Summary

“Detective Lehnsherr, how wonderful to see you out on the job!” The fed in the front greets him as they draw nearer. He’s shorter than the other two by a full head, and he’s beaming at Lehnsherr as if completely undeterred by Lehnsherr’s paint-peeling scowl.

“What do the feds want?” Lehnsherr asks bluntly.

“You know I can’t tell you that,” the fed answers cheerfully. Then his gaze lands on Alex, and, impossibly, his grin gets even brighter. “Did you get a new partner?”

“No,” Lehnsherr says through his teeth while at the same time Alex says, “Yes.”

Notes

THIS FIC IS INCOMPLETE.

Enormous thanks to ikeracity, who alpha'd, beta'd, and dare I say omega'd (wonk) this fic while I was still actively writing it. Thanks also to everyone who said they were interested in my WIP garbage! I'm sorry this fic is incomplete, I loved working on it and I had such big aspirations for every little detail I'd hoped to include. I hope you enjoy the things I did manage to get written down.
“Bullshit. This is bullshit and you know it.”

“On the contrary, Erik, I think it’s high time we assigned you a new partner. This lone wolf act you’ve had going on lately is what’s bullshit.”

“Fine, give me anyone else, then. Don’t saddle me up with—”

“My decision is final. Get out of my office and go do your job.”

The door to the lieutenant’s office is wrenched open, hinges protesting the excessive force. Alex straightens from where he’s leaning back against the wall, folding his arms tightly across his chest and meeting his new partner glare-for-glare as Lehnsherr strides out into the hall and slams the door shut behind him. Alex grits his teeth and forces himself not to flinch as Lehnsherr’s scent washes over him, his pheromones aggressive and purely, unmistakably alpha.

“Saddle up, kid,” Lehnsherr growls, stomping past him towards the bullpen, and Alex has no choice but to follow.

The bullpen is not the hive of activity Alex expected it to be early on a Monday morning. Most of the messy desks shoved in together to form one large, twisting clusterfuck are still empty, and the few other officers who have arrived to work on time don’t appear to be doing much other than drinking coffee and shooting the shit with each other. Every group pauses their conversation as they pass, and Alex can feel their eyes on him, heavy and speculative. It makes his skin crawl, but he keeps his head up, eyes squarely on Lehnsherr’s back.

Lehnsherr has an insulated travel mug in one hand but he carries it like there’s a poisonous snake inside rather than coffee, holding it out and away from his body and gripping its lid only by his fingertips. As soon as they’re outside the building, he immediately twists the lid off and upends it over the bushes. As far as Alex can tell, the only thing that pours out is regular old liquid.

Fucking weirdo, Alex thinks as Lehnsherr gives the cup a few shakes to get rid of the last few drops. He’d had a cup of the break room swill earlier when he’d been filling out the last few forms of paperwork to mark the beginning of his employment with the VPD, and it hadn’t been that bad.

Lehnsherr seems to expect Alex is still following him, because he doesn’t look around to make sure. They head past a long row of docked squad cars, but when Alex sees where they’re headed he stops dead.

“You’re joking.”

“You’re the punchline,” Lehnsherr deadpans, popping open the doors of the ugliest piece of shit Alex has ever seen in his life. It looks like someone has modified an ancient car model from the early 2000s to make it flyable, but didn’t give a crap about how it looks like Frankenstein’s lesser-known steampunk monstrosity. Alex isn’t even sure it can fly. What does Lehnsherr expect them to do, roll to every crime scene? “Get in or go whine to MacTaggert for a new partner, it doesn’t
make any difference to me.”

“I’m not the one who was just throwing a tantrum in her office,” Alex mutters through clenched teeth, but he gets in. The hatch doors slide shut, and the engine comes to life with an actual roar, the weirdly cushy seats vibrating. There’s a real steering wheel, and the center console is a wild mess of tangled wires, spewing from a set of speakers that look like they were salvaged from an antique shop. Alex tries not to wrinkle his nose at the overwhelming stench of alpha clouding his nostrils—Lehnsherr’s scent permeates the entire car, and Alex wonders if he’s some kind of freak who’s married to his job and never goes home.

There’s a wedding band on Lehnsherr’s finger, though, and Alex feels sorry for whatever omega is bonded to him. If Lehnsherr’s the macho alpha cop he seems to be, he probably adheres to the old traditional ways, so his omega was probably forced into the bond through arranged marriage anyway.

Alex sideeyes his new partner as the car valiantly throws itself up into the air with surprising vigor, rising swiftly with only one moment of worrying sputtering from the engine. They merge seamlessly into the traffic overhead, soaring out of the police complex and off into the city.

Lehnsherr leans back in his seat, poking at his comm link. There’s a faint scar over his upper lip, made all the more apparent by his clean shave. He doesn’t have a single finger on the steering wheel but Alex can see it moving, twitching back and forth every so often to hold their course steady. He must be a mutant, then, which is one small point in his favor. The only point in his favor, Alex thinks sourly, because everything else about him bleeds condescending alpha jerkoff.

Still, it’s not like Alex should be surprised. Things are slowly becoming more progressive in the workforce at large, but there are still certain careers society deems as alpha-only or omega-only. The police force, for one, is thought to be too harsh and violent for delicate omegas. Alex himself had to go through an extra six weeks of training and jump through higher, smaller hoops than the rest of his all-alpha class to be considered for the force.

“Put your personal in here,” Lehnsherr says abruptly, thrusting his comm link into Alex’s face. The screen is already open to a blank new contact. “Send a text to yourself so you’ve got mine.”

“What, does this mean you’re gonna keep me?” Alex asks mockingly, but takes the link and starts punching in his pin. Lehnsherr’s model is brand new but already has a chip in the screen.

“Not willingly,” Lehnsherr answers, turning around and digging through the large stack of folders in the back before he pulls out—

“Are those CDs?” Alex asks incredulously, but then happens to glance out the windshield. “Watch where you’re going! Jesus, if you’re going to insist on using a steering wheel then at least keep your eyes forward!”

“Relax, kid,” Lehnsherr says. The steering wheel twitches to the left by itself, and they whiz past a freighter by inches. He hasn’t even looked up, instead busying himself with what looks like an honest-to-god CD player, sliding one of his CDs inside. Alex didn’t even know they still made CDs. He only knows what they are in the first place thanks to the Technology History course he took for a gen ed credit.

“It’s Summers,” Alex says flatly.

“Are you done with my link yet, Summers,” Lehnsherr says, pressing a thumb down on one of the buttons. Actual buttons. It’s like they’re flying around in a goddamn museum.
Alex shoots a text off to himself and hands it back. When his own comm link lights up with the message, he saves Lehnsherr’s pin to his list of contacts as Asshole.

The music starts up, harsh and grating on Alex’s ears, some kind of early-century rock music with real guitar and a confusing crash of percussion. Lehnsherr’s music taste is clearly as vintage as the rest of him, and Alex suddenly wonders if he’s about to die, trapped in a blast-from-the-past rust bucket with an alpha who clearly hates him for daring to be an omega.

“Complain about the music and you’re out,” Lehnsherr says pleasantly when Alex opens his mouth.

“What do you mean o—what the fuck?!” Alex screams, grabbing onto the dashboard for dear life as the entire car suddenly lurches sideways, his door popping open so he’s dangling over open, empty air. 15 miles below, the neon blue plasma ocean burns merrily, as it always does on the surface of Visir, glowing hungrily as it waits expectantly for Alex to fall. His body would definitely incinerate about three miles before it ever reached the plasma itself, but that doesn’t mean Alex wants to actually experience it.

The car continues on its straight trajectory, and Lehnsherr seems to be perfectly at ease even though they’re flying completely sideways at a speed upwards of at least 125 miles an hour. A few people honk at them, horns blaring as they zoom past, weaving effortlessly through traffic.

“I don’t fucking care about your fucking music!” Alex yells, feeling himself start to slip sideways. He has his seatbelt on but it’s one of those old piece-of-crap polyester ones, probably liable to snap at any second.

The car eases over, righting itself smoothly, and Alex’s door seals itself shut again. “Out,” Lehnsherr articulates calmly, fiddling with the volume dial.

“Are you a fucking lunatic?” Alex asks him, point blank, because they might as well get this over with on the first day.

“I’ve been called worse,” Lehnsherr says, unconcerned. “Spare me the dramatics and save your energy, Summers, it’s going to be a long day.”

Spare me the dramatics, from the man who just turned his entire car sideways. Alex fumes in silence for the rest of the ride. The department, he knows, did this to him on purpose. They partnered him with the biggest asshole on the force just to get him to quit, because they don’t want an omega cop on the team. Legally they can’t say a word so they were forced to hire him after he proved himself ten times more competent than the alphas applying, but it doesn’t take an idiot to see they’re still trying to get rid of him.

It’s not going to work. Alex refuses to give in, especially not now. He’s got his badge, and they’re going to have to bury him with it.

He looks out the window, wishing he could roll it down to expunge some of the alpha pheromones in the car. Antares is bright today, not hidden behind the usual cover of amber-tinged clouds. It’s an unusually clear day, so Antares’ little brother Satevis is visible too, smaller and always 45 degrees down and to the left. Alex wishes he’d thought to bring his eyeshield, but this morning he barely had enough time to scarf down some tepid oatmeal for breakfast let alone check the weather.

Humanity has spread out across four of the six planets hurtling continuously around Antares and Satevis, but Visir, second largest and third from the suns, is the hub of civilization despite the
burning plasma covering 94 percent of the planet’s surface. Like most natives, Alex’s feet have never touched real, actual ground since he’s never been off-planet or to the any of the three small islands in the southern hemisphere that account for Visir’s total land mass.

Alex keeps tabs on the hovering city blocks they pass, enormous platforms floating like man-made clouds in Visir’s atmosphere while air traffic swirls around and through them like gnats. The platforms serve dual purposes in creating habitable ground for people to live and work on, as well as soaking up all the radiation in the atmosphere from the ever-burning plasma with the huge power generators beneath them, converting the radiation into clean energy to keep themselves afloat.

Lehnsherr brings them down when they’ve reached Block 59, East District, their descent surprisingly smooth. They park next to three other regular patrol cars blocking off the entrance to a side alley and Alex all but kicks open his door and scrambles out of the deathtrap while Lehnsherr is still busy shutting down his retro stereo.

Out on the sidewalk, Alex straightens his posture and squares his shoulders. The VPD uniform is simple and the utility belt is streamlined, the bulkiest item being the ray gun clipped firmly into its holster on his right hip. Alex isn’t the first omega to have ever donned the black gear, but he’s determined to be the one who sticks it out the longest, and not get chased away from the career by asshole alpha coworkers. He can do anything that alphas can do, and he’ll prove to them all that he can do it better.

“You have breakfast this morning?” Lehnsherr asks him, walking past him and heading towards the holotaped-off entrance to the alley, forcing Alex to jog to catch up.

“If you’re about to ask me to run and get you a bagel, fuck off,” Alex snaps as they walk through the tape together.

“Sure, Summers,” Lehnsherr answers, but he only sounds amused.

There’s a small group of cops gathered towards the back of the alley, only half of which are pretending to do any real police work. One is rummaging around through the pile of vacuum-sealed trash parcels sitting beside an overflowing dumpster, and two more are examining long scorch marks burned into the grimy astroconcrete wall. The other three are sipping coffees.

What they’re standing over, Alex comes to find, is the reason Lehnsherr asked about his breakfast. There’s a body on the ground, lying crumpled on its side. Alex has seen plenty of bodies before throughout the course of his training, but what makes this one stand out is that the man wasn’t killed by a ray gun or even a blaster: his stomach has been slashed open, all his entrails spilling out across the dirty ground.

“Morning, Lehnsherr,” one of the other cops says as they come to a stop within the gathered group. Alex is merely treated to a suspicious look after a large whiff. “Nasty business, isn’t it?”

“What do we got,” Lehnsherr sighs, folding his arms as he stands over the body, studying it intently.

“Male, early 30s, omega,” answers another alpha, turning around from the scorch marks on the wall. Her gaze flickers across Alex at the word omega, but she continues to address Lehnsherr, flipping through the datapad in her hands. “Called in this morning by a little old lady who just wanted to empty out the cat litter box. Rex and I already questioned her, she didn’t see anything else and doesn’t think John Doe is a tenant in this building. Your omega isn’t going to throw up, is he?”
Stiffening, Alex snaps his eyes up from the bloody body on the ground. “I’m not queasy,” he says through gritted teeth, even though he is, just a little bit. The alpha over by the dumpster has a flushed look that says he already puked, Alex thinks angrily, but of course it’s him they worry about. “And I’m not his omega.”

“I’m mated, Harwell,” Lehnsherr says pleasantly, twitching his hand once to show off the ring on his finger, “as you well know.”

She doesn’t look impressed. “Just as long as he doesn’t contaminate the crime scene.”

“What are the scorch marks about,” Lehnsherr asks calmly just as Alex opens his mouth again. “Is John Doe a mutant?”

“If he is, it’s nothing visible,” Harwell jerks a shoulder in a shrug. “We’ll have to wait for forensics to get samples back to the lab to know if he tests positive for the X-gene. I doubt it, though. Omega mutants don’t tend to have offensive-type powers. The perp probably had a ray gun.”

Alex clamps his mouth shut, even though he burns with the desire to say something. Lehnsherr wanders over closer to the wall to take a look. “If the perp had a ray gun, why’d they slash the vic open like a can of foodstuff?” he asks absently. “No reason to gut someone if you’ve already got a gun.”

“Maybe sexual assault gone wrong?” another alpha says with a shrug, taking a long sip of coffee. “Perp corners omega at gunpoint with the intention to rape, omega still won’t give it up, perp gets frustrated?”

“What, so is the perp a scary alpha mutant with huge claws now?” Lehnsherr drawls. “Do we have signs of a struggle, aside from the obvious?”

“We’re working on it, asshole.”

Disgusted with all of them, Alex moves a little further into the alley. Aside from the body itself and the scorch marks, the place appears to be clean of any other kind of evidence, but he can add a pair of eyes to those who have already gone over the area. It is admittedly odd that the victim has been slashed open. Stabbings are so early-century, and hardly any criminals walk around sporting knives when there are so many different kinds of ray guns and blasters on the market.

It’s not too far-fetched to assume the perpetrator might have some kind of claws as part of their mutation. But it’s not their job to assume things, Alex thinks as he looks back at the group of alphas with narrowed eyes, it’s their job to connect facts to come up with the truth. He doesn’t want to be like them and write this off as just another case of omega-rape-gone-wrong before he’s absolutely certain.

He studies the scorch marks carefully. They do look like they were made by some kind of high-energy plasma, which is what his own powers would leave behind, but a blaster could easily leave the exact same marks too.

“We’ve got some gawkers,” Harwell observes. Alex turns away from the wall and follows her gaze down towards the street, where a few pedestrians have begun to gather, attracted by the cluster of squad shuttles and blue projection holotape that only allows badged officials through without sounding an alert.

“Send the omega down to keep them out of the alley,” another cop suggests, “he doesn’t need to be seeing all this.”
“And why not?” Alex bursts out. “Think my delicate sensibilities can’t handle it? Afraid I’ll get scared and cry?”

“One of your kind has been murdered,” the officer says, patronizingly placating. “It’s okay if you’re upset.”

“If I recall, Carson, you had to sit out the rest of the day after your first murder scene,” Lehnsherr says idly, rotating around from his own inspection of the wall like some kind of robot. “So why don’t you go down there and work the crowd a little, and make sure we don’t have any reporters trying to weasel their way past the holotape.”

“The omega is still the most junior—”

“Summers was just about to tell me his rookie opinion on the scene,” Lehnsherr says, eyes glittering, “and while I’m sure it will be riveting, you’re still going to have to get going.”

Muttering something under his breath, Carson turns on his heel and stalks back towards the mouth of the alley. Alex turns his glower onto his partner, but Lehnsherr merely raises an eyebrow. “Make it good, Summers.”

“The trajectory of the marks appear to be going outwards, away from the dead end of the alley,” Alex says after a pause. His hackles are still up, but this is also his chance to prove himself. “So whoever fired the weapon—or whatever powers they have,” he allows, “—was standing with their back towards the dead end.”

“Which means?” Lehnsherr prompts.

“Which means that the person firing was the one backed into a corner,” Alex says impatiently. He doesn’t need his hand held. “So unless the perpetrator was firing a blaster at the victim while the victim ran away, which I don’t think he was since the victim doesn’t appear to have any plasma burns, the victim was the one firing the gun.”

“Omegas aren’t allowed to carry weapons,” Harwell says skeptically.

“You have an omega right in front of you carrying a ray gun,” Lehnsherr points out, and Harwell scowls.

“He’s different,” she says tersely, “obviously he’s been given special permission since he’s on the force.”

“Look, Summers,” Lehnsherr says, dry as dust, “we got her to admit it out loud. All before noon.”

Alex keeps his eyes narrowed and doesn’t answer. Lehnsherr may sound like he’s on Alex’s side, but Alex recognizes an alpha dick measuring contest when he sees one. Lehnsherr isn’t actually sticking up for him, he’s just making sure his dominance is asserted since alphas can’t go five minutes without swinging their balls around.

Harwell isn’t taking the loss well. “These scorch marks were caused by a blaster, not a ray gun,” she snaps. “And even if the omega did fire a weapon, where is it now? Conveniently stolen by the perp?”

Slowly, Lehnsherr grins. “No. It’s right here.” He nods towards the pile of trash parcels the other officer is still rooting through, and a blaster floats up into the air.

“You’re tampering with the evidence just to be a showoff,” Harwell says coolly, but even Alex can
tell she’s boiling mad. “I’ll be making sure the lieutenant hears about this.”

“Tell her I send my love while you’re at it,” Lehnsherr says flatly, setting the blaster back down with his powers. The other officer clears away the trash parcels to make space so the weapon remains out in the open, though he’s still careful not to touch it, even with his gloves on.

Carson comes jogging back down the alley. “We’ve got feds incoming,” he reports, “just wanted to give you a head’s up. They only landed a second ago but they’re headed this way.”

“Who called the feds?” Lehnsherr snaps, and Alex feels his own hackles rise again as all the alphas surrounding him bristle with newfound aggression. Aggressive alphas always send him straight into fight-or-flight mode, his nerves already up with adrenaline. He hates that it’s instinctual for him to be afraid, but it’s only hardwired self-preservation.

“I only called it into the lieutenant,” one of the coffee-sippers says, “maybe she called them in.”

“Oh no,” Lehnsherr says, shaking his head as a trio of suited FBI agents appear in the entrance of the alley, “I don’t think so. This is not their turf.” He stalks down the alley to meet them halfway as they walk through the blue holotape, the projection flashing green with approved entry, and Alex cautiously follows behind his partner.

“Detective Lehnsherr, how wonderful to see you out on the job!” The fed in the front greets him as they draw nearer. He’s shorter than the other two by a full head, and he’s beaming at Lehnsherr as if completely undeterred by Lehnsherr’s paint-peeling scowl.

“What do the feds want?” Lehnsherr asks bluntly.

“You know I can’t tell you that,” the fed answers cheerfully. Then his gaze lands on Alex, and, impossibly, his grin gets even brighter. “Did you get a new partner?”

“No,” Lehnsherr says through his teeth while at the same time Alex says, “Yes.”

“Senior Special Agent Charles Xavier,” the fed says, holding out a hand to shake, and very suddenly Alex realizes who he’s talking to.

“You’re Charles Xavier,” he blurts out.

“Top marks, Summers.”

“Yes I am,” Xavier says with another smile, ignoring Lehnsherr completely. “You must be Alex Summers.”

“You know who I am?” Alex asks blankly. Charles Xavier, the first omega in history to join the FBI. Belatedly he realizes Xavier’s hand is still extended and he quickly takes it to shake.

“I’d heard there was an omega in this year’s batch of police recruits,” Xavier says. His grip is strong and assured.

“Plus he cheats with his telepathy,” Lehnsherr drawls, and Xavier rolls his eyes.

“I obey all telepathic laws and restrictions, which you well know,” he answers calmly. He smiles at Alex again. “I’m so pleased to meet you, and I’m delighted to know that you’re Detective Lehnsherr’s partner.”

“Yeah, you would be,” Lehnsherr mutters.
“Thank you, sir,” Alex says awkwardly. Charles Xavier was an inspirational figure for him when he’d been at the police academy: a career omega who didn’t let shitty alpha expectations or gender roles hold him back. He’s probably watched Xavier’s series of TED talks a hundred times. “I—uh, it’s an honor to meet you.”

“Here, take my card,” Xavier says, opening his jacket and fishing one out from one of the inside pockets. Alex catches a glimpse of his shiny FBI badge. “Feel free to call me any time for anything. Especially if Detective Lehnsherr is giving you a hard time.”

Lehnsherr scoffs while Alex takes the card and tries not to seem to eager about it. Xavier’s commlink and email are listed in simple font beneath his name and rank. “Thank you, sir. I really appreciate it.”

“If we could get back to the crime scene,” one of the other FBI agents says pointedly. She and the other agent are both alphas, but they both appear more amused than annoyed.

“Certainly,” Xavier says cheerfully.

“Certainly not,” Lehnsherr shoots back, eyes narrowed. “This is a bit local for your jurisdiction, don’t you think?”

“Your lieutenant called us in,” Xavier says, “so we’re not here to start a pissing contest over territory. We have an earmark on this type of case right now, Erik, so this is standard procedure.”

“Is it a serial killer,” Lehnsherr says at once, and Xavier sighs.

“You know we can’t discuss our cases.”

“You’re basically admitting it already, you might as well just tell me.”

“Come on,” the female alpha says to Alex, nodding back towards the crime scene. “It’s better to just leave them to it, they’ll argue for hours once they get started.”

“Okay,” Alex says, slightly reluctantly. Lehnsherr is practically looming over Xavier, every line of his body aggressive alpha posturing, but Xavier doesn’t appear to be fazed at all. Alex would love to sit back and listen to Xavier knock Lehnsherr down a few alpha pegs. It sounds like this is a regular thing, though, and Alex takes vicious pleasure in the idea of Lehnsherr attempting to boss an omega around and often not getting his way.

“Why don’t you walk us through what you’ve got,” she says as they start to walk. “We’d like to get this scene wrapped up before the press catches wind of it.”

