there’s two characters and they’re on a train. One is named Iska. The other Emil.

“Is this us?” Isak asks, flipping through quickly now, seeing ‘Paris’ and ‘summer’ and ‘just one night’. “You wrote a script about us?”

For the second time tonight, Even looks uncertain. “Is that okay?”

Is it? Isak has no idea, no one’s ever written a script about him before. This one is dense too, pages and pages of dialogue, some lifted verbatim from Isak’s own lips. It’s odd reading them on paper. Is he really this childish?

“When did you write this?” He asks instead, and Even straightens up. “How did you find me?”

“I started it in October when I still hadn’t heard from you. I hadn’t stopped thinking about that night and I needed to get it out of my system, I guess. Once I started it just kept coming. I literally finished it on the way here. As for finding you, you know your friend Sana?” Startled, Isak nods, even though he has no clue how Even would know Sana of all people. “She's my friend Elias' little sister. I remember you mentioned her, so I borrowed my flatmates Facebook one night to do some stalking, in case she was the same one. I couldn't really believe it when I saw your name in her friends, and when I messaged her she said you'd spoken to her about me, which renewed my hope, a bit. She told me where to find you, with some very strict instructions to make things right.”

Isak wants to snort; that sounds exactly like something Sana would do.

Even continues. "It's a wild coincidence but in a way, I always sort of knew? It all felt too much like fate."

Fate.

“Wow,” he says softly, eyes wide. Suddenly, all of Sana's weird hints over the past few weeks make a whole lot more sense, though he's not sure how he feels about her being up-to-date with his love life before he was. Either way, lunch is in order, his shout. Yet, something’s still niggling at him. “Hold on, didn’t you say that anything you’d write would be all dramatic and tragic? We were like, the opposite of that.”

Even rolls his eyes, but his smile is warm. “Maybe, but someone once told me love doesn’t have to be big or dramatic or explosive to be real, and I think they may have been onto something.”

“Who said that?” Isak asks indignantly. “Should I be jealous?”

He’s expecting Even to tease him, make up some other boy on a train whose heart Even stole, but the look he gives Isak is nothing but sincere. “Never,” he says quietly.

Fuck.

“What was the real reason you came here?” He asks carefully, and Even tilts his head back until it’s up against the wall. The streetlights outside cast shadows on his jaw, and he looks Isak in the eyes when he speaks.

“I missed you.”

Fuck.
Isak stutters. “And how does it end?”

Even bites his lip. “That’s the bit I’m having difficulty with.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know how it ends. I was hoping you could help me.”

Isak raises an eyebrow. “Okay?”

Even’s watching him closely, too closely, and he nods minutely like he’s steeling himself for something. He motions for Isak to pass the script back over and he does, wishing he had the courage to reach for Even’s hand.

“So right now, Emil and Iska make the decision to go home, leaving each other behind. They say they’ll return a year from that day and meet again in the same spot, and they make promises to keep in touch but it doesn’t really work out—”

“I’m sorry,” Isak interrupts, burying his face in his hands. He’s not crying, but he’s tense like an arrow. There’s no excuse; he’s just a coward. “I wanted to so badly but I… I don’t know, I just couldn’t. I felt so stupid.”

“Isak…” Even says softly, “don’t apologise, please. It’s okay.”

“It’s not okay, I fucked this up!”

“Of course you didn’t. I wouldn’t be here if you had, would I?”

Isak looks up, meeting Even’s eyes, and they are so warm. He shrugs, and it’s the opposite of relaxed. “I don’t know.”

Even squeezes his hand. “If I genuinely thought there was nothing left between us I wouldn’t be here, I promise.”

Isak choked out a laugh, a tad watery. “Thanks, I guess,” then, softer, “I’m really glad you’re here.”

Even smiles, leaning across the table to give Isak a quick kiss on the lips. “Me too. Now, help me finish this.”

“Right. Go on.”

“So they’re both back home and they miss each other ridiculously but neither knows what to do. They could wait until next summer, take a chance and return to Paris, and if one turns up and the other doesn’t then that’s how it is, that’s what they decided. Maybe they both turn up, or maybe neither of them does. They won’t know until it happens.”