Alex tears his gaze away from Lehnsherr and Xavier, slipping Xavier’s card carefully into one of the pouches at his belt and clearing his throat. Lehnsherr might not be, but Alex can prove he’s professional. “Forensics isn’t here yet, but I can tell you what we think so far.”

“Allerdyce grunts in acknowledgement, pulling out a datapad and snapping a couple pictures of the body. Alex takes that as his cue, and explains what he’s observed about the scorch marks on the wall and shows them the weapon Lehnsherr found. Harwell butts in and makes sure the FBI agents know she’s the one who questioned the only witness so far, but the other officers from the VPD keep their distance, staring at the agents with clear dislike.
A team from Forensics arrives in the middle of Alex answering Munroe’s questions, breaking out their kits and setting to documenting every inch of the crime scene. Alex looks around for Lehnsherr and Xavier and finds them exactly where he left them, still deep in conversation, though Alex can’t hear what’s being said at this distance. He can’t see Lehnsherr’s face since his back is to Alex, but Xavier is smiling up at him, arms folded, and Alex fervently hopes he’s running circles around the asshole alpha.

Finally Lehnsherr turns away from Xavier, but his resting bitch face tells Alex nothing about how the conversation went. They come back over to the crime scene and while Xavier heads over towards the body, Lehnsherr spots Alex and makes a beeline for him.

“I hope you didn’t embarrass the entire police department with the briefing you gave Munroe,” is the first thing he says, and Alex glares at him.

“I’m not the one who threw a tantrum in Xavier’s face.”

“A tantrum?” Lehnsherr repeats absently. Most of his attention is focused on Xavier as he bends down to examine the body—he’s checking out Xavier’s ass, and Alex wants to punch him. “That wasn’t a tantrum. Trust me, you’ll know when it’s a tantrum.”

Fucking alpha creeper, Alex thinks viciously, though he doesn’t dare say anything out loud. One word from Lehnsherr could get him fired. Alex despises how his career is basically at the mercy of a testosterone-driven alpha hierarchy.

Lehnsherr deigns to tear his gaze away from Xavier, studying Alex critically. “Get excited, Summers,” he deadpans with the same level of enthusiasm Alex usually reserves for going to the dentist, “we’re going canvassing.”

By mid-afternoon, Alex is considering becoming a murderer himself. It took them three hours to cover the entire highrise building, and he’d lost track of the number of people who either outright laughed at his presence in a uniform next to Lehnsherr, or asked Lehnsherr if today was some kind of bring-your-kid-to-work day. Not a single person had any helpful information to add, so when Lehnsherr finally deemed it time to head back to the station, they didn’t have anything new on whoever murdered their John Doe, making the entire thing feel like a waste of time.

At lunch, Alex was initially glad to be spending it alone; Lehnsherr dropped him off at the front of the station with a haphazard, “I’ll be back in an hour,” and Alex had been relieved at the prospect of a break from him. But then he’d walked into the cafeteria alone, and had to suffer the scrutiny of dozens of alphas sizing him up even while he determinedly ignored them as he got food and picked a seat as far away from them all as possible.

“Partner won’t even have lunch with him,” he’d overhead at one point, “no surprise there.”

“Probably already propositioned his partner, so his partner’s in MacTaggert’s office asking for a transfer.”

It had taken a fair bit of concentration for Alex to not slice the entire table in half with his powers, but it’d been very, very tempting. He can’t afford to snap. He has to be above the juvenile, high school-level taunting because he’s an omega in an alpha-dominated workplace and one slip up will
give them the opportunity they’re all looking for to boot him out. They want him to have a meltdown, because then they’ll only use that as proof that omegas can’t handle the type of pressure that comes with having this type of career.

Lehnsherr had come back from his lunch looking happily full, which Alex decided to take as especially annoying since it turned out the food in the cafeteria is shitty, and that’s not even getting into how Lehnsherr pretty much threw him to the wolves. Unperturbed by Alex’s silent but clear disgust, Lehnsherr set him up at one of the desks in the bullpen with a datapad filled with nothing except parking violation complaint forms.

“I have a few calls to follow up on for some possible leads,” he’d said, “you work on processing those.” Then he’d proceeded to disappear for the rest of the fucking afternoon.

Possible leads? Shouldn’t Alex, as Lehnsherr’s partner, be helping Lehnsherr track them down? But instead he’s been left in the bullpen with intern-level busywork, gritting his teeth in annoyance every time an alpha walks by and accidentally jostles his desk.

He sloughs his way through the paperwork, though, because he’s certainly not about to give Lehnsherr an excuse to say he’s not doing his job. It’s mind-numbingly boring, and by the time five o’clock rolls around Alex feels like a part of his soul has died, and that he might possibly be a zombie.

The bullpen is busy with the shift change, dayshift cops heading out and nightshift cops arriving and exchanging greetings. Alex stands up, unconsciously stretching and cracking what feels like every joint in his body, and nearly jumps out of his skin when someone wolf whistles loudly.

“I didn’t know they were hiring entertainment now,” someone shouts, and half the room laughs.

“That’ll make the night go by faster,” one of the nightshift cops says, provoking another round of laughter, and Alex has had enough.

“Touch me and I’ll rip your dick off,” he snaps, spinning around to face the source of the voices, which is of course exactly when Lehnsherr decides to show up.

“Kinky,” he says idly, coming to a stop in the entrance to the bullpen. He hadn’t spoken loudly, but the entire room goes quiet. “I didn’t know you were into that kind of foreplay, Lundquist.”

“Fuck you, Lehnsherr,” the other cop says, shaking his head in disgust.

“Maybe some other time, tonight I’m booked by my husband,” Lehnsherr says gravely, and a couple people snicker. Lehnsherr gives another one of his slow, creepy grins, holding it until the laughter dies off uneasily and the entire bullpen is tensed and waiting for him to make a move.

“I’m only going to say this once,” he says pleasantly, “so I implore you all to listen carefully. MacTaggert gave the rookie to me, which makes him my partner. If you insult my partner, you are by extension insulting me.”

He stops there. He doesn’t elaborate. He doesn’t even insinuate. But no one in the room meets Lehnsherr’s gaze.

Alex is still vibrating with anger, but he follows Lehnsherr wordlessly when Lehnsherr jerks his chin towards the exit. Muttering breaks out as soon as they’ve turned the corner, but Alex tunes it all out and concentrates on not leveling the building as he follows Lehnsherr out to the front of the station.

Lehnsherr is carefully tapping out a text on his comm, relaxed and at ease as if he didn’t just
threaten an entire room of his coworkers. He has the empty traveler’s mug from this morning tucked under one arm, and a pair of old-century aviator sunglasses in his free hand that he fumbles with before sliding onto his face as the bright afternoon light hits them full-force as they walk out of the building. Alex has two buses he needs to catch in order to make it home, but he’s not about to walk away before giving Lehnsherr a piece of his mind.

“I don’t need your help,” he says, coming to a stop. The thick city-infused air out here is like a fresh breeze of relief compared to the heavy alpha stench back in the bullpen. “I don’t need some kind of macho alpha savior.”

Lehnsherr stops too, hitting send on his text and turning around to look at Alex. Alex can see two reflections of himself glaring in the lenses of the aviators. “Okay,” he says simply.

The lack of a fight from the one person he’s wanted to fight the most all day leaves Alex slightly off-kilter, but he sticks to his guns. “Good,” he says gruffly, “just so we’re on the same page.”

“The same sentence, even,” Lehnsherr drawls, and pauses again. Alex can’t see his expression thanks to his fucking ridiculous sunglasses. “Go home and get some rest, Summers. We’re taking another field trip first thing tomorrow morning.” He heads off towards his piece of shit car, leaving Alex alone in the front of the station.

Alex takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly. He’s still angry, but nowhere close to the near-apocalyptic levels he’d been inside. He’s a lot better at anger management than he’d been when he was just a kid.

Tomorrow will be better, he tells himself as he starts walking towards the lone bus stop on the edge of the police complex.

Good thing it doesn’t actually matter if he believes it or not.

* *

The house is dark when Erik gets home, but it’s nothing out of the ordinary for him to get there first. C4 is waiting for him in the garage, beeping excitedly as Erik throws the car into park and climbs out.

“Don’t run over my feet again, or I’m turning you into scrap metal,” he warns the little personal assistant house droid, and it actually backs up a couple inches remorsefully. “Here. Take this.” He hands his empty mug down, just to give it something to do. C4 takes the mug with a happy whistle, rotating around and rolling off into the house like an excited dog. “And turn some lights on!” Erik calls after it, adding under his breath, “You cave-dwelling little cretin.”

Erik takes his usual route through the mansion, lights flickering on obediently as he makes his way up from the garage to the kitchen, taking a deep whiff every so often to make sure everything is as it should be and there are no foreign scents in his house. C4 keeps the place spick-and-span, so the only scents Erik can smell are his own, territory clearly marked out, and of course that of his mate.

His paranoia sufficiently satisfied, Erik takes off his utility belt when he reaches the kitchen, slinging the pouches and holstered blaster haphazardly onto the table. C4 is fiddling with the dish sterilizer, but when it sees Erik it rolls over to him at once with a hopeful chirp.
“Why did I agree to programming you to have the personality of a dog,” Erik asks it, but pats it once on the head. C4 beeps cheerfully.

He walks over to the fridge, pulling it open with his powers and eyeing the contents inside. He could get dinner started, or he could just order in. They have an entire drawer dedicated to takeout menus from nearby places that do delivery, the slim tablets stacked neatly in alphabetical order. But ordering in on a Monday feels like admitting defeat, so with a sigh he pulls out the ingredients for a quick stir fry. After a moment of consideration he grabs a beer too, popping off the top with his powers and taking a long drink as he nudges the fridge closed and dumps everything out on the counter.

“Thanks,” he says when C4 helpfully pulls out a chopping board, and flicks one of the stove burners on before floating a knife from the knife block over to get started.

Erik has their biggest skillet full of vegetables sizzling away by the time C4 reports a sleek ship landing out on their public shuttle pad. Erik turns down the heat and finishes off the last of his beer, chucking the empty bottle into the waste dispenser to be sorted for recycling, and then extends his powers out to latch onto the ring that matches the one on his own finger as it draws steadily nearer.

“—actually just walked in the door right now,” Charles is saying into his comm as he steps into the kitchen, a datapad tucked up under his arm and his free hand already working on loosening the knot of his tie. “Your son even has dinner waiting for me—I know, he’s a credit to you. Would you like to say hello? Yes, of course. I love you too. Here he is.”

Erik sighs but extends a hand, floating Charles’ comm over to himself. “Hello, Mama.”

“Hello, my darling,” Edie says. “I know I just saw you today for your lunch break, but I wanted to hear your voice again before I head into surgery.”

“Ten hours, you said?” Erik asks as Charles presses up against his front to kiss his cheek, pressing a silent *hi, hello, glad to see you* into his head before backing off to finish taking off his tie and settle in.

“Heart transplant,” Edie answers, and Erik has to smile at how anticipatory she sounds. With today’s technology, heart transplants are rare. Erik always did assume he got his old school tastes from his mother. “The patient is in good health—other than the heart, of course—so everything should go well.”

“Are you going to be okay on your feet for that long?” Erik asks, turning to poke at his stir fry so it doesn’t burn. He’s aware of Charles moving around the kitchen behind him, getting out plateware to set the table—the mansion has an entire formal dining room across the hallway, but they usually just eat at the smaller table in here.

Don’t leave your weapon on the table, he says as he scoops up Erik’s utility belt, and Erik waves an absent hand at him.

“Just because I’m getting older doesn’t mean I’m slowing down,” Edie says on the phone sharply, and Erik laughs to show he’s only teasing. “I once had a 21-hour long surgery, I’m sure you remember. This will be nothing.”

“Of course, Mama,” Erik agrees dutifully. Edie has been chief of surgery for fifteen years at Visir Regional Medical, so Erik has no doubt in her abilities. “Well, good luck with the surgery. Get yourself home safe afterwards, too.”
“I will, my darling,” Edie says, sounding amused. She’s still the Head Alpha of their family, but Erik can’t help wanting to take care of her too. “Have a good night. I love you.”

“Love you too, Mama,” Erik says, and flicks off the heat on the stove at the same time he ends the call. He turns around just in time to catch an armful of Charles, who wraps his arms and legs around Erik like an octopus and leans up for a real kiss this time which Erik eagerly returns.

You’ve been drinking, Charles accuses even as he does something with his tongue that makes Erik want to groan.

Just one beer, Erik answers, carrying him over to the first bit of clear counter space he can reach. I hardly think that will affect anything.

Charles sends him a vague feeling of disapproval, but it doesn’t linger for long as his attention focuses on getting his hands down between them to scrabble at the fly of Erik’s pants.

“Dinner’s going to get cold,” Erik reminds him absently, before he ducks down to scent at Charles’ throat, breathing in the distinct smell of his omega. He mouths at Charles’ skin and feels him shiver.

“It’s stir fry, it’s easy to reheat,” Charles says dismissively, his voice a little breathless, and then his clever fingers are inside Erik’s pants, and find Erik’s quickly-hardening cock.

Erik jerks up at the touch, nipping Charles just to get him to yelp. It works, but then Charles gets his revenge by wrapping his hand around Erik’s cock and giving him a couple quick strokes, working him up as he expertly maneuvers Erik out of his pants.

“God I love your uniform,” he says absently, wiggling forward a little on the counter to press up against Erik better.

“Because I look good in it,” Erik asks, giving Charles another filthy kiss as he rocks up into Charles’ grip, “or because it gives you easy access?”

“Do I have to answer that right now,” Charles answers, and Erik laughs.

Charles has already shed his socks and shoes, so all Erik has to do is pull his pants and boxers off. Getting them down past Charles’ hips and ass takes a little maneuvering since Charles is sitting on the counter, but they’re practically professionals at it, Charles lifting himself up by wrapping his legs around Erik’s waist again for leverage and Erik pulling the fabric away. Erik reaches around to give Charles’ bare ass a squeeze before he sets him down on the counter again, and Charles laughs into their next kiss.

Come on, Charles says, spreading his knees wider and scooting forward, I’m wet for you, Erik, I’m sopping—

They both moan as Erik slides a finger up into Charles’ hole, already slick and ready. Charles is a male, though, so Erik slowly works another finger up inside him, gently stretching him open further and spreading his slick all around while Charles clutches at him and rocks his hips against Erik’s hand.

So ready for me, Erik thinks at him, resting his forehead on Charles’ shoulder so he can look down past Charles’ straining cock and watch his own fingers disappear up inside Charles’ hole while slick leaks down his wrist. Charles is starting to clench down on him now, and he’s reached the point where he’s so aroused his telepathy has gotten hazy between them, insensate.
Erik’s cock feels like it’s throbbing, heavy and leaking as he carefully lines them up. Charles shifts a little in Erik’s grip but Erik growls, catching Charles’ lower lip in a gentle bite as he pulls Charles down onto himself, one hand gripping Charles’ leg beneath the thigh to hold Charles’ legs open and apart while his other hand is braced against the edge of the counter. He has to break away from Charles’ mouth to breathe for a second, panting and trembling.

“Erik,” Charles sighs as he shudders through the last few inches of Erik’s cock bottoming out inside him. His arms are wrapped around Erik’s shoulders, and Erik can feel him inhaling sharply against the base of Erik’s throat, taking his turn to scent his mate.

His alpha instincts are screaming at him to start thrusting, to fuck his mate’s hole because this is what they were both designed to do, but Erik holds himself still, sweating with the effort. Charles is completely blissed out on Erik’s scent, mouthing at the juncture of Erik’s neck and shoulder beneath the collar of Erik’s uniform jacket mindlessly, as if delirious. He’s hot and tight around Erik, the musk of his slick heavy in the air and like catnip to Erik’s senses.

Experimentally, Erik rocks forward, and Charles lets out a shaky breath. “You want this?” Erik growls, doing it again, using the leverage his has on Charles to pull back before thrusting in again.

_I want your knot_, Charles demands, even as he gasps, panting. “Knot me, Erik.”

Just the idea is enough to spur Erik on, and he picks up the pace and starts fucking Charles against the counter in earnest. The kitchen fills with their breathy panting, everything around them forgotten as Erik thrusts into his mate, pleasure pooling in his gut until he’s heated all over. He kisses Charles like he’s starving for it, like he hasn’t seen him in weeks instead of only a few hours, drinking in every moan that falls from Charles’ lips on every forward thrust.

“I’m—I’m close—,” Charles stutters out, slamming his hips forward to take Erik’s cock in deeper. He’s projecting his building orgasm straight into Erik’s head and Erik groans, feeling his cock getting impossibly harder with an oncoming knot, slowly beginning to swell—

Charles’ orgasm rips through him, coming with a stifled cry and splatter of come. He doesn’t waste time, digging into all of Erik’s pleasure centers even as he continues to shudder through his release and Erik thrusts forward one last time and comes with a groan, knot swelling up inside Charles and tying them together.

For a few long moments, all they do is cling to each other and pant. Erik feels like every last bit of tension is draining from his muscles as his cock pulses steadily, emptying come out deep inside Charles, and Charles twitches and moans as he’s filled. Both of them are slippery with sweat, Erik’s uniform hot and stifling while Charles’ white dress shirt is plastered against his skin, but Charles is projecting a happy cloud of warm contentment Erik basks in.

The fervor of his alpha instincts slowly calms, satisfied by having his mate tied to him by his knot, filling him up with come. It allows Erik to relax even more, going back to breathing in Charles’ scent while Charles drowsily kisses any part of Erik he can reach. Being knotted by an alpha triggers drowsiness in omegas, an old biological backup system that helps guarantee a knotted couple will stay safely tied together for the duration of the knot.

_Hi_, Charles says after a minute has gone by, sleepily amused, _how was the rest of your day?_

“Annoying,” Erik decides on, and Charles snorts. _Yours?_

“Busy,” Charles admits, and shivers at another pulse of come. “The director isn’t happy about how little progress we’ve been making lately.”
“Maybe VPD can help,” Erik says slyly, and Charles laughs.

“I see that you called around to every police force in the solar system this afternoon.”

“You’re not allowed to go through my memories unless you’re going to start coughing up more details on this case.”

“You know I can’t disclose anything right now,” Charles sighs, stroking Erik’s collar bone, “just like I told you earlier.” He brightens. “Speaking of earlier, is Alex Summers really your permanent partner?”

“Can we not talk about Alex Summers while I’m knotted inside your ass,” Erik says dryly.

“What, you don’t find that stimulating?” Charles asks with a smirk, wiggling a little and prompting Erik’s cock to deliver another burst of come that makes them both shudder.

“I’ll give you stimulating,” Erik says, sliding a hand over to grip Charles’ cock pressed between them. Charles is halfway hard again thanks to the thick alpha cock still up his ass, but Erik can sometimes get him to come again while still tied to Erik just by stroking him off.

Charles bats his hand away. “No,” he orders, “not yet. I want to be able to do this again later and if I come twice now I won’t feel like it.”

Erik rolls his eyes. “Going by the schedule still?”

“You don’t like fucking me twice a night?” Charles asks sweetly.

“Trust me, darling,” Erik says, leaning forward to breathe the words right into Charles’ ear, “I never have a problem with fucking your brains out.”

Charles laughs, wrapping his arms around the back of Erik’s neck and giving him a quick kiss. “But…?”

“But I don’t think this will work if you’re so…regimented about it,” Erik says carefully. “It’s like we’re trying to force it. I think we need to relax and let it just…happen.”

Charles’ mouth is an unhappy slant. “We’ve been trying for years,” he says, his voice steady even though Erik knows how upset this topic makes him. “We haven’t used any kind of birth control during any of my heats for the past two years, Erik. Usually once is all it takes.”

“I know,” Erik says, sliding a hand up Charles’ back slowly. He loves Charles to death, but Charles is used to always having things go his way immediately, so navigating the past couple years has been a bumpy road. “And I’m game to follow whatever schedule of sex you want. Trust me, it’s very exciting for me to fuck you four times a day, seven days a week,” he says very solemnly, and Charles cracks a grin. “But I don’t think it’ll help if you’re uptight about it.”

“Erik Lehnsherr, telling me not to be uptight,” Charles muses in mock amazement. “Usually it’s the other way around.”

“Treasure this moment,” Erik agrees.

“Believe me, I am.” Charles is still smiling, though, as he leans in to rest his head on Erik’s shoulder. Thank you, he presses into Erik’s head silently, I love you.

“I hope you remember that sentiment after I knock you up with twins.”
“Twins?” Charles squawks, jerking upright, and Erik groans at the not-entirely-pleasant tug Charles’ body gives his cock at the motion. “Who said anything about twins?”

“I did,” Erik says smugly. “I can feel it. Alpha’s intuition.”

“Alpha’s intuition,” Charles mutters, scoffing. “I don’t think so. We’re having one at a time, and that’s final.”

“You can’t control everything,” Erik says, grinning, just to tease him, “even as much as you like to think you do. But now you’ve probably jinxed it. Bring on the triplets.”

“I would murder you,” Charles says calmly, and Erik laughs, pressing him back until his head bumps against the cabinets and kissing him.

It only takes a few more minutes for Erik’s knot to go down; Charles isn’t in heat, which would catalyze a longer knot time. They spend the duration trading slow, lazy kisses until Erik’s cock is able to slip back out of Charles’ hole, and Erik carefully draws back, making sure Charles isn’t about to pitch off the counter.

“No yawning,” he orders, mock sharply, when Charles’ jaw nearly creaks with the force of one, “I’ve been promised a round two later so now I feel entitled to it.”

“Alpha entitlement will be the death of us all,” Charles answers even though his grin says he knows Erik is kidding, and he stretches where he sits. “It’s just the sleep hormones, they’ll wear off.”

Erik takes stock of them both. His pants have slid down to rest around his ankles, and his uniform jacket is splattered with Charles’ come. Where Charles sits the counter is a mess, covered in a mixture of Charles’ slick and a little bit of Erik’s come that’s dripped out of his hole, none of which can be very comfortable to sit in.

“You go wash off,” Erik suggests, offering Charles a hand down. Charles slides off the counter easily enough but Erik has to grab him when his knees almost buckle at first. Well, well, he thinks smugly, not a bad sight for the old ego.

“Please, like your ego needs boosting at all,” Charles says, rolling his eyes. He straightens, gently brushing Erik off. “Leave the counter, I’ll wipe that down when I get back. You get dinner reheated.” He heads out of the kitchen, and Erik stares at the flashes of Charles’ bare ass he’s able to glimpse beneath the bottom of his dress shirt until Charles turns the corner.

Pulling up his boxers, Erik turns his attention back to the skillet sitting on the stove. The vegetables might get a little mushy, but it’ll be edible. “C4,” he says, and the droid zips back into the kitchen at once. It’s a good thing it’s programmed to make itself scarce whenever its masters start getting intimate. Erik doesn’t think he’d like the little camera eyes staring up at him the whole time. “Take these and put them in the dry cleaning hamper,” he says, kicking his pants the rest of the way off and shedding his jacket, adding them to the pile Charles’ pants and underwear make on the floor.

The little droid whistles and gathers up the clothes, so Erik starts fiddling with the stove to see if he can reheat the stir fry without ruining it. Charles returns after a few moments, wearing one of his old university shirts and a pair of Erik’s sweatpants, rolled a few times at the ankles, and gets to work cleaning off the counter. He pointedly ignores Erik when Erik leers at him from across the kitchen.
“What did you do with my blaster,” Erik asks when they finally sit down at the table together. The stir fry didn’t come out too bad, he thinks, despite the stop and start.

Curled in his chair, Charles is too busy wolfing his food down to answer out loud. *It’s with my ray gun, out in the hallway cabinet where they belong. You have to get used to locking it up, Erik, especially if we’re going to have kids.*

“If they blow a finger off it’d be a good life lesson,” Erik says with a shrug, and winces when Charles mentally jabs him.

“So,” Charles says casually once he’s slowed down enough to speak out loud. Erik wonders if he even ate lunch today, because if he didn’t then Erik’s going to have to start calling Charles around lunchtime and act like an alpha who micromanages his mate or something. “I made an appointment for us tomorrow.”

“An appointment,” Erik repeats slowly.

“At a fertility clinic,” Charles says matter-of-factly, while Erik stares at him. “It’s an alpha doctor, but he comes recommended so I didn’t think it would hurt to try him out at least once.”

“Why do we need to go to a fertility clinic?” Erik wonders blankly.

“Because obviously something isn’t going right,” Charles says impatiently, “and I think it’s time we both got tested to see if we’re compatible.”

Erik raises an eyebrow. “We’re compatible, believe me. I checked. Multiple times. You might remember.”

“I meant biologically,” Charles says, rolling his eyes, “not just sexually.”

“Are you insinuating my dick isn’t working properly,” Erik says suspiciously.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Charles says, with a small laugh despite himself, “and there’s an equal chance it’s me, too. I just thought it would be...educational, to know for sure. That way we’re not just blindly throwing darts at a wall over and over again and hoping something will stick.”

*I think come would be a more appropriate metaphor in this case,* Erik thinks, loudly enough for Charles to hear. *It would be more literal than darts.*

“And then we can figure out how to proceed, if it turns out I can’t get pregnant the normal way for whatever reason,” Charles continues, ignoring him. “I’m sure the doctor can talk to us about what options we have.”

Erik isn’t sure if he’ll like any other options there are, whatever they may be, but he keeps the thought from Charles. “Alright, fine. We’ll go to the appointment.”

“Good, because it wasn’t an option,” Charles says pointedly, but he’s smiling. “It’s at 4:00 tomorrow. I’ve already cleared my schedule, so don’t be late.”

“It’s out of my hands if MacTaggert says no,” Erik says, but he knows she won’t care. Knowing Moira, she’ll all but shove him out the door, no questions asked. “Just text me the address of this place and I’ll be there.”

“I will,” Charles says, pleased, “and tell Moira I said hello, too. Oh, and speaking of your work: Alex Summers.”
“Alex Summers,” Erik sighs.

“Is he your permanent partner, or is he being shuffled around the department?”

“I think it’s permanent,” Erik says darkly, “despite my best attempts to prevent it.”

Charles raises an eyebrow. “You’ve barely given the lad a chance. You could lead a good example for the rest of the force, too. You’re the best choice for his first partner anyway.”

“I don’t want another partner,” Erik snaps, “and especially not a snot-nosed brat fresh out of the academy who doesn’t know one end of his ray gun from the other. His ray gun, Charles! They want me to go out into the field with a partner who only has a ray gun.”

“Yes, do tell me more about risks of only being allowed to carry a ray gun instead of a blaster like the rest of your colleagues,” Charles says dryly, “and only then because you’ve been granted special permission since you’re part of law enforcement.”

Sorry, Erik thinks, and Charles dips his chin in a nod. Charles’ entire dissertation back in college was all about the archaic, unequal laws for omegas that still stand thanks to the ultra-conservative alphas holding their positions in congress year after year. Erik doesn’t need to tell him about any of it.

“How did Alex’s first day go?” Charles asks, bringing the conversation back to its original topic.

“He’s bright,” Erik admits, “but I honestly don’t know why he’s doing this to himself.”

“What do you mean?” Charles asks, and Erik knows that defensive tone creeping into his voice.

“I don’t mean it in the sense that I don’t think he can do it because he’s an omega,” Erik says pointedly. Erik couldn’t care less what Summers’ gender identity is, when all is said and done, and Charles knows Erik better than to assume he does. That Summers is an omega isn’t why Erik has a problem with him. “But Summers clearly hates alphas and the entire alpha-hierarchy culture that surrounds the police force, so I don’t know why he’s picked this as his career.”

“Maybe he wants to change the system from within,” Charles says loftily.

“Not everyone can be like you, Charles,” Erik says with an exaggeratedly long-suffering sigh, and Charles smiles. “But no, I don’t get the sense that Summers is a bright-eyed activist who wants to change the world. He’s driven, but not like that.”

“So you don’t think he’ll last?”

“I don’t know,” Erik says with an honest shrug. “He’s proud. Might stick it out just because he’s too proud to call it quits.”

“Well, at least he has you,” Charles says slowly, frowning thoughtfully.

Erik decides not to point out again that he doesn’t want a partner at all. “C4, come get the dishes,” he calls, and the droid rolls out of its charging station tucked into one corner, coming over to the table to collect their empty plates and take them to the sink.

“I can’t believe I let you name that droid,” Charles says, just like he always says once a day every day and will probably continue to do so for the rest of their lives. “Of all the possible letter and number combinations in the universe, you pick C4.”
“Boom,” Erik says, grinning, and Charles throws his napkin at him in disgust.

“Think if I bend over you can fuck me while I do the dishes?” Charles asks as they stand, studying the lip of the counter in front of the sink as if calculating the logistics.

Erik makes a face. “No, let C4 handle the dishes. I’m fucking you horizontally this time, unless you want to skip the fertility clinic appointment tomorrow and go to a couple’s massage instead.”

That’s also the most domesticated omega thing you’ve ever said in your life. Who are you and what have you done with my radicalized mate.

Charles laughs, shaking his head even as he slides his fingers through Erik’s, linking their hands together. I was just trying to multi-task. “But come on, then, old man,” he says, tugging Erik out of the kitchen, “you can fuck me on our bed or in the bathtub, your choice.”

Erik allows himself to be led, trailing along after his mate. “I love the sex schedule.”

\*

In the morning Charles wakes Erik up before the alarm with a blowjob, sliding down beneath the sheets and licking Erik’s cock until he’s rock hard. He feels Erik jerk awake right around the time he takes Erik’s entire cock into his mouth, but Charles has a telepathic grip on Erik’s reflexes to keep himself from being kneed in the face.

Good morning, he says, sliding his hands across Erik’s thighs as he slides his lips further down.

Isn’t it, Erik answers, slightly strained, muscles quivering with the need to thrust up. He still has control of his hands, and he slides one over clumsily to bury his fingers in Charles’ hair. Let me—just—

Don’t you dare come yet, Charles warns him, though he’s less worried about how much it hurts to have an alpha knot in your mouth and more worried about how it would be such a waste of sperm. He won’t get pregnant by swallowing Erik’s come, as convenient as that might be.

He gives Erik back control, and Erik immediately bends his knees and plants both feet flat on the mattress, keeping Charles in the valley of his legs. “Lights 50 percent,” he gasps out as Charles bobs his head, and a moment later Charles feels the sheets being dragged off himself and he blinks in the dim light.

“Don’t stop,” Erik says, panting, and Charles goes back to sucking, laving the underside of Erik’s cock with his tongue on every backwards pull. Erik moans, fingers tightening a little in Charles’ hair, but other than the occasional helpless twitch of his hips, he lies back and lets Charles go at his own pace.

It would be lying to say he isn’t putting on a little bit of a show for Erik, using as much spit as possible and letting the dripping head of Erik’s cock smear precome against his lips whenever he pulls back far enough. Charles uses his telepathy to stroke the pleasure center in Erik’s brain, amping up his arousal until their bedroom is filled with the sound of Erik’s jagged panting and the obscene wet noises Charles is making, and soon enough Charles can feel Erik beginning to swell in his mouth.

“If you want my knot, you’d better come up here now,” Erik says tightly, and Charles pulls his lips
all the way off his cock with a wet pop.

*Don’t come yet, don’t come yet,* Charles chants as he picks himself up and climbs on top of Erik, moving a little stiffly on account of his own hard cock straining upwards between his legs. Fortunately his ass is already wet, slick with his own arousal from causing Erik’s, so once Charles is straddling Erik’s hips he lines himself up and sinks slowly back onto Erik’s cock, going slack-jawed with pleasure as Erik pushes into him.

Erik slides his hands up to rest on either side of Charles’ hips, holding him steady while Charles adjusts to the pressure of having his alpha’s cock back up his ass; Erik is well-endowed, and Charles likes him that way. Charles braces his hands on Erik’s chest and begins to ride him, working himself back and forth on Erik’s cock.

It doesn’t take Erik long, and they both moan as his knot swells inside Charles and locks into place, shooting warm come inside him. Charles stills on top of Erik, nearly purring with pleasure at the sensation of being filled, a very old omega instinct hardwired within his genetic code.

Half-sitting up, Erik slips a hand behind Charles’ back to support him and then drags himself up further to lean back against the headboard of the bed. Charles shudders at the pull in his groin of Erik’s knot that tugs him along, already too drowsy to do anything besides allow Erik to rearrange them to his liking.

“All before the alarm goes off, too,” Erik says as he catches his breath. He’s idly stroking Charles’ sides now, his mind glowing with lazy contentment.

“That was the goal,” Charles confesses with a sleepy grin, his voice slightly hoarse. Erik’s knot is pressing up against all the right spots inside him, and Charles feels wonderfully lethargic. “Nnah,” he gasps when Erik’s calloused fingers suddenly wraps around his cock, catching himself with his hands on Erik’s shoulders when his body pitches forward.

“Come on, Charles,” Erik says as he begins to stroke Charles’ cock, his voice the gravelly, low rumble it always sounds like post-orgasm, “let me see you come.”

Another moan grinds its way up from Charles’ throat, and he rocks mindlessly between the large hand on his cock and the huge knot in his ass, the dual pleasures ricocheting through him until he’s wound tight as a coiled spring. It feels *so good*, and Erik is watching him, eyes glittering in the dim light, and it’s too much. “God, Erik—”

His orgasm rips through him, his telepathy flaring out for a moment and flinging Charles deep into the recesses of his primitive omega hindbrain, and he must completely check out for a few moments because when he comes back to his senses, he’s completely curled forward into Erik’s chest. As his cock releases another burst of come inside Charles, Erik lets out a long, satisfied sigh and starts to rub Charles’ back slowly.

*I think I’ve melted,* Charles says, turning his head so he’s breathing into Erik’s neck. Erik’s scent is his favorite in the entire world, and he feels his entire body relax even further against his mate’s like putty as he breathes it in.

Erik laughs, his chest vibrating beneath Charles’. “At this rate you may actually kill us,” he agrees, “think of the children.”

Charles snorts, burrowing in closer and closing his eyes. It won’t hurt to doze until Erik’s knot goes down. Then if they get up and get moving once the alarm goes off, they can do another quick round in the shower and still have plenty of time to finish out their regular morning routine and not
be late to work.

“Be reasonable,” Erik cautions, because Charles has projected this last bit into his head, “I have a longer refractory period than you.”

_Do you want to fuck me four times a day or not_, Charles asks him, smiling against Erik’s skin, _because I think squeezing in three times at night would be harder than twice in the morning._

“If my dick falls off, I’m divorcing you,” Erik mutters, but Charles can feel the grin in his words. _Good thing we signed a prenup_, he answers cheerfully, and Erik gives a dry laugh. Charles shifts, picking himself up off Erik’s chest and wincing a little when their skin peels apart with dried come. But he leans forward to kiss Erik slowly, morning breath and blowjob mouth be damned. “Just think,” he says when they part, “you’ll miss having all this sex once we have kids.”

“C4 can babysit,” Erik says immediately, and laughs when Charles narrows his eyes. “This is good practice, actually. We’re going to be so good at quickies.”

Erik’s knot is just beginning to go down when the alarms on both their comms go off at the same time. Charles wiggles a little to start easing Erik’s cock out of his ass. “That’s our cue,” he says to Erik with a winning grin, and Erik vividly imagines smothering him with a pillow.

Even so, Erik’s just as enthusiastic about fucking Charles up against the tile in their shower as he always is about having sex with Charles, so Charles thinks his grumbling is more out of habit of being difficult than any real grievances. Erik wants to have kids just as much as Charles does—it was one of the things they used to discuss, back in college when Erik was getting more serious about courting Charles. Erik has always stood by him and supported him, whether it was Charles’ controversial dissertation or Charles’ decision to work on his career first before they started having children.

Only now Charles’ career is well-established, Charles thinks some twenty minutes later while he’s drying off and getting dressed, but he hasn’t been able to provide his alpha with offspring.

He hates that he thinks of it that way. He knows _Erik_ doesn’t even think of it like that. Erik would never hold it against him if it turns out they can’t have children at all. But it’s an expectation of omegas by society that Charles has internalized and needs to unlearn and remove from his beliefs, and yet there are still times when he’s left feeling insecure enough by the negative pregnancy test results that he can’t help but think it.

But he does genuinely want children, too, and not just because society expects it from him. He loves kids, and the idea of having them with Erik makes him ache with longing. It’s exhausting, however, to have to defend himself on both fronts from alphas and omegas alike with conservative beliefs who think he should’ve been focused on children from the start of his marriage to Erik, and even from more liberal people who assume he only wants children because he’s been taught by society that he should be having them.

He should be allowed to want both a family and a career, Charles thinks, it shouldn’t have to be a choice between one or the other. He shouldn’t be _judged_ for wanting one or the other.

“You’re thinking hard about something,” Erik says when he drifts up behind Charles as he stands at the kitchen counter, tossing the ingredients for their morning smoothies into the blender. His puts his hands on Charles’ shoulders and gives him a small massage.

“Work,” Charles says with a brief smile, snapping the lid onto the blender and turning it on. It’s
too early in the morning to get Erik riled up about society.

_I was hoping you were daydreaming about my dick_, Erik thinks since the noise of the blender is too loud to bother shouting over.

_Don’t worry, darling, your cock is never far from my thoughts_, Charles says dryly.

_What a relief_, Erik says solemnly, and Charles steps on his foot.

“Make sure you drink all of this,” Charles says once he’s switched off the blender and divvied out the contents into the two traveler mugs waiting on the counter. The smoothie recipe is supposed to help boost their chances of conceiving, so Charles has been making it for them every morning for the past month. “I’m considering making up a stock of this so we can drink it during my next heat, too.”

“Great,” Erik says with no inflection whatsoever as he picks up his mug.

“Have a good day,” Charles says with a smile, leaning up for a kiss. “And don’t forget, 4:00.” He’s already sent Erik the address to the clinic, just so there was no chance of forgetting to during what’s sure to be a busy day.

“I’ll be there,” Erik says, and presses Charles back against the counter to kiss him thoroughly for a moment.

Their last few minutes in the house are spent in a rush, Charles gathering up his datapad he brought home to go through before bed while Erik sets C4’s tasks for the day and collects their weapons from the hallway cabinet. Charles tucks his ray gun under his suit jacket and makes sure his badge is pinned securely.

“Shuttle’s here,” Erik says, a split second before C4 announces the shuttle touching down on the landing pad outside. He catches Charles by the arm and gives him another kiss. _Love you._

“Love you too,” Charles says, his smile a little dopey, but he grabs his briefcase and his traveler mug and heads out of the house, down the short walkway extending out into open air from the mansion’s foundation to where the sleek, black shuttle waits out on the landing pad, passenger door open.

“Good morning, Dr. Xavier,” the shuttle’s AI greets him as he climbs aboard, sliding the door smoothly shut behind him with a soft hiss.

“Good morning,” Charles answers, settling himself down in one of the upholstered seats in the small cabin. Because the main FBI headquarters are located off-planet in orbit, he catches a ride every morning from one of the service shuttles.

“Please prepare for liftoff,” the AI says serenely, and a moment later the shuttle gently lifts off the landing pad, ascending smoothly upwards into the sky.

It isn’t a long flight from his house to the FBI orbital station, but Charles taps at the dark touchscreen located in the seatback in front of him, waking it up and selecting its communicator tab. Ororo picks up after only a second.

“Hi, Charles,” she says, taking a sip of coffee. Judging by the wall behind her, she’s already in her office.

“Any new updates on the case?” Charles asks, taking a quick sip of his smoothie.
“Yeah, actually,” she answers grimly, “I was just about to call you. We just got in a report for another murder on Jeor.”

Alex goes outside to wait at the front of the station after the first comment about his ass from the group of alphas hogging the coffee machine, keeping his arms tightly folded across his chest as if physically holding in his mutation. He can’t even be mad at Lehnsherr for being late because Alex is the one who’s early, thanks to the bus schedules. It’s either catch the ultra early bus and be early, or catch the next early bus and be late.

Lehnsherr pulls up to the station exactly on time, down to the exact second, last-century rock music blaring. Alex stays where he is and watches him get out of his deathtrap car, wearing his aviators even though the amber clouds are thick today, and carrying the same traveler’s mug from yesterday in one hand while flipping through his comm with the other.

“Summers,” he says absently, without looking up from the screen as he approaches. He comes to a stop next to the planter lining the outside of the building, and unscrews the lid on his mug with his powers and upends the entire thing over the bushes.

“Aren’t we going somewhere?” Alex asks, unimpressed.

“Yes we are,” Lehnsherr says idly, slipping his comm into his pocket and giving the mug an extra couple of shakes. “Let’s go.”

He expects Lehnsherr to turn around and walk back towards his car, but instead Lehnsherr heads around the side of the building. Alex follows him closely enough to keep up but at a cautious distance, half-wondering if this is some kind of prank. If Lehnsherr notices, he doesn’t say a word about it, leading them around the back of the building to a side door that has a large CAUTION sign posted over its window, along with a symbol for dangerous chemicals.

“What is this—” Alex starts to ask but Lehnsherr all but kicks in the door and walks inside, so after hesitating half a second, Alex braces himself and follows him in.

A blast of cold air conditioner hits him in a loud rush, and then an annoyed voice is saying, “—many times have I asked you to knock?”

“Morning, McCoy,” Lehnsherr says, leaning against the countertop sans aviators. They’re standing in what must be the forensics lab, piles of actual file folders and paperwork with real paper stacked in every available space that isn’t taken up by equipment. Several huge, locked cabinets full of evidence bins line the walls, and a desk that looks like a tornado hit it is crammed into one corner, holoscreen pulled up and showing different blaster models.

McCoy is a blue, furry mutant currently glaring at Lehnsherr from where he’s sitting looking up from the microscope in front of him. Alex finds himself staring, because not only has he never seen such a visible mutation before, the lab itself isn’t just sterile, it’s completely odorless—no scent of omega, and no scent of alpha.

“You’re a beta,” Alex blurts, and McCoy turns his golden-yellow gaze onto him, one bushy eyebrow raised.
“You’re forward, aren’t you,” he says, and Alex feels his face heat.

“I’m sorry,” he says, not daring to even look at Lehnsherr as he kicks himself mentally. “I didn’t mean—sorry.”

McCoy sighs, standing up. He towers over them both, and Alex is certain both he and Lehnsherr could fit comfortably in one of the lab coats McCoy is wearing. “It’s either that or ‘you’re blue,’ so I suppose I’m used to it by now.”

“I know a great song from 1999 that you would love,” Lehnsherr says like a fucking weirdo, and McCoy gives him a flat look. Alex is already liking him more and more.

“I’m Alex Summers,” he says, stepping forward to shake McCoy’s hand. McCoy has sharp-looking claws, but they don’t graze Alex’s skin at all. “I’m his new partner.”

“My condolences,” McCoy says, and then blinks at him through his horn-rimmed spectacles. “You’re an omega.”

Alex bristles at first, but then he figures he owes McCoy that one. “Yep.”

“Did you know omegas make up 44 percent of the population?” McCoy says, walking over to a stack of manila folders sitting on the corner of the long countertop. “Betas only make up 13, but that leaves only 43 percent made up by alphas.”

“No,” Alex says, not sure where this is going.

“Of course, those numbers are from the census five years ago, so they’re a little dated,” McCoy says absently as he shuffles through the pile, “but it’s just interesting to know.”

“Okay,” Alex says carefully, and ignores how Lehnsherr is grinning at him.

“Here,” McCoy says, yanking out a thin tablet and tossing it to Lehnsherr. “All the stuff that’s come back so far. I’m still waiting on the coroner’s report, and I haven’t heard from ballistics yet either, but you know Sean. He works at his own pace.”

Lehnsherr catches the tablet one-handed and rifles through the digital pages quickly, eyes flashing down the text. “So the prints on the blaster were from the vic.”

“Yep,” McCoy says, and abruptly Alex clues in that they’re talking about the murder case from yesterday. “All prints on the grip matched the ones from the vic. One set of prints on the barrel were different, possibly made by the perpetrator when they tossed the gun away? But so far no matches.”

“Did you run it through the other planetary databases?”