It sounds kind of dismal, to be honest, even though it’s exactly what they agreed to. It sounded so much more romantic when Even first proposed it, and Isak isn’t even into all that cinematic shit like Even is but even he could see the appeal somewhat.

Told like this, they sound like idiots signing their own death note before it even began.

“That’s a stupid ending.”

Even meets his eye, unreadable. “You think so?”
Isak huffs, crossing his arms against his chest. “Nobody would ever agree to that, especially if they like each other so much. What are your other options?”

Very slowly, Even lips twitch into a smile. “I have one other ending, but I’m not one hundred per cent sure on it.”

Isak pouts. “Can’t be worse than that one.”

“Well,” Even starts, his lips still caught in a weird half-smile. “This is Emil’s last year of university, and other than making movies, he doesn’t really have any other plans. With the first semester over, he only has a few more months left and he’s always wanted to set his stories in Norway.”

Quietly, no louder than the phantom beat of a heart, something begins to unfurl in the pit of his stomach, as small as a lemming. It tastes something like hope.

“And then there’s Iska, still in Oslo. Emil returns over Christmas and maybe they get back in touch and agree to give it a go between them, doing it right this time. It’d be long-distance for a few months, but they’d both visit each other over weekends and term holidays. In July, when Emil graduates, he could come back to Oslo, for good, and finally, they’d do things properly. Maybe that August they would go back to Paris, but there’d be no uncertainty. Just them two, together for as long as they’ll have each other. Maybe even forever.”

When Even finishes, it’s like he’s taken all the air in the room with him. Isak can’t breathe, can only stare, stars in his eyes because he can barely believe it; it’s like Even’s an oracle, like he’s peered straight into his wildest dreams and brought them to life, spun out of the fabric of space and time.

He clears his throat and Even meets him steadfast; they’re both holding their breath.

“I like that ending better,” he says, voice surprisingly clear.

Finally, Even grins, and his palm falls open at the centre of the table. There’s no hesitation when Isak meets him halfway.

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They’re sweaty and gross, naked on Isak’s already dirty sheets with the window wide open, letting in the freezing night time air. It’s jarring on his skin, gliding coolly over damp hair and touch-warm bodies, and he’s pretty sure it’s snowing outside and this is how people get pneumonia but Isak’s never felt more alive. He stretches lazily, Even snuggling closer where he’s buried in Isak’s neck, muscles deliciously sore.

Distantly, he can hear his phone buzzing, lost somewhere between the sheets again, and for once, Isak doesn’t care what his friends are up to; would rather live here in the moment, for as long as he’s allowed to.

“Isak?” Even asks softly, voice muffled in his skin. His eyes are closed but his arm is solid across Isak’s chest, and he knows he’s not nearly as deadweight as he appears to be. He presses a tiny kitten lick to the bob of Isak’s Adam’s apple, again when Isak giggles and burrows away.
When he hums in acknowledgement, Even continues. “I’m calling my best friend. Pick up,” he says.

For a moment, Isak has no idea what he’s talking about. When he does, it seems impossible that that was only three months ago. He still has no idea what gave him the courage to tell Even how he felt, but despite it all, he’s so glad he did. They might not be here now if he hadn’t.

Too lazy to find his phone, Isak bring an imaginary one to his ear. “Make the sounds,” he says, and Even huffs a laugh, hot on Isak’s skin. He only has to ring once before Isak picks up, embarrassingly eager, but embarrassing things don’t seem so embarrassing when they’re done with Even.

“Hello?” He answers drily.

“Hi Mikael. Long time, no speak.”

Isak has literally no idea how this Mikael would speak, has no information on him other than vague memories of Even saying his dream is to make B-grade horror movies like *Ghost Shark* and *Killer Clowns from Outer Space*. Knowing just that, Isak wholeheartedly approves. “Yeah, dude. What’s up?”

Even snorts, a quick bite to his shoulder. “I’m back in Oslo, man.”

“Sick. What for?”

“Remember that guy I met in Paris? The one from Oslo? I’m here to see him.”

None of this is news, but Isak’s breath still catches in his throat. Sensing this, the arm draped across Isak squeezes lightly, and Isak relaxes back into him.

“Yeah?” He asks, breathless. “How’d it go?”

“Good,” Even sighs, eyes still shut. “Really good.”