McCoy shakes his head. “No, I only ran it through the Visir database. Should I be cross-checking with the rest of the solar system?”

“The FBI showed up at the scene yesterday,” Lehnsherr says, handing the tablet back, “and of course they wouldn’t confirm anything, but I’d widen your search.”

“Nobody ever tells me these things,” McCoy mutters, pulling a real pen out of his pocket and scribbling a note down on the palm of his hand. “I’ll run the prints again this afternoon. But I’m surprised you didn’t get the inside scoop.”
“I’ll wrangle it out of him, one way or the other,” Lehnsherr says with a shrug, and Alex recalls Lehnsherr arguing with Charles Xavier yesterday and narrows his eyes.

“The feds are just doing their job,” he speaks up, unflinching when Lehnsherr looks over at him. He doesn’t like how confident Lehnsherr sounds that he’ll be able to bully information out of Xavier, like he thinks it’ll be easy because Xavier’s an omega.

“Sure, Summers,” Lehnsherr says slowly, like he’s not sure what Alex is talking about. Asshole.

“Anyway,” McCoy says, glancing between them, “I don’t have a match for the vic’s prints yet either so hopefully the autopsy can help ID him. Was there anything else you wanted, or will you get out of my lab now?”

Lehnsherr puts his mug down on the counter. “Test this for radioactive poisoning.”

“Get out of my lab, Erik.”

“It’s on your head when I die,” Lehnsherr says, scooping it up again while McCoy rolls his eyes. “Let me know if you get any hits on those fingerprints.”

“Will do.”

Pushing the back door to the lab open with his powers, Lehnsherr raises his hand up in thanks as he heads outside. “See ya,” Alex says awkwardly to McCoy, who gives him a nod, and jogs to catch up with his partner, the heavy door slamming shut behind him.

“So are you ever going to tell me about those leads you were supposedly following up on yesterday, or am I not worthy enough?” Alex asks coldly when he falls into step with Lehnsherr again, rounding the corner of the building.

“I don’t know, can you keep your mouth shut?” Lehnsherr returns pleasantly, and Alex scowls.

“Am I on this case or not?” he snaps. “Because if you don’t think I can do my job, then—”

“Good answer,” Lehnsherr tells him, and comes to a stop. “Look. If the FBI decides to show up to a murder scene, particularly one that’s low-profile, the first thing that should pop into your mind is serial killer. Why is that.”

“Because…” Alex’s brain scrambles for a moment, thrown off by the sudden pop quiz. “Because there’s a chance they’ve been tracking other murders that look very similar to this one on another planet. Or planets.”

“Right,” Lehnsherr nods, “so if they don’t want to tell us, the local-yokel cops, what they think they’re onto yet, it’s because they’re not entirely sure there’s a connection between the murders and they don’t want to kick up a huge investigation if they don’t have to be involved.”

“And they’d have to be involved if it’s a serial killer who’s hopping planets,” Alex says.

“Good, Summers,” Lehnsherr agrees, but there’s not a hint of any kind of approval in his voice, which Alex is glad for. He doesn’t need Lehnsherr’s approval. “I spent yesterday afternoon making phone calls around to various precincts on the other planets, asking about recent murder cases they’ve had.”

“And?” Alex asks, intrigued despite himself. Lehnsherr may be an asshole alpha, but he’s clearly proficient at his job.
“Two other cases on Mahird, one on Jeor, and three on Grelmaines,” Lehnsherr says grimly, “and that’s only what I’ve managed to find so far. There could be more.”

“A serial killer that spreads four planets?” Alex asks, shocked. “That’s…”

“One hell of a shitstorm coming our way,” Lehnsherr says, and for once Alex is inclined to agree with him.

“You’re sure they’re all related?”

“Sounds like it so far. Vic’s always an omega, always gutted. I’m pulling a few favors here and there, and the people I talked to should be sending me their files today, so that’s what you’re going to do this morning—go through them all and compare to see how much matches up.”

Alex unconsciously straightens, eager for some real police work to do. “What happens if we connect enough dots?”

“Then I get to argue with the lieutenant until she lets me do what I want,” Lehnsherr says wryly, “and we pursue the case.”

As much as he doesn’t like Lehnsherr, Alex does like the sound of taking down the scum who’s going around murdering omegas. “Okay. Let’s do it.”

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Normally Erik hates the inevitable days spent entirely cooped up in his office at the station, whether it’s because Moira has gotten tired of his shit and grounded him for some minor infraction—like the one time she grounded him for an entire week because of the satellite thing, which Erik still believes was the epitome of injustice—or because he’s swamped by the paperwork that follows wrapping up cases. It always seems to make the day drag on and on into boring infinity, but today passes in a blur.

By noon he’s managed to scrounge up two more possible cases that fit what they’re looking for, from another two precincts on Grelmaines, and luckily it’s easy to have the files sent over. It’s been easy for all the cases, because most of the other precincts are treating them as cold cases; just another omega murdered, probably because they were out too late without an alpha escort—basically asking for it. It makes Erik grind his teeth, itching to reach through the commline transmission and strangle the lazy alpha cops he’s talking to, but even verbally dismantling someone two planets away won’t get him the files he wants.

Once he has them, he forwards them to Summers, who he’s set up in one of the spare conference rooms with orders to organize the files and lay all the evidence out to see if there are any patterns aside from the obvious dead omega one. Erik hasn’t been down to check on him yet because he’s been on the phone all morning, but at least Summers had seemed eager to get started on sifting through the files.

Moira comes into his office just as he’s saying goodbye to the latest officer he’s been forwarded to, only with no luck—she’d had a cold case involving a murdered omega, but it was from ten years ago and the cause of death had been a beating, not a stabbing. Moira’s expression is calm, but Erik takes one look at her and knows she’s annoyed.
“Erik,” she says as he closes out the transmission hologram, “why is the rookie down in conference room three setting up a link analysis chart that looks like it’s straight out of the latest spy thriller?”

“Is he really doing a link analysis chart?” Erik asks, considering. Not the way he would’ve gone, maybe, but it’s not a wrong way to look at it. Summers has been busy, then, so it’s no wonder he hasn’t come back to hang around glaring at Erik over whatever new perceived slight.

“Erik.”

“Lieutenant MacTaggert,” Erik says, leaning back in his chair so he can stretch out his legs.

“This is your friendly reminder that we’re busy enough with cases from our own precinct for you two to be starting a conspiracy theory about a bunch of cases from all over the solar system.”

“Really, MacTaggert,” Erik says flatly, “the FBI shows up to a murder scene and you think I’m starting a conspiracy theory.”

Moira sighs, and sinks down into one of the chairs in front of Erik’s desk. She rests her elbows on the edge of the desk, massaging her temples wearily. “No. That was a poor choice of words. But the chief has been up my ass about our solve rate lately, so I really don’t have time for you and Summers to be off on a wild goose chase that the FBI already has people on.”

“One of the murders happened in our district,” Erik points out, “so technically—”

“Don’t get technical with me, Lehnsherr,” Moira interrupts brusquely. Moira is a baseline human, with no mutation to speak of, but sometimes Erik half-wonders if she does have powers that allow her to be a constant thorn in his side. “Stick to cases that pertain to our district, or I’ll put you on traffic duty for the next month.”

“Are you sure you want me pulling people over?” Erik asks with a lazy grin.

“No,” Moira says flatly, “but I’m willing to put up with complaint calls if it means you’re not wasting time.”

“I am not wasting time,” Erik growls, “these cases aren’t 30 years old and I’m picking at them because I’m bored. All of the murders have happened over the past year, at most, which makes them relevant and—”

“The FBI is working on it, Erik,” Moira says, standing up with an air of finality. “I’m sure Charles is working on it, and I doubt he’d appreciate you undermining him. Find a local case to apply your obsessive behavior to or go sit in a patrol car on the side of the flyway, it’s your call.” She leaves his office, already pulling out her commline to answer an incoming call.

Muttering a few unflattering things about the lieutenant under his breath, Erik shuts down all his holoscreens and follows her down the hallway back towards her office. Moira’s already sitting behind her desk by the time he arrives in her doorway, and she glances up at him.

“—just a second,” she says, and puts a thumb over the receiver. “What now, Erik?”

“Speaking of Charles,” he says, leaning against the doorframe, “I’m out early for an appointment today.”

Moira gives him an exasperated look. “You couldn’t have just written an email?”

“Absolutely not.”
She rolls her eyes. “Fine. You’re out early, I’ll make sure they announce it from the heavens. Shut my office door, please.”

Erik flips her a mocking salute and backs out into the hallway, pulling her door shut with his powers. Undermining Charles, he thinks as he heads over to the conference rooms. Is that how it really looks? Like he can’t handle his omega handling a high-profile case and so feels the need to try and outperform him? He files the thought away for later.

Summers has the e-files spread out all across the long plexiglass touchscreen surface of the conference table when Erik steps into the room. He’s also making use of the huge projection board along one entire wall, dragging and dropping documents and pictures here and there, rearranging the images with a swipe of his fingers to put them in order. He’s scratched out tons of notes in tiny, cramped handwriting with the stylus currently dangling loosely down at his side in one hand, and drawn a few lines here and there to show specific connections. Erik carefully looks over what he’s gotten together so far, and has to admit the kid has done well—based on what they have, he’s hypothesized connections between five out of the nine murders they know of.

“It’s noon,” he says, and pretends he doesn’t notice how Summers jumps.

“I haven’t looked through the two new file packets you just sent over,” Summers says, “but this is what I’ve got so far.” He watches Erik as if waiting for a letter grade.

“And what does it tell you,” Erik says, studying Summers in turn. His guard has come back up, no longer loose and relaxed, the stylus clutched tightly in his hand.

“That the killer—or killers are starting to escalate,” Summers bursts out right away, sounding like he’s been waiting to tell Erik this for about an hour now.

Erik knows the murders are happening more frequently recently based on the dates he was given by the other stations, but no one had said anything about the possibility of there being more than one perpetrator. “You think it’s more than one.”

“It could be. I can show—”

“After lunch,” Erik interrupts him, waving a hand. Who knows when Moira will be by next to make sure they’ve packed up and cleared out. “You can save all this, yes?”

“Yeah, I’ve got a memory chip.”

“Good,” Erik says, “then upload it all and let’s go.”

“We’re going to lunch?” Alex asks, brow furrowed. “Together?”

“Unless even the sight of me is enough to put you off eating,” Erik says dryly, “yes, Summers, we’re going to lunch together.”

Alex isn’t sure what he was expecting when Erik Lehnsherr decided they were going out for lunch together, but a tiny hole-in-the-wall Jewish deli run by the most grandmotherly-looking omega Alex has ever seen in his life wasn’t it. The place is packed with the lunch rush, but as soon as the
elderly omega behind the counter sees Lehnsherr she gestures them to a small table crammed up against the window, scribbling out an order ticket and tearing it off before Alex has even had a chance to ask what the menu is.

“Don’t worry, you’ll like it,” Lehnsherr says, looking amused by Alex’s skeptical face, and Alex quickly scowls at him.

“So why are we doing this?” he asks stiffly, feeling a little exposed.

Lehnsherr, on the other hand, is relaxed and at ease in his chair, somehow making his long legs work with their tiny table. “Because the food they serve in the station cafeteria is shit,” he answers, like it was obvious, “and also MacTaggert doesn’t want us working on the serial killer case.”

“What?” Alex demands, loudly enough to cause nearby heads to turn their direction. “Mind your own business.”

“Relax, Summers,” Lehnsherr says calmly once everyone has gone back to being reabsorbed in what they were doing. “It just means we can’t use the conference room anymore.”

“Why doesn’t she want us on the case?” Alex asks, keeping his voice lowered. Lieutenant MacTaggert is an alpha, of course, but she’d seemed reasonable.

“Office politics, put briefly,” Lehnsherr says, “and they’ve basically decided to sit back and let the FBI handle it.”

“And you told her we’d shelve it?” Alex asks bitterly.

“I didn’t say anything to her,” Lehnsherr answers, “which I assume she took to mean tacit agreement. We can keep working on the case, but it has to be more on the down-low.”

“What about McCoy and the lab?”

“Oh, I shot him an email on the way here,” Lehnsherr says breezily, and Alex vividly recalls how he’d been steering without touching the wheel or looking out the windshield again. “He’ll finish running the prints at least, and pull all the rest of the data once he gets the coroner’s report and whatever Cassidy in Ballistics comes up with and save a copy for us.”

“Okay,” Alex says, feeling a little better about the situation. He doesn’t want to drop the case, FBI or not, and it seems Lehnsherr doesn’t either. They can do this. “Then we keep working on it.”

“Erik Lehnsherr,” a voice says, and the grandmotherly omega ambles her way over to their table, carrying a tray with two sandwiches and two glasses of water. Lehnsherr lifts a hand and gently floats the tray out of her hands, setting it down on the table for her. “Where is your sweet mate? Are you having an affair with this boytoy?”

“Hello, Mrs. Feigenbaum,” Lehnsherr says, amused again, while Alex coughs. “He’s at work. This is my new partner, Alex Summers.”

“Oh, that’s right, he works,” Mrs. Feigenbaum says disapprovingly. She sizes Alex up with her beady little eyes, and Alex tries to look polite and unassuming. “He is pretty, but not like Charles.”

Charles, Alex thinks even as he does his best not to scowl at her. Weird how Erik’s mate is called Charles, just like Charles Xavier.

Lehnsherr laughs. “No one is quite like Charles.”
“And you work as a police officer?” Mrs. Feigenbaum asks, turning her disapproval onto Alex. “What does your alpha think of this?”

“I don’t have an alpha,” Alex says as neutrally as he can, even though he can feel his hackles rising. She’s just an old omega stuck in her generation’s mindset, he reminds himself.

Mrs. Feigenbaum frowns, opening her mouth, but Erik asks smoothly, “How is Mr. Feigenbaum?”

“Psh,” she says, waving a hand. “Senile. Why don’t you ever come to temple anymore with your mother?”

“Work has been busy for both of us,” Lehnsherr starts to say, but Mrs. Feigenbaum shakes her head.

“That is no excuse. If my son lived in the same city as me, every Saturday we would go to temple as a family. Children too! You need to breed your Charles before it is too late, you have already waited long enough.”

“I’ll keep that in mind, Mrs. Feigenbaum,” Lehnsherr says dryly. “Thanks for lunch.”

“Just leave your credits with the tray,” she says, and then ambles back towards the deli counter.

“She’s a pistol, isn’t she,” Lehnsherr says while Alex watches her go, feeling slightly dazed.

Alex doesn’t even begin to know how to answer, so he picks up his sandwich and takes a large bite. It turns out to be a warm pastrami on rye, the perfect mix of dijon mustard and horseradish exploding on his tastebuds and reminding him just how hungry he is. Alex starts wolfing the sandwich down, and Lehnsherr doesn’t say *I told you so*, but his expression conveys it anyway. He digs into his sandwich too, and for a few minutes neither of them speaks.

“So you think there are multiple killers,” Lehnsherr says when they’re both about nearly done with their sandwiches, putting his down to take a drink of water. “Fill me in.”

“I thought we were waiting till after lunch.”

“Well it’s either that,” Lehnsherr says idly, taking another bite, “or we can chat about the weather.”

The idea of making smalltalk with Lehnsherr is nothing short of horrifying, so Alex wipes his mouth with his napkin and starts talking about their case. “So far five of the other murder scenes and circumstances match those of our John Doe’s from yesterday to a T. But in three of those cases, some of the evidence might point to at least two people being present during the murders.”

“Such as?”

“Extra sets of fingerprints in two cases, and in the third, the omega was actually dragged a little ways off of a street and into an alley. The vic’s weight means either our perp is pretty strong, or he had help. A partner.”

“Extra fingerprints could be from anything,” Lehnsherr says, but he sounds more thoughtful than dismissive. “First responders accidentally contaminating the scene, bums rolling the body in hopes of finding a few spare credits…”

“I know,” Alex says, “but it was the vic who was moved that really put up a red flag for me.”

“Physical mutations aren’t uncommon,” Lehnsherr says, “and strength usually comes hand in hand
with those. We could be dealing with a mutant perp.”

“Assuming they’re a mutant seems a little convenient.”

“Dismissing the possibility entirely just to avoid the usual bias is dangerous,” Lehnsherr points out wryly. “I hate the stigma too, Summers. Probably just as much as you hated Harwell’s assumption yesterday that omega mutants don’t have powers beyond making flowers grow.”

Alex clenches his teeth. “She doesn’t know shit.”

“No, she doesn’t.”

“You know what I can do?” Alex asks him carefully.

Lehnsherr’s expression is inscrutable. “I read your file.”

“Doesn’t freak you out that I could level this building?” Alex asks, voice low but mocking. “Me, a _delicate_ little omega?”

“I can stall out the engines keeping this entire city block afloat,” Lehnsherr says calmly, “right now. While you and the rest of ten-thousand-plus people currently occupying this block were falling to your deaths, I could levitate myself to the next block and do the same again. And again. And again. Somehow, my ability to do any of this has zero correlation with whether my ass is self-lubricating or not.”

Alex stares at him. “You’re crazy.”

“That hurts all three of my feelings,” Lehnsherr answers unconcernedly, pushing his chair back from the table and dropping a few credits down next to the wrappings from his sandwich. “Let’s get back to the station. You have more parking ticket complaint forms to process.”

Alex blinks, feeling a little bit of whiplash in the face of such an abrupt change of topic. He files away their previous conversation to examine later and stands up too. “What about the murders?” he demands, making sure to put down the exact same number of credits Lehnsherr has because no way is he letting some alpha pay for his meal, and stomps after Lehnsherr out of the deli.

Lehnsherr’s parked by the curb outside, and Alex scrambles into the passenger’s seat. “Doesn’t that take precedence over _parking tickets_?”

“We’re off the case, remember,” Lehnsherr says, starting the engine with a guttural roar. His loud, outlandish music from a century ago starts up a second later, the burst of screaming guitar and wild drum beats making several pedestrians stare as they pass by, the lyrics kicking in to howl something about death in the air and being strapped to an electric chair. “But that doesn’t mean you can’t multitask.”

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Erik is already parked and waiting in the carpark outside the clinic by the time Charles and Ororo touch down in the street. Charles gathers up his things quickly, while Ororo gives Erik a small wave out the front windshield of her shuttle.

“Thanks for the lift,” Charles says, “and sorry again for bailing early on a day like this.”
“I was heading back to headquarters anyway,” Ororo answers, “and don’t worry, you’ve already put in plenty of long hours. I’ll only hold it a little against you.” She smiles.

Charles laughs, and the passenger-side hatch pops open to let him out. “Keep me updated. Let me know if anything new comes up. I can always come back in after this appointment is over.”

“Nah, go home with Erik,” Ororo says with another smile. “I’m only swinging by the office to drop off our report in person and grab some more files to go over at home. With a large glass of wine.” Her eyes search Charles’ face for a moment. “Good luck.”

“Thanks,” Charles says honestly. With the career choices he’s made, he’s faced down more than one criminal with a blaster in their hands, and yet he feels more jittery right now than all of those occasions combined. Ororo can probably smell that he’s anxious. “I’ll see you tomorrow. Say hello to T’Challa for me.”

“I will,” she answers, her grin going soft at the thought of her mate. She and T’Challa are both alphas and have been together for as long as Charles and Ororo have been partners on the force. “Have a good night, Charles.”

Charles turns away as the hatch slides shut and she takes off, the shuttle heading straight back up out of the atmosphere. Erik has gotten out of his car, leaning against the side as Charles approaches.

Hello, darling, Charles greets him silently rather than calling across the lot, mustering up a smile. It feels like a small weight has lifted off his shoulders, seeing Erik, and he shares the sentiment with him as he closes the distance between them. Erik just makes him happy, no matter how long or trying Charles’ day has been.

“Long day?” Erik asks him as if he’s the mind reader here, floating Charles’ briefcase out of his hand and tossing it into the backseat of the car. His thoughts are open and relaxed for Charles, and Charles sinks his telepathy gratefully down into Erik’s comfortingly familiar mindscape.

“Mm,” Charles agrees, stepping up for a quick kiss. “How was your day?”

Erik lifts one shoulder in a shrug. “Bureaucracy at its finest. You putting your jacket back on, or want to throw it in the car?” His hands trail along Charles’ sides for a moment and Charles holds still, allowing them both to draw comfort from Erik’s alpha need for tactile reaffirmation, to touch his mate and confirm that all is well. Most people claim omegas are the ones who crave touch, drawing on evidence from how needy omegas in heat get about it, but Charles has always firmly believed that alphas need it just as much—like scenting, he thinks it does psychological wonders for mated pairs.

He smiles up at Erik. “I’m not sure what you expected, working for law enforcement.” He hands his suit jacket currently folded over one arm to Erik to put in the car, and as an afterthought takes his ray gun off his belt too, to join Erik’s blaster beneath the seat. “Ready?”

“Sure,” Erik says, locking up with his powers. “You’re filling out all the forms, though.”

Charles snorts. “I’m the only one who has all our health insurance policy numbers memorized anyway.”

“Which is more important on a daily basis, that or the number to the Thai delivery place?” Erik scoffs, but he slides his fingers through Charles’ and holds his hand on their way into the clinic.

The front waiting room is decorated more lavishly than the front hall of Charles’ family mansion.
that they live in, with expensive paintings on the walls and ornately carved chairs beneath a crystal chandelier that casts a gentle glow on the room. The front desk is manned by a droid, and even Charles can tell it’s one of the newest models currently on the market.

*You sure our insurance even covers this guy*, Erik asks dryly, *because he doesn’t look cheap.*

Charles gives him a mental nudge, resisting the urge to roll his eyes. He leads the way over to the desk, Erik trailing along behind him. “Hello, we’re new patients. We have a 4:00 appointment.”

“Good afternoon,” the droid greets them in a pleasant, computerized voice. It picks up a slim tablet and hands it across the desk. “If you could complete these forms while you wait, Dr. Essex will be with you shortly.”

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“Thank you,” Charles says, taking the tablet and turning around to survey the sitting area for a seat. Erik makes the decision for him, resolutely towing him over to the far corner, furthest away from the rest of the small smattering of people already waiting in the chairs. *Antisocial cave-alpha,* Charles thinks at him fondly as Erik resolutely plants himself on Charles’ left side, so he’s sitting in between Charles and the alpha sitting four chairs away.

*I’m a slave to my instincts,* Erik thinks wryly, and Charles elbows him in the side.

The first form is easy, asking for basic things like their address and other contact information, and then there are several lines dedicated to health insurance coverage. The second form asks for relevant health information such as when Charles’ last heat was, how many days it lasted, if they’ve conceived before or not. There are a few questions about Erik’s alpha lineage that Charles does his best with, ducking into Erik’s mind to gently lift out the answers he needs while Erik preoccupies himself with mentally profiling every single person in the room. Luckily neither of their families, as far as either of them are aware, have any histories of genetic diseases passing down the line, but Charles carefully checks off that they’d like to be tested anyway. Just in case.

The last form, when Charles gently swipes his fingers down the tablet’s glass screen, turns out to be a short questionnaire on their daily life and habits, and the further he reads down the higher his eyebrows climb.

*On a scale of one to five, how important is it for your psyche that I greet you at the door every evening when you get home from work,* Charles thinks to Erik, interrupting his thoughts sizing up the grumpy-looking alpha sitting on the other side of the room next to her nervous-looking omega.

*Five, definitely,* Erik thinks back absently, *my dick withers every time I remember you have a larger career than I do.*

Charles has to bite a finger to keep from laughing. *What about when you remember you live in my mansion, and not a house you bought for both of us like this questionnaire insinuates you should have?*

*Oh, I don’t worry about that,* Erik answers, *you’re basically my sugar omega and I’m your kept alpha.*

Stifling another strong urge to laugh, Charles puts the tablet aside, leaving the questionnaire blank, in favor of lacing his fingers through Erik’s again. It’s true that technically neither of them needs to work, and they could live extremely comfortably off the interest of Charles’ trust fund for their entire lives; it’s also true that even without the trust fund Charles’ position at the FBI makes him the breadwinner of the house anyway since it pays better than Erik’s at the VPD.
Charles knows a great number of alphas who wouldn’t like that their omega is making more money than them, but Erik has never cared. Erik hadn’t even cared about the trust fund remaining solely in Charles’ name—Charles had written him in as a beneficiary as soon as they’d been married, of course, but Charles remains in control of his own money while all the other high society omegas he remembers growing up with had their trust funds signed over to their alphas immediately, no exceptions. It was the expected thing to do.

Erik has his moments of bullshit alpha behavior, but they’re few and far between, and he’s never tried to exert any form of absolute control over Charles’ life beyond what kind of music they listen to in the car. The questionnaire doesn’t have a question about that, though.

“Dr. Xavier and Mr. Lehnsherr?” the droid calls, moving out from behind the desk. “If you could follow me, please.”

They stand, and the droid takes the tablet from Charles before leading them out of the waiting room and down a short hallway, their footsteps echoing slightly on the marble floor. Erik is stealthily feeling out the droid’s parts with his powers, mentally dismantling it in his head, but Charles is starting to feel jittery again. This appointment was his idea, but he has no idea what to expect. What if it turns out he and Erik can’t conceive children at all?

Adoption is a perfectly adequate alternative, he tells himself firmly as the droid shows them into Dr. Essex’s office. The office is just as opulent as the waiting room, and Charles pretends to ignore the wry look Erik shoots him as they sit down in the cushy chairs set before the desk while the droid shuts the door behind them.

Dr. Nathaniel Essex is seated behind his desk, and cuts a quick glance between them. “Hello, Dr. Xavier,” he says, reaching across the vast expanse of lacquered wood separating them towards Erik, and Erik doesn’t quite smile so much as show his teeth.

If the questionnaire hadn’t already been enough to send up a red flag for Charles, this would definitely do it. “Actually, I’m Dr. Xavier,” he says, clearing his throat and holding out his hand, “and this is my alpha, Erik Lehnsherr.”

“My mistake,” Dr. Essex says smoothly, but he still hesitates for a split second before shaking Charles’ hand. “Mr. Lehnsherr,” he adds, shaking Erik’s. He sits back in his chair again, appraising. “You are mated?”

“Were we supposed to bring our marriage certificate to prove it?” Erik drawls, and Charles sends him the sensation of being elbowed in the ribs. They’re both used to people assuming Erik is the one with a higher degree, especially since they don’t share a last name despite being happily mated for six years now.

“Erik was eager to dive into the workforce,” Charles says calmly, “but I decided to stay in school a little longer.” It’s the simplest explanation for it. Erik has his Master’s in forensic science, but Charles had gone for his PhD in criminology since he’d been aiming to be as impressive as possible upon applying to the FBI—and, if he’s honest, rub it in the faces of certain professors. Funnily, both of their undergraduate degrees are in sociology—they’d met in the program, and it had taken Charles a month to wheedle Erik into going out on a date in an atmosphere where alphas were supposed to do most of the pursuing—but Charles doubts Essex will find the story as heartwarming as he does.

“I see,” Essex says, expression unreadable, but out of professional respect and personal boundaries, Charles doesn’t attempt to read his mind. “I suppose then this is the answer as to why you left the new patient questionnaire blank.” He flicks a glance towards the holoscreen hovering above his
Correct,” Charles answers lightly, aware of the tenor of Erik’s thoughts growing icier and icier with every passing second, “I didn’t find any of the questions relevant to our lifestyle, I’m afraid. I’m not a house omega.”

Essex folds his hands on the surface of his desk. “May I inquire why you’re here, then?”

“Pardon?” Charles blinks, momentarily thrown. “Erik and I want to start a family. We haven’t been able to conceive yet, which is why we’re here. We’d like to be tested for—”

“Dr. Xavier,” Essex interrupts, and the way he says doctor implies what little merit he believes the title has, “I think you know just as well as I do the reason you haven’t had offspring.”

Erik does something with his powers, so quickly and quietly Charles doesn’t catch what it is, because he’s too busy staring at Essex while a loud rushing sound fills his ears. “You’re the expert with a medical degree,” Charles says, glad his voice comes out perfectly steady, “enlighten me.”

“You spend your days playing at being an alpha,” Essex says, a faint smile curling at his lips as if he finds this amusing, “and so you’re introducing stresses into your life that any good omega wouldn’t have. There’s no need for blood work or genetic testing, or frankly for me to waste my time and medical procedure where it’s not actually needed. You’re an omega who doesn’t know his place, and it’s just as much your alpha’s fault for indulging you in this behavior. If you wish to procreate and have offspring, there’s no mystery involved as to how you should proceed: start acting more like an omega, and perhaps your body will remember its own biology.”

“And what does acting like an omega entail,” Charles says coldly, “playing house all day and waiting for my alpha to come home from work?”

“If you want children, yes.” Essex doesn’t even blink. “By all means, keep your career if you wish and your alpha allows it. But expect to sacrifice starting a family if this is the case. Omegas who successfully reproduce are omegas who don’t put themselves in high-stress environments their bodies aren’t built to handle in the first place.”

“I think we’re done here.” Erik’s voice cuts through the fog that seems to be surrounding Charles, and abruptly he realizes he’s shaking with anger. Erik, however, is leaned back in his chair as if utterly relaxed, but regarding Essex in a way that tells Charles he’s imagining exactly what it would look like if he pulled Essex apart using the iron in his blood. “I think I’ve heard enough bullshit for one day.”

“I apologize, Mr. Lehnsherr, if I have offended you,” Essex says, his gaze snapping to Erik and Charles is dismissed, just like that. “It was not my intention.”

“Clearly it was your intention to offend my mate,” Erik replies, in a pleasant tone of voice that somehow manages to make the room feel like it’s dropped several degrees in temperature. “So you understand, then, your apology doesn’t strike me as sincere.”

Let’s just go, Erik, Charles says as a loaded silence stretches out for several seconds, suddenly wanting nothing more than to be very far away from this office, please, let’s just leave.

Erik sends him the impression of squeezing Charles’ hand in acknowledgement. He stands, continuing to stare down Essex who remains still and impassive behind his desk. “I wonder, are you as bigoted to the faces of your omega colleagues?”

“D6-R3 will escort you from the building,” Essex says, and the door to his office slides open to
reveal the office droid waiting patiently outside.

Charles stands up too, taking a breath. He’s angry, hurt, and worst of all, ashamed, even though logically he knows there’s no reason for him to be—Essex is wrong, so, so wrong, and yet the creeping doubt Charles tries so hard to ignore and push away is thriving, pushing the idea to the forefront of his mind that it is his fault, somehow, they haven’t been able to conceive.

He’s not sure what kind of facial expression he’s wearing, but the walk from Essex’s office out through the waiting room and back to their car passes in a blur, one of Erik’s hands resting warm and solid against the small of his back the whole time. Erik walks him around to the passenger side and pops the door open with his powers, but Charles stops short of climbing in and turns into him, wrapping his arms around Erik and pressing close for a moment.

What did you do back there in his office, Charles asks after a few moments, not quite trusting his voice again just yet. Erik’s got his arms down around Charles too, rubbing one hand slowly up and down along Charles’ spine.

“I might’ve busted some of his plumbing,” Erik says smugly, his chest vibrating against Charles’ face with the words.

“Erik,” Charles hisses, startled into speaking again, “you’re a police officer.”

“So?” Erik says. “That guy was an asshole.”

“Fix it,” Charles says, lifting his head to look up at Erik, “I know you can still reach it from here.”

“No,” Erik says calmly. “It’s a very small leak, odds are he won’t notice until there’s a nice, big water spot in his ceiling. He won’t be able to prove it’s my fault, if he even remembers us by then. And he can definitely afford to cough up a couple thousand credits.”

Reluctantly, Charles doesn’t press, letting the issue drop and resting his head against Erik’s chest again. Erik is livid, a deep-seated anger roiling inside him like the ocean in a storm, but gone are his explosive days where that anger would manifest in violent outbursts of his powers. Charles is glad Erik has better control of his powers, but he wishes the new alternative wasn’t Erik bottling up his anger and dealing with it alone.

Are you alright, Erik asks him silently, pressing his lips against the top of Charles’ head.

I will be, Charles replies, because there’s no use hiding he’s upset. To be told by a licensed medical professional the reason he isn’t getting pregnant is because he’s dared to have a career has rattled him. Erik used to debate with him endlessly during their undergrad years, accusing Charles of being all levels of naive, but Charles has never been able to bring himself to believe, even as a telepath, that someone—especially a doctor, a scientist—could be so deeply steeped in their backwards social beliefs to ignore science itself. Essex hadn’t even wanted to give them an actual examination.

Erik holds onto him and breathes, in and out. Charles isn’t listening in directly to Erik’s thoughts right now, but he’s tuned into the quiet murmur of them, like he’s standing outside a ballroom and can hear the chatter of voices inside without overhearing anything distinct. It’s comforting in its own way, with the added bonus of still allowing Erik the space to work through his own thoughts without Charles constantly hovering inside his mind.

“I’m sorry,” Erik says at last, with a small sigh, “I don’t know how to make this better.” The admission must cost him, going against every alpha instinct to provide, provide, provide for his
omega mate, but Erik has always been upfront with Charles.

“Me neither,” Charles admits. He’d thought they would walk out of this appointment with certainties, not more uncertainties and insecurities.

Erik shifts slightly, but he doesn’t let go. Charles presses one palm against the center of Erik’s back, in between the dip of his shoulder blades and shifting muscles. Erik hides it well, and masks it with his cold anger at Essex, but Charles can feel he’s disappointed too. Why can’t they just be like every other mated pair and have kids, Charles thinks wearily, with the same aching longing he always gets when he imagines children of their own. Even beta couples, rare as they are, have better luck than this.

*This isn’t your fault,* Erik thinks firmly, the words solidifying like stone in his head with conviction. Charles has always loved how Erik thinks, straightforward and unwavering; Erik is unshakable once he’s decided on something. *The reason we haven’t been able to have any children yet isn’t because you have a job. You said this guy was recommended?*

*Janice from the DOI said he was phenomenal when she and her omega were having problems,* Charles says dully. *In hindsight, I think her omega is a house omega so I guess Essex would’ve been more willing to work with them in the first place.*

“There are plenty of other doctors out there,” Erik says aloud, still stroking Charles’ back. “Here on Visir, or if you want to go off-planet, then I’ll go off-planet with you. And you know how much I hate space.”

Charles smiles into Erik’s jacket. “Oh, Erik, so romantic.”

“You want romantic? We have a *sex schedule.* That’s the height of romance as far as I’m concerned. But I think we should stick to it right up through your next heat, and if you’re still not pregnant after that, *then* we’ll go see another doctor. One that we’ve both vetted. Thoroughly.”

Smiling ruefully, Charles turns his face up towards Erik’s. “Deal.”

Erik leans down to kiss him, short but sweet. *Now it’s sealed. The pact is complete.*

“You’re ridiculous,” Charles tells him, but he’s suddenly a little overcome by how much he loves Erik, and how glad he is it’s the two of them in this together.

“No, I can feel you having feelings about this,” Erik says, maneuvering Charles around and steering him into the car. “We’re going to go to the gym and punch things until we can’t move our arms properly, and then we’re going to go home and order the unhealthiest takeout option we can find in the drawer.”

Charles climbs into the car willingly while Erik walks around to the driver’s seat. Thinking on it, he finds he likes the idea of punching something right now a lot. “And then you’re going to fuck me in the shower.”

“And then I’m going to fuck you in the shower,” Erik agrees, starting up the engine, “twice.”
Summers is sound asleep when Erik finds him buried nearly neck-deep in folders down in the cold, dark basement the VPD calls the filing room. Erik feels a little bit like a zombie himself on the account of not having gone to sleep until the early hours of the morning—he hates seeing Charles sad—but judging how Summers is slumped back against the shelf he actually spent the night here, so Erik takes comfort in the knowledge that however shitty he feels, Summers is guaranteed to feel ten times worse once he’s awake.

He briefly considers upending this morning’s mug of poison from Charles over Summers’ head, but who knows, the smoothie concoction might be potent enough to render him bald and Erik doesn’t hate the kid that much. Instead, he bends down and picks up the folder resting conspicuously open in Summers’ limp hands, and it only takes two seconds of scanning the file inside for several things to align in Erik’s head all at once.

“You stupid bastard,” Erik sighs, closing the folder and tucking it under one arm. Summers doesn’t even stir, a small frown furrowing his brow even in sleep.

Pulling out his comm, Erik flips through the scant few messages he’s already accumulated despite the early hour, including a small I love you message from Charles he makes a mental note to reply to later when he’s done dealing with this new shitstorm, and opens up his sound settings.

Five seconds later, Erik has the immense pleasure of watching Summers nearly shit himself as he jerks awake to the blaring klaxon alarm ringtone blasting from the tiny speakers of Erik’s comm, banging his head against the shelf and almost knocking over a stack of folders as he jolts up into a sitting position, disorientated and confused.

“Morning, Summers,” Erik greets him cheerfully, and the look Summers gives him when he realizes Erik is standing over him holding his comm in his face would eviscerate a lesser being.

“The fuck is your problem,” Summers mutters, shoving Erik’s hand away and dragging himself over a few inches to put a little distance between them.

What the fuck, exactly, is Erik’s problem, were he to actually list it out, is a long and complicated conglomerate of many things, none of which are currently here nor there. “Get the fuck up, Summers,” he says in the same cheerful tone while making sure his smile conveys the exact amount of deep shit Summers is in, “it’s time for a little chat.”

For a second it looks like he’s gearing up to come right back at Erik with a scathing retort, but then Summers’ gaze zeroes in on the file still tucked up under Erik’s arm and his mouth snaps shut. He picks himself up wordlessly and follows Erik out of the room, leaving Erik with the appropriate amount of silence to decide how exactly he’s going to handle this.

Everyone has some kind of sob-story origin as to why they signed up to be a cop, Erik has found over his long years of being just that. Some people get into it because they have a family history of cop work and bar habitation, or they’re from a long line of distinguished officers and not joining the force as the next alpha in line amounts to shitting on your entire family’s legacy. Other people, like Charles, are hopelessly naive and want to pursue justice in a corrupt system with the dream of reforming things from the inside.

That isn’t being entirely fair to Charles, Erik thinks as he drops down into the chair behind his desk and Summers sinks down into one of the rickety pieces of shit across from him, not making aggressive eye contact for the first time since Erik has met him. Charles joined the FBI because his particular gift of telepathy allows him to do what many interrogation-slash-negotiation specialists cannot: read his subjects, whether they’re a prime suspect in a cell room or a terrorist hovering on the edge of committing a catastrophic crime, with 100% accuracy. With that kind of intimate
knowledge, he can put a stop to any kind of shit before it really starts.

If anything, Erik himself belongs in the category of the naive, because he joined the VPD partly because he abhors space so following Charles into the FBI was out of the question, and mostly because he wanted to be more on the frontlines, as it were, of mutant crimes and mutant treatment by the police. It’s been a pet project of his for years to get a specifically mutant task force together to handle mutant crimes, which is why he’s always at figurative war with Moira since the funding hasn’t been scraped together yet—not that it’s her fault, as Charles likes to remind him, but the day where Erik admits he doesn’t actually have (much) a problem with Moira is the day he drinks ten of Charles’ poison smoothies in a row.

Alex Summers, it appears, belongs to the fourth category: people who had someone close to them get hurt, and they join the force to get closure—or revenge, in one form or another.

Tossing the folder down onto the desk between them, Erik kicks back in his chair and waits. A corner of the file inside slides out, the names Christopher and Katherine Summers visible in black ink on the paper. Trust the VPD to still keep backup files on real paper.

Summers still won’t make eye contact, looking instead off to the side at the wall where Erik has a shitty holorender of their precinct’s district of Visir. His entire body is tense, but surprisingly he doesn’t seem ready to blow. He’s terrified, Erik determines, studying him as the seconds drag out longer and longer without any kind of snide remarks or defensive glares.

“Let me guess,” Erik says at last, “you lied on your applications and all of the alphas proctoring your tests were too caught up by the fact you’re an omega to care about cross-checking anything else about you.”

“Yes,” Summers says, his voice low and hard. He’s glaring now, but he still won’t look directly at Erik.

“And you thought you’d do a little extra sleuthing on the side when no one was looking.”

“You’re the one who has me working on a case the lieutenant told us to drop,” Summers snaps.

“Yes,” Erik allows, leaning forward to flick open the folder so the file is in full view, “but I’m also not a direct relative of any of the deceased.”

Now that the file is open, a small hologram picture opens up, Christopher and Katherine Summers both beaming at the camera. Christopher holds the hand of a tall, skinny boy, age seven or eight at the most, with black hair and red sunglasses that are almost comical in how they’re too large for his face, while on her hip Katherine holds a little blond toddler who can only be Alex, tiny pout and all. They’re standing in front of a playground, the background slightly blurry, but the picture still has all the hallmarks of a happy little family.

Erik does not—will not—imagine what it would be like to have a picture just like it of him and Charles on his desk.

“Burglary one night,” Erik says, watching Summers’ fists slowly clench. “Guy got spooked when your parents caught him. He had a blaster. Shot them both and ran.”

“I know what happened,” Summers says through clenched teeth.

“Then you know it was a hit and run. Guy could be anywhere in the solar system.”

“But I can track him down,” Summers snarls, finally turning his glare onto Erik full-force with
bloodshot, red-rimmed eyes, “I remember what he looks like because I was fucking there.”

Going by the dates on the file, Alex would’ve been about ten years old at the time of his parents’ murder. Ten years old, and a direct witness to his parents being shot down in cold blood because he’d gotten up for a drink of water in the middle of the night, only to stop just in the doorway of the living room because he’d heard voices. Ten years old, when he and his older brother Scott were orphaned and left utterly alone in the world.

“Are you going to report me,” Summers says mockingly, because Erik hasn’t said anything yet. “Get them to take my badge and kick me off the force? It’s what you’ve fucking wanted from the start.”

“Kid,” Erik says flatly, “if I had you kicked off the force because you joined up in the first place because you have a personal vendetta to fulfill, I’d have to resign too.”

What Erik tells people about the reason he became a cop is true: he wants to be at the forefront of how the police handle mutant crimes and mutant suspects. What he never tells people—except for Charles, who has always been Erik’s one exception to many things—is why.

It shuts Summers up at least, because he doesn’t say anything else, going back to glowering silently, still obviously waiting for the other boot to drop. At least he doesn’t ask what Erik means. They’re not at the point where he’s unlocked Erik’s fucking tragic backstory yet.

Erik resists the urge to massage his temples, feeling a headache coming on. Dealing with this kind of shit first thing in the morning after a long night of Charles all wrapped up in his head isn’t ideal. He’d much rather be spending the morning brooding over a cup of coffee alone while sorting through all the residual emotions left over from having a miserable telepath mentally merged to his brain for twelve hours, not playing two-bit psychologist to his greenhorn partner he’s been stuck with.

“I’m going to take this file,” he says at last, picking up the folder and sweeping all the pages neatly inside, “and keep it here with me.” As he speaks, he reaches down with his powers to the single locked drawer in his desk and reforms the melted metal so the drawer is accessible again. “I’m going to pretend I didn’t find you sleeping in the goddamn file room, and you’re going to take yourself out to the bullpen, park your ass at a desk, and process parking ticket complaints until either your fingers start bleeding or I come and get you. Are we clear?”

Summers’ eyes follow the file as Erik slides it into the drawer, but he grits out, “Transparently.”


Summers throws him one last glare, but it’s tinged with too much suspicion and honest confusion to be as paint-peeling as he probably wants it to be. He picks himself up and stalks out of Erik’s office, and Erik imagines he’d slam the door too if it wasn’t an automatic sliding one.

Figuring it’s a pretty safe bet the kid is too freaked out by Erik’s discovery of his little secret to do anything other than exactly what he’s been told to do, Erik turns his attention to remelting the lock on the drawer again so it’s sealed shut. Technically with his powers, Summers would be able to slice Erik’s desk in half no problem and get the file back, but if it comes to that it would be safe to assume he isn’t afraid of Erik reporting him to Moira anymore anyway.

Erik has no intention of reporting the kid to Moira, though. It would definitely get him written up, and even though Moira is fair, Summers would still be put under a huge amount of scrutiny and more likely than not be put under an investigation—especially since, like it or not, he’s an omega
—that would probably ultimately earn him a discharge from the police force: the kid isn’t wrong to expect people are waiting for an opportunity to kick him out. If Summers wants to quit now that Erik’s put a stop to his little mission, that’s his own choice to make, but Erik at least isn’t going to help the system stamp him out.