Isak smiles, even though no one can see it. A finger rises to trace it, gentle on his lips, before moving down to his left hand and bringing it up to Even’s hair. He snorts, because Even’s about as subtle as a brick, but obediently, he scratches, running his hands through the damp strands just how Even likes it.

“Tell me about him,” Isak asks.

“He’s so beautiful. And hot. Pretty,” Even says, laughing when Isak pulls lightly at his hair. “But he’s funny too, and clever, and so sweet. I can’t stop smiling when I’m around him.”

When Isak doesn’t say anything, he continues. “I never knew it could feel this way, falling in love.”

Isak feels himself freeze, fingers static in Even’s hair. On top of him, Even doesn’t show any sign of realising what he just said. He’s basically dozing off, nothing but his words and the occasional kiss to Isak’s collarbone indicating that he’s still awake.

“So soon?” Isak chokes out.

“Mmhm,” Even sighs sleepily, nosing in deeper. “I know I’ve only known him a day, but sometimes it feels like a lifetime. Do you know what I mean?”
And the thing is, Isak does.

“Yeah,” he says, resuming his motions. “I think I do. I think he does, too.”

“You reckon?” Even asks, voice soft with hope.

“I know,” Isak confirms, and when Even kisses him, it’s only the first of forever.

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(Later, Even’s out cold and Isak’s going through his script, reading glasses on in the dim light of his bedside table. The window’s still open and he heard Eskild get back about an hour ago, meaning introductions will be necessary in the morning, as well as apologies for demolishing his salmon. Isak sort of wants to go out and tell him everything, have the freak out he should be having, but Even is on top of him, the weight solid and grounding, and he knows he won’t be able to sleep until he’s read it all.

It’s almost four in the morning when he reaches the end.

“Did you seriously write five pages of our reunion as us locked in my room fucking for three days straight?”

Even doesn’t reply, sound asleep, but he doesn’t need to. He’ll be here in the morning, and the morning after that, and the morning after that. And one day, not too long from now, he’ll be here every morning.

For that, Isak would wait a lifetime.)

Chapter End Notes

EDIT: re the crucial detail I forgot! Even finds Isak though Elias, or Sana technically, remembering Isak mentioning her as his friend and going with gut instinct. He does some Facebook stalking, sees Isak’s name in her friend list and gets in contact with Sana, who only grills him a little bit about being a) an idiot and b) damn extra. She gives him Isak’s address because we all know Even is too dramatic to believe in the nice, simple art of a phone call.

I can’t believe this is over! This has been my pet project for almost two months now, started when I was interning at Penguin Random House and given the job of manuscript assessments. Blue was the result of reading such bad writing, I literally started writing something myself to counter it. Not to say that this is any good, but it can’t be any worse.

I know this is a Before Sunrise AU, but I think the only time I quoted it directly is in here when Isak tells Even that he likes the way he can feel his eyes on him when he looks away. This is quite an iconic line, and I did feel a little cheap using it, but it’s just so GOOD and I really wanted it in there because I felt it was truly relevant to them. Other than that, I hope this feels realistic, and not too silly or melodramatic or
whatever crosses my mind when I'm writing it and constantly doubting myself. Leaving this universe is pretty rough, especially as it's been such an achievement for me (I've never written anything this long, let alone finished it) so I definitely plan on revisiting it eventually, maybe in 9-year timestamps like in the films. Depending on whether anyone would be interested in reading them obviously, but I'll miss my boys.

Anyway, thank you for joining me on this journey, and to everyone whose left kudos or a comment, I love you and thank you! A lot of me went into this fic, even when it was at its weakest, so in a way, I'm relieved to be done (I have A LOT of Love Island to catch up on) but I'll also miss it a lot.

I'll definitely be back though! I'm not sure just yet, but I have some ideas floating around. Maybe something Hogwartsy (because everyone loves a Hogwarts AU) or something along the lines of Even being a big director and Isak his long-suffering assistant. (I know, I love tropes. Sue me.) I am also open to suggestions, so let me know if there's anything you'd love to read, because I may want to too!

Once again, thanks for reading and all my love! Je t'aime <3

End Notes

This should hopefully be updated once a week. Unfortunately, I'm reaching that point in adulthood where you need to start worrying about finding a real job so bear with me.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!