And besides, he...empathizes with the kid, even if the realization nearly gives Erik hives. Definitely too much time spent with Charles curled up in his head last night, the way Charles likes to when he’s feeling particularly down. Erik’s arms are still sore from the punching bag they’d nearly destroyed between the two of them at the gym, but Charles always puts him through an entirely different kind of wringer—mental, rather than physical. Not that Charles means to; being mated to a telepath means a lot of oversharing when it comes to thoughts, feelings, emotions—so their highs are electrifying, but their lows...

Last night had been very low.

The various metal fixtures Erik has collected in his office over the years all rattle softly for a moment when his powers flux in his agitation. He still half-wants to go back to Essex’s office and wrap a pipe around the smarmy jackass’ neck, but even that would do nothing to change the fact that they still don’t know why Charles hasn’t gotten pregnant yet. Erik tries not to let Charles overhear his own worries since Charles is already worried enough for both of them, but Erik wants to give Charles the family he knows Charles badly wants so much. It’s nearly driving Erik’s alpha instincts insane, because he’s not providing what his mate wants, but he doesn’t know what to do, and Charles is sad, and they’re both stressed, and they’re both, Erik suspects, so tired.

And there’s a psychopath planet-hopping around the solar system just to kill omegas, but the police force has decided to sit back on its ass and let someone else handle it. It’s times like these that are truly in the running for Erik’s supervillain origin story, he thinks as he pulls up his desktop computer and waits for the holos to load. Charles already thinks he looks great in a uniform, and it wouldn’t take much tinkering to create his own. Maybe with some kind of helmet to keep his identity secret.

There’s an email from Hank sitting in his inbox, subject line John Doe. Without even bothering to read the full message Erik gets up, because a morning of harassing Hank down in the lab is better than a morning of stewing in his office. Hopefully Hank has something good to show for his day of radio silence.

As a second thought he grabs his mug on his way out the door, because even if he can’t convince Hank to classify Charles’ smoothie as hazardous waste, Erik can still steal a warning label to put on the outside of the mug anyway.

★

His fingers might not be in danger of bleeding, but it takes all of five minutes of reading the most pathetic excuses and pathetic grievances submitted by people who have nothing better to do with their lives than complain for Alex’s eyes to feel like they’re bleeding instead. Fortunately the bullpen is mostly empty, the beat cops already out on their morning patrols, so at least he only has the leftover stench of alphas to deal with instead of the alphas themselves.

After the first half-hour, though, Alex shoves the tablet away from himself and gives into the temptation to put his head down on the desk because screw it, Lehnsherr’s probably reporting him
to the Lieutenant right now anyway so it doesn’t matter if he processes these stupid parking ticket complaints or not.

Alex hadn’t meant to fall asleep in the file room. Lehnsherr had fucked off early yesterday, with some kind of weird half-baked excuse about an appointment or something, which Alex hadn’t believed for a second; the lazy fucker just wanted to go home early. It had seemed, at the time, to finally be Alex’s golden opportunity to figure out where all the old cold case hardcopy files are kept and find the one on his family.

Except then it’d taken him hours and hours to find the file in the mess—it had quickly become apparent that even though the VPD still kept hardcopy files on every case, no one gave a shit about them—and then, once he’d had the folder in his hands, it’d taken him another inordinately long time to make it all the way through the file, even as sparse as it is. Alex had lost count of the number of times he’d nearly accidentally lit the entire room on fire, for the first time in years his grip on his powers threatening to fail as all the memories of that night came pouring back in with every line on the pages.

Then he’d poured over the file again and again, going over every little detail in hopes of seeing something new, something different that the detective in charge of the case ten years ago hadn’t. What he should’ve done was take the file home—it’s not like anyone would have ever missed it—but he’d been unable to move, rooted to his spot between the dusty aisles as he’d read and reread the details of last night of his parents’ lives over and over until he finally must have passed out from exhaustion.

Fucking stupid, Alex thinks morosely. Now Lehnsherr knows, and as soon as he tells MacTaggert it won’t take long before the whole police force knows that Alex really is just another emotional omega who couldn’t handle it, because it hadn’t escaped Alex’s notice Lehnsherr mentioned something about having his own personal vendetta—but as an alpha, Lehnsherr’s probably expected to be hot-blooded and angry, but god fucking forbid an omega feels the same way.

But Alex has been angry for ten years now and he knows he can track down the asshole who killed his parents. Cold cases aren’t always unsolvable. He just needs the time and resources of the VPD.

“Hey, you alright?” A gentle hand lands on his shoulder and Alex nearly jumps out of his skin, lurching upright in his seat, muscles tensed for a fight. The alpha standing next to Alex’s chair lifts his hand quickly, holding it up in a conciliatory gesture as he backs off. “Sorry, man. Didn’t mean to startle you.”

Alex opens his mouth, ready to deliver a scathing retort, but then he’s hit with a whiff of the alpha’s scent and the words die in his throat. He’s never met an alpha who smells so utterly divine, and normally Alex would be disgusted by how much he sounds like Scott by thinking that, but right now he’s too caught up in the heavenly pheromones coming off the alpha who suddenly looks as dazed as Alex feels.

“Hi,” the alpha says, and distantly Alex is aware of how the alpha’s grip on the tablet he’s carrying has suddenly gone tight, “I’m Armando Muñoz.”

“Alex Summers,” Alex finds himself answering. The scent of every other alpha he’s ever met is too strong and overpowering, but Armando Muñoz’s really is heavenly, definitively alpha yet fresh where all the other alphas are musky.

Armando looks like he’s trying very hard not to inhale too deeply. “You a cop?”

The question brings Alex down a little from whatever high this alpha’s scent is giving him. “Yes,”
he says warily, bracing himself for whatever condescending line is going to come out of the alpha’s mouth next.

“Impressive,” Armando says, but he sounds like he actually means it. “Good for you, man.”

“Uh,” Alex says blankly, “thanks?”

“Sorry, I sound like such an asshole,” Armando says, chagrined, and Alex isn’t even sure how to respond. Slightly embarrassed, Armando clears his throat. “Maybe you can help me. I work for the DA and I’m looking for Lieutenant Moira MacTaggert. I’ve got some case files she needs to go over and sign.”

“Yeah, um,” Alex says, trying to get up without knocking into the desk or his chair, “I can show you where her office is.”

“Great, thanks,” Armando says, smiling, “I’m obviously new so I’m still trying to learn my way around.”

“Nice,” Alex says, but neither of them move, and oddly Alex has the feeling Armando is desperately trying to come up with something more to say too.

It’s all broken by Lehnsherr, who chooses at that moment to stride into the bullpen without looking up from whatever he’s carefully typing out one-handedly on his comm. “Summers,” he says to announce his presence, and then finally looks up and catches sight of Armando.

“Morning,” Armando greets him smoothly, stepping forward and offering him a hand. Alpha posturing, Alex thinks as he watches them shake while mutually sizing each other up, he’ll never understand it. “I’m from the DA’s office. Looking for Lieutenant MacTaggert. You’re Erik Lehnsherr?”

“Did Frost mention me,” Lehnsherr says without a hint of surprise, dry as dust.

Armando grins, and something within Alex relaxes somehow but he pushes the feeling away, annoyed with himself. He’s just glad they’re not about to start an alpha dick-measuring contest. “Yeah, she did.”

“Everything she told you is a lie,” Lehnsherr says, “except for the 21st birthday story. All of that is one hundred percent truth, and I’m alpha enough to admit it. She isn’t.”

Armando laughs, and Alex feels like every nerve ending in his body lights up at the sound. “I don’t think I’ve heard that one.”

“You should definitely ask her sometime,” Lehnsherr says seriously, “and make sure you snap a picture of her expression when you do.”

“I sort of like my mind unscrambled,” Armando says, and Lehnsherr huffs out a laugh.

“MacTaggert’s office is down the hall, third door on the left.”

“Appreciate it, brother,” Armando says, giving him a nod, before he looks back at Alex and smiles again. “Great meeting you, Alex. Hopefully I’ll see you around sometime again?” He sounds like he’s trying to stay casual, but Alex can detect the hopefulness in his tone.

“Y—” Alex has to clear his throat when his voice refuses to come out properly the first time.

“Yeah. Yeah, definitely,” he says, and when Armando grins again he has to steady himself under
the guise of leaning casually against the desk at the rush of pheromones—he can feel himself getting wet, for god’s sake; just a tiny trickle that fortunately doesn’t last long or get any worse, Alex thanks his lucky stars. Half of him wants to be mortified but alarmingly the other half wants another whiff of Armando’s scent, his body suddenly hot and achy.

Armando’s gaze drifts across him one more time before he finally tears his eyes away and walks out of the bullpen, disappearing around the corner. Alex is left in a small haze, almost drunk off Armando’s scent still lingering slightly in the air and all of his emotions in wild turmoil.

“Ah, young love,” Lehnsherr says suddenly, jolting Alex out of his stupor. The asshole has his arms folded across his chest and he’s smirking at Alex. “You two are adorable, and I’m not the type of person who uses the word adorable very often.”

“Fuck off,” Alex snaps, turning away to hide how his face is burning. “You don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about.”

“On the contrary,” Lehnsherr says dryly, “I happen to know what it feels like when you first meet someone you’re so compatible with it’s obnoxious.”

“Somehow I doubt that,” Alex says snidely, because he doesn’t envy whatever omega Lehnsherr is mated to by arrangement. “Compatibility is just a Holowood myth that society has taken upon itself to shove down all our throats.” At least that’s what Alex has always believed. But he’s not sure how else to label what happened just now when Armando Muñoz walked into his life because there’s no way they didn’t just have instant, chemical compatibility. The thought scares him even as a shiver he does his best to contain jolts through him.

“Sure, Summers,” Lehnsherr says, and if he’d sounded amused or in any way condescendingly placating Alex really would turn around and punch him in his fucking face, but Lehnsherr’s voice is calm and inflectionless.

“Mind your own fucking business,” Alex grits out through his teeth. His skin still feels hot, like it does when he’s shot off too many rounds of plasma in short succession with his powers, or how he starts getting warm when his heat is on the way. But his powers are a little burnt out right now after last night, and his next heat is still weeks away. Is it even possible to induce a sort of off-schedule, mini-heat just by bumping into someone?

He’s not sure how long Lehnsherr lets him simmer in silence, but eventually Lehnsherr says idly, “McCoy’s come up with a small lead on our John Doe, so I’m heading out to follow up on it.”

“What is it?” Alex asks, feeling composed enough to turn around and face Lehnsherr again. Lehnsherr isn’t even looking at him, instead preoccupying himself with smoothing out the large biohazard warning sticker he’s stuck on the outside of his traveler’s mug.

“John Doe’s actual name is Andrew Gieger,” Lehnsherr says, “and he has a sister living over in Block 74.”

“Let’s pay her a visit,” Alex says, but Lehnsherr shakes his head.

“No, I’m going to pay her a visit. You get to stay here and work on those parking ticket complaints, which I see is going swimmingly.”

Alex scowls. “Aren’t I supposed to be your partner?”

“You’re on probation, for the shit you’ve pulled,” Lehnsherr says calmly, and Alex glares at him mutely. “Consider yourself lucky this is the only punishment I have time for right now. If
MacTaggert comes looking for me, tell her I’m drowning myself in the bathroom sink. She’ll roll her eyes and drop the subject, it’s a very useful tactic.”

Fucking psychopath, Alex thinks sourly as Lehnsherr flips him a wave on his way out. He wants badly to be helping with the omega-killer case, but at the same time he’s a little relieved to not have to spend any more time with Lehnsherr right now. His hormones still feel like they’re in overdrive, and Alex isn’t horny, thank god, but he definitely has a jittery, butterflies-in-his-stomach feeling that only grows stronger every time he reimagines Armando’s voice.

It’s confusing and frustrating that he can’t hate it as much as he thinks he should. Armando is just another alpha, he tells himself as he slowly sinks back down into the chair at his desk. He’ll only end up trying to control you, and probably just sees you as a good fuck.

“Summers, where’s Lehnsherr?” MacTaggert pokes her head into the bullpen, looking annoyed.

“Drowning himself in the bathroom sink,” Alex says stiltedly.

With a small sound of disgust, she rolls her eyes. “Never mind, I know the files well enough on my own,” she says, and withdraws, leaving Alex struggling to resist the strong urge to bang his head against the nearest wall.

The sister turns out to be a bust, not that Erik was expecting her to be a gold mine of information to begin with. When she finally answers her door after ten minutes of knocking, she takes one look at Erik’s badge and slams the door shut, several locks clicking into place before Erik even has time to break the news of her brother’s death.

Locks generally don’t provide much of an obstacle for Erik, but he refrains from dismantling Lisa Geiger’s door and instead slips his card under the door before taking himself back down to the elevator. He knows a couple judges he can harangue into signing a search warrant if it comes to it, but he suspects she’ll be turning up at the police department herself in due time. Guilty consciences are powerful when left to fester, and if she was planning on skipping out of town she would’ve already been gone by now. Erik will be seeing her again, and it’ll be in his office.

That, and Charles always gets all frowny and disappointed whenever Erik bends the law a little, and a frowny and disappointed Charles is a force of nature.

He’s left slightly at loose ends, so he decides to eat up the rest of the day by dropping in on his various CIs rather than returning to the office. It’s always good to turn up unexpectedly to check in on them, and see what kind of shit is being passed around in the city’s underbelly, rumors or otherwise. But things are quiet right now, for the most part, and Erik doesn’t even have the luck of digging up anything new about someone going around murdering omegas—that, at least, can be credited to Andrew Gieger being the killer’s first victim so far on Visir, but Erik has a grim feeling it’s only a matter of time before more dead people turn up.

With nothing new to sink his teeth into and worry at like a bone, Erik is left with plenty of time to think about him and Charles again, and he’s in full brooding mode by the time he pulls into the garage at the end of the day. Charles texted him earlier this afternoon to say he’d be home late tonight, so Erik doesn’t bother doing anything about dinner yet. He ends up in the den, folded into
the couch and considering mustering up the effort of searching out where the remote for the holoscreen has gotten to, even if the news usually only ends up making him angry.

“C4,” he calls, because the little droid hasn’t even bothered to come greet him yet, “where—”

Without warning, the entire room explodes.

Charles pushes his way through the human wall of gawkers and reporters, not holding back with a mental nudge if someone is slow to get out of the way. The cluster of people is contained to the landing pad and bridge leading out to it, blocked off by a police officer and flickering security holotape.

“Back off,” the officer warns when Charles finally shoves his way to the front, “this is private property and—”

“I live here, this is my house,” Charles snaps, patience worn thin. “Let me through, I need to find my mate.”

The officer squints at him and reaches for his radio. “Let me just call—”

Unwilling to wait a second longer, Charles pulls out his FBI badge and swipes it across the holotape, which flashes green in approved entry. He doesn’t even wait for the officer to react, stepping through the projected barrier and breaking into a jog as he heads around the side of the house, leaving the crowd behind.

Panic bubbles up again as he rounds the corner and takes in the small army of police cars and fire transports gathered on the front lawn. He’d gotten the call half an hour ago that there had been an explosion at his house, and everything after has been a blur.

From what he could see as his shuttle was coming in for landing, a huge chunk of the western wing of the house is caved in, fire control bots still hovering over the debris spraying water across patches of smoldering flames. There are dozens of crews scouring every inch of the rest of the house, presumably looking for traces of more explosives, but right now Charles doesn’t care about the house, their belongings, any of it—he needs to find Erik.

There’s a small cluster of med transports on the other side of the police cars, and Charles breaks out into a run. Erik, he calls out wordlessly, reaching out for that dear mind so familiar and loved, Erik, Erik—

A spasm of pain rips across their link, the backlash making Charles flinch even as he draws his telepathy up short, cutting the connection. His panic gives way to relief, however, so potent he nearly staggers the rest of the way over to the med transports: Erik is alive.

“—and let me up,” Erik is saying irritably, snapping at the paramedics surrounding him where he sits on the back edge of one of the transports, and he’s halfway to attempting to stand up until Charles is there, practically slamming into Erik and wrapping his arms around him tightly.

“You’re alright,” Charles breathes out even though it’s doubtful Erik can hear him. He doesn’t try to touch Erik’s mind again, instead soaking in Erik’s physical presence as Erik wraps an arm
around Charles in return, dragging Charles awkwardly half-on top of himself as he sinks back down into a sitting position. Charles draws in deep breaths of Erik’s scent, a sort of temporary calm dropping down around him and dissipating the worst of his panic now that he’s found his alpha—now that he knows Erik is okay.

“Back off,” Erik says sharply to the paramedics, trying to shift as if to bring Charles down beside himself and get his body between them and Charles, but Charles digs in his heels in.

“Let them do their job,” he says, giving Erik a meaningful squeeze before letting go just enough so he can straighten again, standing over Erik between his legs. It’s killing him not to be able to touch Erik’s mind, and he runs his hands up and down Erik’s shoulders continuously. “Are you alright?”

“Minor concussion,” Erik says, faintly rueful, which would explain why even telepathy is painful right now. Peering intently into his eyes, Charles can tell he’s still slightly dazed, his hands clumsy as he settles them on Charles’ hips. “Nothing broken.”

“Your alpha is lucky,” says one of the paramedics, busy packing up a supply kit. “The only reason his skull isn’t crushed is because he managed to drag a sheet of metal over himself before the roof caved in on him.”

“Our wall might be a little ruined,” Erik admits, and Charles shakes his head.

“I don’t care about a wall,” he says, and then has to stop for a moment when his throat grows tight. God, he’d almost lost Erik tonight. If Erik wasn’t a mutant with extraordinary powers, Erik would be dead.

“Hey, it’s alright,” Erik says into the pause, because Charles still hasn’t said anything yet, “I’m fine. Probably pissed off about this entire ordeal, once my head stops ringing, but I’m also pretty tired.”

“The babbling is normal,” the paramedic says when Charles looks over at her, “his brain is a little rattled. Your Head Alpha has already cleared us to take him to the hospital for a scan just in case.”

“He said his concussion was minor,” Charles says, even though the majority of him is already beginning to doubt it.

“Yeah, that would be his alpha pride talking,” a second paramedic says, sounding amused. He’s a beta, so Charles figures it’s safe to trust his assessment. “He’s got a full-blown concussion. And I’m not about to be the one to tell Dr. Edie Lehnsherr I didn’t bring her son to the hospital, you know?”

“I’m fine,” Erik says loudly, and Charles sighs, albeit fondly.

“Your mother wants you to get scanned at the hospital, just in case,” he says, “and I agree with her, so you’re outvoted.”

“Nothing is fair,” Erik says with a dramatic sigh, and Charles laughs despite himself. “If you insist.”

“I do,” Charles says with a small smile, wishing he could reach out with his telepathy and show Erik just how glad he is Erik’s still here to be complaining.

“Doesn’t really matter what your omega thinks,” the first paramedic says, her eyebrow quirked. “It’s up to your Head Alpha, not him.”
It’s a snap change, Erik going predatorily still under Charles’ hands and his demeanor shifting entirely as he turns his head to take her in. “You can strap me into the back now,” he says, and the edge in his voice never fails to make Charles shiver, just as it never fails to make lesser alphas quail and even betas slink away, “my omega wants me to go to the hospital.”

Neither of the paramedics respond, the alpha averting her gaze and the beta suddenly making himself busy and picking up a tablet, jotting a few notes down. Charles leans down to hug Erik closer again, pressing in as much as he can given their slightly awkward positioning.

“Easy, tiger,” he says quietly, but he’s smiling a little. “You know I can fight my own battles.”

“I like fighting them for you,” Erik says, starkly honest. His hands move restlessly across what he can reach of Charles’ lower back, feeling him out, and he pushes his nose into Charles’ throat, inhaling deeply.

“I know, darling,” Charles says, tilting his head so Erik can scent him better. It’s very hard not to crawl into Erik’s lap right now, but then they won’t want to part. “I’ll catch up with you at the hospital in a little while.”

Erik doesn’t say anything at first, and Charles can feel the hesitance in every line of his body. “Be careful,” he says at last, though he makes no move to let go of Charles yet, “I don’t know how or why the explosion happened. If it was foul play…”

“It’s unlikely anything else will happen tonight,” Charles assures him, “but I will be.”

“We’re heading out,” another paramedic announces, and Charles gently begins to untangle himself from Erik’s grip. “You hop in first, and we’ll get your alpha settled.”

“Actually I’m staying here,” Charles says. He gives Erik a brief kiss, murmuring, “I’ll see you again soon. I love you.”


Charles laughs. “You think?” he asks dryly, but dutifully waves goodbye as the paramedics get Erik up and into the back of the med transport. He watches the shuttle pull away, engines glowing as it picks up speed and altitude, taking off for the hospital.

Erik is safe, he tells himself, allowing himself a moment to let relief sink down to his bones. His heart is still pounding, nerves strung out on the vestiges of his adrenaline that’s been pumping ever since he got the phone call. Later, he thinks, he’ll be exhausted, but for now he gathers himself up and heads over towards where he can feel Moira’s mind.

Moira is wrapped in a jacket, speaking into her comm near one of the police cruisers, but she flashes Charles a tight smile when she sees him approaching. “Right. Get it signed by tomorrow. Thanks,” she says, ending her call. “Hi Charles. I’m glad you and Erik are okay.”

“Hello, Moira,” Charles greets her, relieved she’s addressing him familiarly instead of professionally. “Thank you. What’ve we got?”

“Not much, so far,” Moira admits, shifting the tablet in her hands so Charles can see. He leans in for a closer look, examining the 3D layout they’ve rendered of his house. “We’re still sifting through the rubble for evidence. Unfortunately, I’m leaning strongly towards foul play. You and Erik both have racked up enough enemies over the years as it is.”
“And I’m afraid this house hasn’t run on gas for at least two centuries,” Charles murmurs, swiping slowly across the panoramic image. The west wing of the mansion has the most damage while the east wing is virtually untouched, which makes sense given the east wing is completely closed up and sealed off; he and Erik live primarily on only a couple floors of the west wing. Worrying, though, if this truly was an attack: whoever is responsible has been observing them, if they knew which part of the house to hit.

“Have either of you received any kind of threats lately?” Moira asks him intently.

“No,” Charles says, shaking his head. He’s not handling any high-profile cases right now that would garner him any kind of attention—the press hasn’t caught wind of the serial killings yet—and Erik hasn’t been on any kind of warpath recently. “I haven’t heard from my stepfather or stepbrother in ages, either.”

“Is it likely they’d go to these kinds of extremes?” Moira’s aware of the situation with Kurt and Cain, so at least Charles doesn’t have to explain.

“I don’t think so,” Charles answers truthfully, “they’re angry I got the house and certainly want me out, yes, but half-destroying it seems rather counterintuitive.”

Moira looks pensive. “I suppose so. Forward me whatever contact information you have for them at some point tomorrow, and I’ll send a couple officers out to check up on them anyway.”

“It’s really not necessary,” Charles says, wincing slightly. Sending the police to the Markos’ front door would only be like poking an anthill. “My stepbrother is more likely to have used himself as a wrecking ball than go through the trouble of rigging explosives, believe me.”

“If you’re sure,” Moira says dubiously, and then a blast of radio chatter interrupts them, Moira’s name barely audible in all the racket. “Hold on,” she says to Charles, and then picks up the receiver. “Did you guys cover sector three yet?”

Charles tunes out the radio jargon, instead looking up at the looming front of the Xavier Mansion. He’s always had mixed feelings about this house, coinciding with his mixed bag of memories of growing up here. Only after he and Erik got married did it ever start feeling like an actual home, but now their home has come under unknown attack.

It’s the last thing they need right now, on top of everything else, and for a moment Charles has to fight to quell an odd surge of laughter.

“—and someone get me a render of which parts of the house are stable enough to access,” Moira is saying when Charles turns back around again, “Xavier’s going to need to gather up some belongings.”

“Thank you,” Charles says as the radio crackles with affirmatives. Erik may view Moira with thinly-veiled disdain coupled with grudging acknowledgement that she is his boss and therefore worthy of at least a mote of respect on occasion, but Charles has always liked Moira—she’s brutally efficient, and anyone who can put up with Erik’s bullshit on a daily basis deserves appreciation.

“No problem,” Moira answers, blowing the loose strands of hair that have fallen out of her bun off her face with a puff of breath. “There’s not much else we can do here but wait, so you might as well get your stuff and go make sure Erik doesn’t tear down the hospital out of boredom.”

“Oh, he knows better than to try that,” Charles answers wryly, “because if he did, he’d have to
answer to his mother."

It’s a long two hours before his mother even has time to see him, caught up in the middle of a surgery while Erik is admitted to the hospital and run through all the poking and prodding it takes before he’s finally given his scan and then left alone in a private room, propped up in a bed but with orders not to fall asleep no matter how drowsy he feels. Erik wastes no time in scaring off all the nurses, recovered enough to feel grumpy about his entire situation, and he’s in the middle of clicking through all 500 channels on the hospital holoscreen for the thousandth time and wondering where the hell Charles is when Edie steps into the room.

“I’m fine, Mama,” Erik complains when she immediately flashes a penlight into his eyes, leaving him temporarily blinded as bright spots bloom across his field of vision.

“I’ll be the judge of that,” she answers matter-of-factly. “How is your head?”

“Sore,” Erik admits. He has a roaring headache, which hadn’t done the nurses any favors in regards to his temper.

“Any memory loss?” Edie asks casually as she flips through the holoscreen hovering at the end of his bed displaying all his vitals and other bodily readings.

“No.”

“Powers?”

“Working fine.” Erik demonstrates by briefly swiveling the holoscreen projector. “No pain, aside from the headache I already have.”

“Good,” Edie says, perching on the edge of his bed. Gently she smooths a hand through his hair, an old gesture of comfort that has Erik inhaling softly, letting her familiar scent—strong and potent as ever even beneath the layers of antiseptic, disinfectant, and general hospital smell—lull him into a state of calm. “Where is Charles?”

“On his way here,” Erik answers. “I saw him briefly at the house but—” he breaks off with a jaw-creaking yawn, “—he stayed behind to see what kind of damage control we’ll have to do.”

“No sleeping,” Edie says, tapping his cheek gently, “but good. You can both stay here for the night if you’d like, that’s why I had you put in one of the private rooms.”

Erik would roll his eyes if he wasn’t certain the action would make his head twinge. “No thanks, we’ll probably just get a hotel room. But I’m surprised the hospital director didn’t offer me his own house on the account of me being your son.” Everyone in the hospital loves his mother, to a degree Erik refuses to be jealous over. He’s her only son, so they’ll all forever be deprived of having her as their Head Alpha anyway.

“He may have offered a place to stay until you and Charles determine whether the house is still livable or not,” Edie says wryly with a grin. Erik inherited his own infamous-within-the-precinct grin directly from her, but not many people know Edie’s is infinitely sharper.
Erik snorts. “No. We’ll be fine. The west wing is what’s damaged, but hopefully the east wing is still structurally sound. We can just move into a few rooms over there during rebuilding.”

“Or maybe Charles will want out of that house altogether,” Edie says, “you know he hates it.”

“But he also refuses to let it fall into his stepfather and stepbrother’s hands,” Erik says flatly. Charles has a complicated relationship with the hulking Xavier Mansion that’s been in his family for 15 generations or something equally ridiculous; he hates the house and the memories it holds but through a combination of a misguided sense of familial duty and sheer stubbornness is too proud to give it up. Erik secretly hates it too, and all the ostentatious wealth and privilege that oozes from its lofty rafters, but that was a pill he had to swallow a long time ago when he first married Charles—he took Charles as his mate, but with him came the Xavier name and everything attached. “It’s up to Charles what we do. It’s his house.”

Edie smiles fondly. “I’m glad you’re alright, my darling.”

“I just can’t wait to get out of here,” Erik says, “so I can start tracking down who did this.”

“You’ll be discharged as soon as your scan results come back,” Edie assures him, “though I have a feeling Charles might have a thing or two to say about you turning into a vigilante for revenge.”

“I’m a police officer, it’s my job to take down bad guys.”

“Yes, and I can see how no personal bias will be involved at all.”

“They blew up our house, Mama!”

“I know,” Edie says firmly, “which is why I want you to be careful. For my sake, not just for Charles’. I worry about you two.”

“I will, Mama,” Erik says seriously, taking his mother’s hand. Edie is small and wispy, for an alpha, but she’s tough as nails. Erik often forgets she’s starting to get on in years, and won’t always be the tireless force of nature he remembers from childhood, stepping out of long shifts in the hospital’s surgical ward and switching straight to bullying Erik into doing his homework and carting him around for all his extracurriculars without breaking a sweat. Edie never took a new mate after losing her omega, so it was always just the two of them in their family unit, until Erik met Charles. “You don’t have to worry.”

The door slides open with a soft hiss to admit Charles, looking tired and hefting a dufflebag. He breaks into a smile when he sees Erik and Edie, setting the bag down on a chair and going immediately to Edie as she rises to greet him.

“Charles,” Edie says warmly, wrapping him up in a warm hug. “I’m glad to see you. I’m so sorry to hear about the house.”

“It’s a little surreal,” Charles admits, submitting to her ministrations as Edie begins to pet his hair absently. Because Charles is the only omega in their small family unit, Edie is far more tactile with him than she would be if their family was larger. Erik knows Charles loves it, having come from an emotionally distant family, and watches with the same calm contentment he always gets when presented with visual proof of just how much his Head Alpha approves of his omega—and how much his omega loves his mother in return. Charles and Edie loved each other from the very first moment they met, and while Charles will go on and on about the psychology behind the dynamics between Head Alpha, alpha, and omega, citing the positive healthy effects reinforcing familial bonds have on each of them, Erik just files it under things that make him feel unequivocally at
peace with the world.

“It’s just a house, though,” Charles continues, breaking Erik out of his mini-stupor, “I’m just glad Erik is alright.” Ever polite, he waits until Edie has released him before coming over to the bed, sinking down on the edge of it and giving Erik a soft smile. “How are you feeling?”

“Headache,” Erik admits, since Charles is probably picking up on it anyway.

Charles exhales slowly, his eyes lingering on the neat line of stitches cutting just above Erik’s left eye. “It’s a miracle you got away with only a headache. That looks ugly.”

“I’m fine.”

Charles, who never takes Erik at his word when it comes to medical issues, glances at Edie. “He’ll be alright,” she says, frowning. “The bio-stitches will be done in an hour or so. He won’t even have a scar. But he’ll have to stay here for another hour or so for concussion monitoring.”

“The doctor said I was fine,” Erik grumbles. He’s had worse injuries before; this headache is nothing more than a minor inconvenience.

His mother levels a stern look at him. “I talked with her before I came in here. She said you were probably fine. Once you’re cleared, you can leave. Until then, you’re not moving a muscle.”

Erik wants to complain that this is a waste of time, that every second he spends laid up in bed is another second the fucker who blew up their house is running free, but he knows his mother won’t budge and neither will Charles. So he swallows his protests and fights down the restless urge to get up and get moving.

Edie’s comm link lets out a trill, and she digs it out of the pocket of her scrubs with a sigh. “I have to go, boys. I’ll try to check up on you before you get discharged, but if I don’t see you before then, I expect you to call as soon as you’ve gotten settled. If you need anything, don’t hesitate to ask.”

“We will,” Charles promises.

Edie moves toward the door, then turns in the doorway and pauses. Running a fond look over both of them, she says softly, “Be careful, you two. No more hospital visits, understand?”

“Not if we can help it,” Erik huffs. Even though he’d spent a good chunk of his childhood hanging around the hospital after school waiting for his mother to finish up with surgery or patient rounds, he’s never been fond of the place. He knows for a fact that Charles hates being here, too; the psionic din of the hospital always gives him a terrible headache if he stays for too long. They’ll both be more than happy to keep their visits to a minimum.

The door slides shut automatically after Edie leaves, sealing out the noise of the hallway outside. With a sigh, Charles nudges Erik until he scoots over and then curls up next to him, his head pillowed on Erik’s shoulder. “I’m glad you’re okay,” he murmurs, pressing his nose underneath Erik’s jaw where his scent is strong. “I was—god, when I got that call, I was so scared. Don’t ever do that to me again.”

Erik wraps an arm around him, tugging him close. “It could have been either of us,” he says after a long minute. It’s a thought that’s been plaguing him ever since the headache had subsided enough for him to think again. “It was just chance that I got home earlier than you did. If it had been you…”

If it had been Charles, he would have been dead. That’s the terrifying reality. There was no way he
could have protected himself from the explosion, and Erik would have been the one to get the call, Erik would have been the one to come home to the news that—that Charles had—

“Don’t,” Charles whispers, lacing their fingers together. “Don’t think about that.”

“It could have been you,” Erik says roughly. “I’m glad it was me.”

“Don’t say that,” Charles says, his voice hard with anger. “This should never have happened in the first place.”

Erik runs his hand up Charles’ back, letting his fingers dig into the tense muscles of Charles’ shoulders. “Do we know anything about how it happened?”

“Not really. I checked the security feeds at the house, but the cameras were disabled for two hours before the explosion. Whoever did it knew enough about the fail-safes to disable the alarm that should’ve told us the cameras had gone off. Alarm system was hacked, too, so we have no info on where or when they entered. Bomb squad’s working on the scene, but I haven’t heard back from them yet. Moira’s taken control of the case for now. She said she’ll call as soon as they find anything.”

“So we have nothing.”

“Not yet.”

Huffing in frustration, Charles noses at Erik’s throat again, seeking out his mate’s scent to calm himself down. Erik nuzzles at Charles’ hair for the same reason, inhaling the uniquely sweet smell that has always belonged only to Charles. Before they’d met, Erik had harbored very little interest in scenting; he’d given it a try before with other omegas, but it had only been vaguely pleasant, nothing more. Charles’ scent, on the other hand, can alter his mood in seconds—a distinct quality of perfect compatibility. It can rile him up just as quickly as it can quiet him. He searches it out now for reassurance, to steady himself.

“I got us a hotel room for the night,” Charles says, his breath warm against Erik’s neck. “We can’t go back to the house until it’s been cleared, and besides, I don’t think we should go back until we know more about who’s targeting us and why.”

“Allright.” Erik glances above the door, where the digital numbers of the clock glow a faint blue. “The doctor should be back in once they have the results of my scan, and then we can go.”

“Only if they say you can go,” Charles says sternly, in a tone that brooks no argument. “We aren’t taking any chances.”

One day, Erik thinks, Charles is going to be a very bossy father. “Yes, sir. But I’m fine, really. The headache’s better, as you can probably tell.” He raises a hand to touch the stitches over his eye, which are already mostly dissolved. “See? Not even a scratch.”

Charles shifts up onto the pillow so that they’re eye-level and runs his thumb over the stitches. “An inch lower and you might have lost your eye.”

“I would’ve made a shitty pirate.”

“I think you’d make a very dashing pirate,” Charles argues. “Like Turngully Douglas.”

Erik wrinkles his nose. “Turngully Douglas? Really? He wrecked his own ship navigating one of the easiest flyways in shallow space. At least give me some credit here.”
“He also led the FBI on a merry chase from star system to star system for close to two years,” Charles points out. “That’s pretty bloody impressive for a two-bit criminal with few resources and fewer friends. Also, you’re a terrible pilot, darling. Let’s not pretend you would’ve fared any better on that flyway.”

As much as Erik would like to argue, it’s true. There’s a reason he hates space, and a reason why Charles always pilots whenever they have to go anywhere that can’t be reached by car. Pride smarting, he grumbles, “I guess it’s good thing I didn’t lose my eye then.”

“Probably for the best,” Charles agrees, snuggling close.

They stay curled up with one another until the doctor returns at the top of the hour. Dr. Barrios is tall and lean and looks as if she’s permanently annoyed by the state of affairs around her. But Erik isn’t disconcerted by her constant frown; he remembers her occasionally bringing him candy when he’d had to stay late at the hospital waiting for his mother to finish her shift. It’s not her fault she has the most spectacular resting bitch face this side of the galaxy.

“So,” she says, barely even batting an eye at the sight of Charles in bed with Erik, “good news: your concussion seems to be resolving nicely. You might have that headache for a little longer, but there’s no long-term damage. Scans came back looking fine. Just take it easy for a day or two, and keep tabs on any new symptoms that pop up. If you’ve got nausea, vomiting, fainting, I want to hear about it, understand?”

Erik starts to nod, winces when the ache behind his temple throbs, and says, “Yeah, I understand.”

“So he’s good to go?” Charles asks, sitting up.

“I’ve signed the discharge forms,” Dr. Barrios says. “They’ve been processed. A nurse will come and see you to the door. But,” she adds, shooting Erik a strict look, “if your headache doesn’t clear up by tomorrow, I want you to come back in. Got it?”

“T’ll make sure he does,” Charles assures her.

Dr. Barrios nods. “I’ve got other patients to see, so I need to get going. Try not to get knocked around anymore, okay?”

“I’ll do my best,” Erik says dryly.

Once she’s gone, Charles slides off the bed and moves to collect his things. Erik sits up and pulls the monitoring cuff off from around his wrist. Almost immediately, a nurse appears in the doorway with a frown and comes over to take the cuff from him. “Please don’t remove this on your own. It confuses the vital signs monitor when the cuff is removed without authorization.”

“Sorry,” Erik mutters, even though he’d known that. “I’ve been discharged.”

“I know,” the nurse says. He taps a code into the cuff’s display and sets it aside on the bedside table. “I was coming to see you out.” He glances at Erik’s hospital gown. “We’ve got some spare clothes in the lost and found. I’m sure there’s something there your size.”

“No need,” Charles says, holding up the duffle. “I brought him a change of clothes.”

You thought ahead, Erik projects carefully, testing it out.

After a moment, he feels Charles’ mental touch, much more hesitant than it usually is. When do I not? Charles replies. Then, after a moment: Your head feels better. This doesn’t hurt?
Not really. The headache’s still there, but he doesn’t think it’s bad enough that Charles can feel it through their mental link, not without trying at least.

I can still feel it, Charles says, but it’s not unbearable. Aloud, he says, “Let’s get you changed so we can get out of here, darling.”

The nurse disappears while Erik shrugs out of the hospital gown and climbs into the sweatpants and t-shirt Charles had brought. When he frowns down at the FBI logo on his chest, Charles smiles apologetically and says, “The closet took a hit in the explosion. I tried to salvage as much as I could, but it was mostly only my clothes left.”

Erik thinks back to all the times Charles had complained about his wardrobe and takes a moment to wonder at how convenient it is that his clothes were destroyed. “Nothing survived?”

“Not even that horrible maroon cape you wore unironically,” Charles says solemnly.

“You let it burn, didn’t you?” Erik accuses.

Charles’ eyes go wide and innocent, the way they always do when Charles is very, very guilty. “How could you accuse me, your dearest husband, of such a terrible thing?”

“Because I know my husband very well,” Erik says, narrow-eyed.

The nurse chooses that moment to sweep back in with a hoverchair. “I can walk,” Erik says, but the nurse insists that it’s hospital policy. So he settles into the hoverchair and allows Charles to push him down the hall to the front desk, where he thumbs through several discharge forms on a datapad and finally signs himself out.

Outside, Charles hails a cab and helps Erik into the backseat. Once the nurse has supervised Erik’s transfer into the cab, he disappears back into the hospital, pushing the hoverchair. Charles gives the driver the address of the hotel, and then they’re speeding off along the upper flyway, zipping across the city so quickly that the buildings blur together into one long, glossy surface.

Now that Erik no longer has to concentrate on staying awake, all of the exhaustion of the day sinks into him at once. He slouches down in his seat so he can lean his head against Charles’ shoulder, and the combination of Charles’ comforting scent and the gentle hum of the cab’s engine gradually lulls him to sleep.

* 

Walking into work the next morning turns out to be like walking into a shitstorm. Apparently Lehnsherr’s house exploded last night, and no one has any idea why. When Alex arrives bright and early, guys from yesterday afternoon’s shift are still on duty, none of the night shift people have left yet either, and everyone is grumpy and short-tempered thanks to a combination of long hours and the personal feel of the attack, since Lehnsherr is one of their own.

Not sure what he should even be doing, Alex edges into Moira’s office as soon as she looks like she has a spare second. The lieutenant doesn’t even look up from her datapad as she says, “Good, you’re here. Erik won’t be in today, obviously, but I need you to run some things he needs from the office over to him since you’re his partner.”

“Is he okay?” Alex asks as she pulls out her comm to scroll through her inbox. He might not like Lehnsherr, but that doesn’t mean the asshole deserves his house blowing up on him.
“Oh, he’s fine,” Moira says, finding the message she was looking for. A moment later, Alex’s comm pings with a new message after she forwards it to him. “There’s the list of what his majesty says he needs. The address to the hotel he’s staying at is in there too. You can take one of the squad shuttles.”

“Yes ma’am,” Alex says, and gets out of her office just as her desk line starts ringing.

It takes about half an hour to track down everything Lehnsherr wants, and by the time Alex pulls the shuttle out onto the flyway, he merges straight into the morning rush hour. Just his shitty luck. With a sigh, he switches on the radio, finds some really mediocre mainstream shit, and enjoys it way too much, mostly because it isn’t Lehnsherr’s ancient “music.”

Lehnsherr’s hotel is way in North District, Block 168, so Alex turns the shuttle’s autopilot on and spends most of the drive reading whatever he can access about Lehnsherr’s house explosion last night. CSU’s still combing over the scene and the fire squad hasn’t submitted a report yet, so there really isn’t much to go on. There’s a preliminary statement from Lehnsherr that pretty much just says, “I came home and the whole house fucking blew up in my face,” which is completely devoid of useful facts. There’s also a note from Moira at the bottom of the case file that just reads, “Statement from Charles Xavier needed asap.”

Alex frowns at the note, puzzled. Xavier? What’s he got to do with this? Alex’s mind races, trying to piece what they know together. Does this mean whoever targeted Lehnsherr has something to do with the serial case? Does this mean they were onto something?

Shit. His thoughts fly instantly to Scott. He’s hundreds of miles away, but who knows how far this maniac will go to try to cover up the murders? This fucker—or fuckers, if there really is a partner—blew up a fucking police detective’s house. It doesn’t get any bolder than that.

He’ll have to ask for protective detail for Scott and his mate. He has no idea who commands the precinct where Scott lives, but surely MacTaggert has connections over there. She can work something out, and if she can’t, then Alex will find a way to make sure Scott and Jean are safe. There’s no way in hell he’s getting them caught up in his job.

Though it’s not as if Jean can’t handle herself. Scott’s alpha is a powerful telepath and kinetic, so she can not only read minds, she can throw shit around as much as she wants with her mind too. A protective detail may really only serve to get in her way if she and Scott are attacked.

Alex sighs when he comes to the conclusion he’ll have to call later and give them a head’s up. It’s not that he doesn’t like Jean. But she’s technically his Head Alpha, since his parents are dead and he hasn’t married into another family yet, though it’s only really by default since Alex is only related to her because his brother’s mated to her. It doesn’t help that as far as Scott’s concerned, Jean hung both moons and every single star in the sky. Jean is nice, Alex likes her, but there’s a reason he lives as far away from them as he can, where it’ll be harder for her to enact any kind of Head Alpha authority over him.

He still really hasn’t even told them about entering the police academy and landing a job yet, either, which will make tonight’s conversation a thousand times even more fun. He can already hear Scott’s stiff, displeased tone.

The autopilot chimes once, signaling their arrival, and Alex takes manual control back in order to guide the shuttle into the hotel’s carpark. Once he’s inside, he double-checks Lehnsherr’s room number, then takes the lift up to the 48th floor. This is a nice place, Alex thinks, eyeing the polished brass railings and the sleek wood paneling of the elevator doors. Who the hell decided to put Lehnsherr up here? Definitely not the department—if it had been up to them, Lehnsherr would
probably be holed up in some shitty motel room with no windows and a cot for a bed. But there’s no way Lehnsherr can afford a swanky place like this, not on his detective salary.

The lift doors pop open with a soft *ding*. Alex steps out and nearly trips over a SOLIS all-purpose droid. It lets out an upset trill and backs up with a warbling, “Pardon me!”

“Yeah, uh—Go ahead.” Alex steps aside, trying not to stare. He’s only seen this model in prototype magazines. He hadn’t even thought they’d be active until next year at the earliest.

Honestly, what the hell *is* this place?

Lehnsherr’s room is at the end of the hall. Alex presses the call button next to the door, and when the robotic door greeter says, “Please state your name,” he leans into the small microphone next to the button and says, “It’s Summers. I’m here with your stuff from the station.”

No one answers for a minute. Lehnsherr’s probably still asleep, Alex thinks, annoyed. No sense in waking up early if he isn’t coming in to work, after all. Then again, the guy just got concussed, so Alex figures he’s earned a little sympathy. Tamping down on his impatience, he waits for another minute. Then a horrible thought strikes him—what if Lehnsherr’s concussion was more serious than the doctors thought? What if he’s lying unconscious somewhere in there and no one knows he needs help? What if he’s *dead*?

*Jesus Christ.* Alex slams the call button again and, when prompted, says, “It’s Summers. You know, your partner.” Holding still, he presses his ear to the door—nothing. “Hey, man, are you dead or anything, right?” *Please don’t be dead, holy shit.*

He’s just about to see if the door’s somehow unlocked when it hisses open, startling him so much he almost takes a step back. He opens his mouth to snap at Lehnsherr for being a slow, lazy asshole—and then freezes.

“Good morning,” says Charles Xavier. He sounds faintly breathless, and he looks—well, *casual*. He’s not in his neat suit today; instead he’s wearing a t-shirt and sweatpants, and he’s barefoot, hair barely combed. But that makes no sense. Why the hell is he *here*, in Lehnsherr’s hotel room? And why does he look like he just rolled out of bed?

And why the *fuck* does he smell like Erik Lehnsherr rubbed himself all over him?

Xavier takes in Alex’s bewildered expression and cocks his head. “Oh dear. Erik didn’t say anything?”

“Say what?” Alex demands, confounded. What’s going on here? So the explosion *did* have something to do with the case? Is the FBI fully involved here?

“Perhaps you’d better come in and sit down,” Xavier says, stepping aside and waving him in.

Alex follows him mechanically. He’s so distracted by Xavier’s presence that he barely even notices how ridiculously lavish the suite is, barely even stares at the huge-ass chandelier that glitters from the ceiling in the middle of the main room. It seems like he and Xavier are alone here, even though Lehnsherr’s scent is all over the place. There’s no other sign of his asshole partner anywhere.

“Where’s, um…where’s Detective Lehnsherr? I stopped by to drop some things off for him.”

“He’ll be out in a moment,” Xavier says. “Can I offer you some coffee? Juice? We’ve got breakfast as well.”
“I, uh…” Alex stares dazedly at him as he pads into the kitchen and starts up the coffee machine. “A coffee sounds good.”

“One coffee, coming right up.”

He putters around the kitchen fetching coffee grounds, some milk from the fridge, and a box of cereal from the cabinets above the microwave. Alex watches in confused silence as Xavier pours himself some cereal and stirs in some milk.

“Uh, no offense,” Alex says finally, unable to restrain his curiosity any longer, “but what are you doing here?”

Xavier sets down his bowl and meets Alex’s eyes. “I’m here because my house was blown up last night and I needed a safe place to stay.”

Alex stares at him, absolutely baffled. “What? Your house, too?” That doesn’t make any sense. He hadn’t heard of a second explosion. So unless Xavier was in Lehnsherr’s house for some reason…

His brain reaches a terrible conclusion and immediately short-circuits.

Xavier smiles gently at him and thumbs the ring on his left hand. “Yes, Erik’s my husband.”

“What,” Alex says in horror before his brain-to-mouth filter can kick in. “You’re married? To him?”

Instead of getting offended, Xavier merely looks like he’s trying not to laugh. “Was I supposed to be single?”

“To him?” Alex repeats, his voice coming out high-pitched and strangled.

“Oh, Alex,” Xavier says ruefully, “forgive me for prying, but it seems you haven’t given Erik very much benefit of the doubt. Though to be fair, I see he hasn’t made an entirely good first impression, either.”

A sudden bolt of horrible clarity hits Alex, leaving him stunned. Tiny Mrs. Feigenbaum in the Jewish deli, asking after Charles. Charles, as in Charles Xavier. Charles Xavier is married to Erik Lehnsherr.

“But,” Alex says blankly, even though distantly he’s aware of exactly how rude he’s being, “but you’re Charles Xavier.”

Xavier takes a thoughtful bite of cereal. “Ah, I see,” he says once he’s swallowed, “because I’m an omega with a career, you assumed I was the strong, independent, don’t-need-no-alpha type?”

Alex can feel his face heating. “Uh,” he says, intelligently.

“You’re not the first to take one look at my political views and assume I’m unmated,” Xavier says, amused, “but Erik and I have been married for six years now.”

Six years. Charles Xavier, Alex’s childhood idol, has been married to Erik Lehnsherr, Alex’s asshole of a partner, for six years. How has Alex never heard of this? How did he not notice?

“We don’t generally advertise our connection when we’re on duty,” Xavier continues, “but I figured Erik might have mentioned something, as you’re his partner. I see now that he didn’t.”

“No,” Alex says with a burst of hot anger and embarrassment, “he didn’t.”
Thinking back though, there had certainly been clues. The way Lehnsherr had ogled Xavier at the crime scene the first time Alex had met him. Mrs. Feigenbaum at the deli. She’d called Xavier by name. How could Alex be so fucking dense?

“Ah, Erik,” Xavier says, pushing off the kitchen counter. Alex turns and follows his gaze to the bedroom door where Lehnsherr emerges, tugging at the hem of the FBI t-shirt he’s wearing, which must belong to Xavier. And come to think of it, Xavier’s own shirt is too tight in his broad shoulders, but a size too big for him in torso length. They’re wearing each other’s clothes. What kind of weird domestic shit is this?

“Summers,” Lehnsherr says, crossing over to the kitchen. He wraps an arm around Xavier’s waist and leans in for a quick kiss, a motion so casual that Alex knows it must be routine. Then Lehnsherr busies himself with the coffee machine, flicking Alex a questioning look over the top of it. “You said you brought me what I asked for?”

“Uh—yeah.” Still slightly shellshocked, Alex hands over the datapad he’d pre-loaded with Lehnsherr’s requested documents. “Everything’s on there.”

“Good.” Lehnsherr sets the datapad on the counter and opens a cabinet full of mugs. “You staying for breakfast?”

Alex darts a look at Xavier. On the one hand, he’s dying to get away from the busywork at his desk and back on this serial case. No doubt Xavier and Lehnsherr are going to discuss what happened to their house (their house, Jesus), and Alex wants to be here for that, wants to be in the thick of the action. But on the other hand, he kind of needs to stagger away and sit down for a while to process the fact that Xavier and Lehnsherr are married. This whole time, Alex has been feeling kind of sorry for whichever poor bastard ended up chained to Lehnsherr, and all this time, it’s been freaking Senior Special Agent Charles Xavier. His whole world’s been turned upside down and shaken violently.

“At least stay for a bite before you go,” Xavier says, smiling kindly at him.

With a jolt, Alex remembers that Xavier is a telepath and wonders if Xavier’s been silently observing his mental implosion this whole time. How fucking mortifying.

“I should…get back to the station,” he says weakly.

But Lehnsherr says, “Stay. We have a couple of things to discuss anyway. You want a coffee?”

“He said he’ll take one,” Xavier tells him.

Lehnsherr pours a mug for himself and one for Alex. “So,” he says, pushing a basket of cream and sugar over along with the mug, “I’m guessing you’ve read up on what happened last night.”

Alex nods, collecting himself. “There’s not much to go on yet. The file was pretty blank.”

“It hasn’t even been a full day yet,” Xavier says, stirring his cereal. “It’ll take time for the fire squad to go through everything.”

Alex looks at him, wondering how much he can push. He and Lehnsherr are officially off the serial case, but does Xavier know they’ve been working on it unofficially? Does he care? The feds have a reputation for being huge pissbabies about jurisdiction, but Xavier seems pretty easygoing.

Instead of diving directly into that potential shitstorm, Alex takes a sip of his coffee (worlds better than the break room shit at the station) and offers, “Sorry about your house.”
Xavier shrugs. “I always hated it anyway. Besides, it was due for a few renovations. The western wing was growing very old.”

“The western wing?” Alex echoes. He’s starting to get a distinct feeling in his gut that the day’s still got a number of surprises left in store for him. He really hates surprises.

“We had a big house,” Lehnsherr answers smoothly. “It doesn’t matter. What matters is that we work on figuring out who did this. Could have something to do with Charles’ work, could have something to do with mine.”

“Or both,” Alex says.

“Or both,” Lehnsherr agrees.

Xavier eyes both of them for a moment, then heaves a sigh. “You’re still working the serial case, aren’t you?”

“You didn’t really expect me to drop it, did you?” Lehnsherr asks.

“No, I didn’t. But I’d hoped you’d respect my authority in the case and trust the FBI to deal with it.”

“I trust you,” Lehnsherr says coolly, “but not the FBI. Not about this.”

“I’m well aware,” Xavier sighs. He finishes with his bowl of cereal and turns to rinse it out in the sink. “As much as I love you, you’re the biggest pain in the arse on the planet sometimes.”

“I’m the biggest pain in your ass all the time,” Lehnsherr says with a smirk.

Alex stares at him in horror. “Tell me that was not a sex joke.”

“That was not a sex joke,” Lehnsherr repeats unconvincingly. He’s grinning like a maniac at Xavier, who looks torn on the edge of exasperation and fondness.

“This is literally the worst day of my life,” Alex says flatly, pushing away from the counter. “I’m leaving.”

“Sit down,” Lehnsherr orders. “We’re not done talking.”

Alex bristles at the command. “Look,” he snaps, “I’m glad you’re alive and shit but I’ve got work to do. So excuse me if I don’t want to sit around listening to you two—” The next word comes out slightly strangled. “—flirting.”

Lehnsherr does the thing with his face where he probably thinks he’s grinning but in reality he’s just showing off every last tooth in his head. “Too much for your delicate sensibilities, Summers?”

“I think we’ve given the poor boy a bit of a surprise,” Xavier says mildly, absently leaning over to snag Lehnsherr’s mug and take a sip. “He didn’t know we’re married.”

“What,” Lehnsherr says, nonplussed. “What do you mean, you didn’t know? Wasn’t it obvious?”

“No,” Alex says hotly, despite the wry look Xavier gives him over the rim of Lehnsherr’s mug.

“Huh,” Lehnsherr says. “You scent-blind or something, Summers? Because I’m a hundred percent certain Charles smells like me.” He leans over and presses his nose against Xavier’s cheek and takes a deep whiff, while Xavier huffs out a small laugh. “Yep, definitely my mate.”
“I’m not an alpha, I don’t go around scenting people to see whether they’re mated or not,” Alex says coldly.

Rather than take Alex’s words as intended and get offended, Lehnsherr merely shrugs as he straightens. “Clearly we’re not exchanging scents strongly enough, Charles. Maybe that’s our problem.”

Before Xavier can answer, his comm lights up with an incoming call, buzzing softly on the countertop. Xavier scoops it up and glances at the ID before offering it out to Lehnsherr. “It’s your mother.”

“She’s calling you,” Lehnsherr says pointedly, stealing his coffee back.

“Yes, because she knows you won’t answer your comm until after noon. Talk to your mother.”

With a sigh, Lehnsherr snags the comm out of Xavier’s hand and answers it, turning and walking back towards the bedroom. “Hi Mama. No, there’s no pain. Yes. No, I’m fine—” The door snaps shut behind him.

It takes Alex a few moments to realize he’s still staring after Lehnsherr in a daze. When he blinks and looks around, he finds Xavier watching him thoughtfully. “Er...I guess I should go now.”

“Erik still wanted to talk to you,” Xavier reminds him, pulling out one of the stools tucked underneath the counter and sliding onto it. “He won’t be on the phone long.”

“I just don’t get it,” Alex bursts out, finally hitting his breaking point now that Lehnsherr’s out of the room again. “How are you mated to him?”

“Luckily for you, I can tell you’re genuinely distressed by this,” Xavier says reproachfully, with a small frown, “so you’re not just saying that to be rude.”

“Sorry,” Alex says, shamefaced. “I just...” He grapples silently for a moment, trying to find the right words since he’s probably already offended Xavier enough this morning. “You’re a progressive omega. And he’s...every single stereotype of hyper-alphalinity.”

“Erik certainly hasn’t made a good first impression on you at all, has he?” Xavier asks, raising a rueful eyebrow. “Erik certainly is a hot-blooded alpha and he’ll go through his posturing with the best of them, I’ll give you that. But overall, where it counts? Erik is just as progressive as you or I. Not,” he adds with a small chuckle, “that I need to defend my marriage to you.”

“No, no, of course not,” Alex says quickly, feeling even more embarrassed. He shifts uncomfortably, wanting very much to be about five thousand miles away from this conversation.

Either Xavier senses it, or he decides to have mercy by coincidence. “No harm done. But if you’re worried about Erik not wanting you as a partner because you’re an omega, don’t be.” He smiles wryly. “He’s married to an omega spook, so I assure you he doesn’t have any problems with an omega cop.”

Alex finds himself smiling back, albeit weakly. “Right.” Xavier might think the world of him, but it doesn’t change the fact that Lehnsherr hates Alex anyway, and hasn’t wanted him for a partner from the start.

“Ah,” Xavier says, only confirming he’s listening in to Alex’s thoughts. “My apologies, you’re thinking rather loudly. But Erik’s last partner...” Xavier trails off pensively. “It’s not my story to tell. You’ll have to ask him one day, when you’re both on firmer ground with each other.”
It’ll be a cold day in hell when he and Lehnsherr are buddy-buddy, Alex thinks, but he keeps the thought to himself. Or at least he thinks he does. Xavier, at least, doesn’t say anything.

Lehnsherr returns just as Alex is finishing up his coffee. Handing the comm back to Xavier, he slides onto one of the counter stools and says, “So, Summers, does MacTaggert have you on anything today?”

Alex shrugs. “She just wanted me to bring you what you asked for. I’m probably on parking ticket duty again.” He shoots Lehnsherr a baleful glare for that.

As always, Lehnsherr ignores Alex’s glower and carries on coolly. “No, you’re not. If MacTaggert doesn’t have you on something, then I want you to go straight to the crime scene and take a look around.”

“The crime scene?”

“My house,” Lehnsherr says impatiently. “Look, I’m laid up here because someone—” he glances unsubtly at Xavier, “—says that I need to take the day off and rest, even though all the doctors completely cleared me.”

“Your mother didn’t,” Xavier points out.

“What my mother doesn’t know doesn’t hurt her.”

“Oh, she would know.” Xavier taps his comm meaningfully. “If I have to call her here to yell at you in person, I will. Don’t try me.”

“Traitor,” Lehnsherr grumbles. “Anyway, Summers, you go to the house, see if there’s anything that sticks out to you. Anything that looks off, looks funny, snap a picture and send it to me. Hell, vid me in on your comm if you can so I can see it live. Just go down there in person and make sure the fire squad and CSU’s not fucking anything up.”

“They’re professionals,” Alex says, frowning. “They’re a hell of a lot better trained to pick at crime scenes than I am.”

Lehnsherr sighs. “Do you want to be parked at your desk filing complaints all day? Because you’re free to do that, too, I won’t argue.”

“No,” Alex says quickly. If he spends another day reading about why some guy’s trying to dodge a thirty-credit fine for parking in a fire lane for fifteen minutes, he’ll go insane. He didn’t sign on to become a cop to file a bunch of goddamn tickets. “I’ll go.”

“Great.” Lehnsherr waves vaguely at the kitchen cabinets and the fridge. “Feel free to grab some breakfast before you go, but go soon. I’ve seen the way you drive; it’ll take you all day just to get there.”

“I drive like a normal human being,” Alex says incredulously. “You’re the one who drives like a fucking lunatic. I’ve almost died like, six times.”

Xavier levels a reproving look at his husband. “Erik, don’t scare the poor boy like that.”

Lehnsherr lifts his eyebrows like he’s the one being wronged here. “What? I just wanted to see what kind of stuff the kid was made of. Clearly he passed muster. Otherwise he wouldn’t be here.”

“Yeah, ’cause I’d be dead,” Alex snaps. He gulps down the last dregs of his coffee, pushes the
mug back across the counter, and fishes the shuttle access card out of his pocket. “I’ll comm you if I find anything.”

“It was nice talking with you,” Xavier says, smiling.

“See you later, kid,” Lehnsherr adds cheerily.

It’s times like these that Alex wishes old-fashioned doors were still trending. The soft hiss of the hotel room door shutting behind him isn’t nearly as satisfying as a slam.

#

Charles spends the rest of the morning on conference vids with the Xavier family lawyer and the family accountant, going over all the various insurance policies covering the house and considering their options. Erik sits next to him out of solidarity, clearly visible in the hologram on the other end, but otherwise occupies himself with the datapad Alex brought him earlier, mind buzzing away as he devours the files.

Whenever their lawyer or their accountant tries to ask him his opinion on anything as the alpha in their marriage, Erik treats them to a long, flat stare and always answers, “I don’t know, why don’t you ask Charles since it’s *his* house,” which is the only reason the entire process is somewhat bearable.

By noon, Charles has a headache but he’s glad to have gotten the worst of it over, all the proper insurance claims filed and money moved around to the right accounts in preparation. They can’t do much else until the police have gotten all the evidence they want and finally allow the building inspectors to come in and start quantifying the damage for the insurance agents, so Charles signs off on the vid feeling worn but at least like he’s been productive.

“I programmed the bot to bring up some room service,” Erik says without looking up from his datapad, “so lunch should be up soon.”

Knocking their shoulders together, Charles leans sideways against him. “Thank you,” he says with a sigh. “How’s your head?”

“I should probably be asking you that question,” Erik says, flicking the tablet off with his powers and setting it aside in favor of wrapping an arm around Charles. “You’re projecting a little.”

“Sorry,” Charles says, mentally reviewing his shields and upping them a little. “We haven’t taken a day off together in so long, I hate that we’re only doing it now because of the circumstances.”

“Yeah,” Erik says with a small grimace.

“Think of all the sex we could’ve been having if we didn’t have to deal with a half-destroyed house.”

“Tragic.”

“We can still have it,” Charles says suggestively, sitting up and twisting sideways to sling a leg over Erik’s and settling in his lap.

Erik smirks up at him, resting his hands on Charles’ hips. “I thought I was banned from sex until further notice, or whatever your exact words were last night.”
“This is your further notice,” Charles says, sliding his hands up underneath Erik’s shirt. “I think by now it’s safe to say your brain hasn’t been damaged.”

Erik lets out a laugh, one of his real and unguarded ones, that has none of his usual sharp edges or dry, mocking humor. It’s Charles’ favorite sound in the entire universe, and he always delights in being the one to cause it, leaning down to kiss Erik while Erik’s fingers get to work on his pants. Charles can feel himself getting wet, his body responding to the aroused pheromones Erik’s starting to put out, purely virile alpha and all chemical attraction.

“Does this mean we’re going back to the sex schedule,” Erik mumbles against Charles’ lips as they work together to get Charles stripped out of his pants. It takes a little fumbling, but the wiggling Charles has to do right over Erik’s crotch is only helping their cause—Erik’s cock is hard in his pants, and he jerks every time Charles brushes against it.

“Do you want babies or not,” Charles says distractedly, levering himself up so Erik can pull his sweatpants down and watching Erik’s cock spring loose. Just the sight kicks Charles’ body into overdrive, a sluice of slick gushing down the inside of his leg and making him shudder.

“A whole litter,” Erik says, voice strained with the effort of keeping still and not lunging up like Charles can hear his alpha instincts screaming. Instead Erik reaches a hand up between Charles’ legs, sliding a finger up into Charles’ hole and they both groan at the wet sound it makes. “You’re so wet.”

“I’m always wet for you, darling,” Charles answers, shifting his legs further apart and swaying slightly, dizzy with need as he fucks himself on Erik’s finger. “Come on, I’m ready.”

“Just a moment,” Erik says, adding a second finger and working Charles open as quickly as he can while still being careful. Charles shifts restlessly, because while Erik’s fingers feel good they’re never enough, until Erik shakily withdraws his hand and catches Charles by the hip to guide him down onto his cock.

Charles moans as Erik’s cock slides up into him, long and thick and filling him up in just the right way. It takes the edge off, just a little, and calms some of his fervor down now that his alpha’s cock is inside him. Were he in heat, it wouldn’t be close to enough to calm him, but Charles’ next heat is still weeks away and this is only regular sex.

Once Charles is fully seated on Erik’s cock, Erik tilts his head up to slant a lazy grin at him, his pupils dark and wide with arousal. “There you are.”

“Here I am,” Charles agrees fondly, and rides him all the way to completion.

Slouching back into work the next day is both annoying and a relief. It’s annoying because Erik has to have the same conversation over and over again—everyone wants to know what happened, how he’s feeling, hey man that was pretty badass how you pulled a wall down to save yourself—but it’s a relief because Erik is itching to dig his teeth into something, instead of just sitting on a hotel room couch all day waiting for news.

“—sucks, though,” one of the desk jockeys is saying, hovering behind Erik while he pours Charles’ morning death smoothie down the drain in the breakroom kitchen, because apparently
having their house blown up is not going to stop Charles from sticking to their Let’s Make A Baby plan. Erik is on board for everything but the goddamn smoothies. “That’s a major asset loss, with that much damage on a house that big. You’re going to lose some—”

“The only thing I’m losing is my will to live, listening to this,” Erik growls, twisting the cap back onto his hotel-issued thermos and stomping back out of the break room. His expression must be bitchy enough to deter anyone else from approaching him, because he makes it all the way back to his office without having to speak to another person.

Summers is waiting for him, sitting in one of the shitty plastic chairs in front of Erik’s desk with his usual stony-faced recalcitrance. “Morning, Sunshine,” Erik says dryly, sinking down into his far more superior chair. He fought Jason over in Accounting for an entire month over this chair, because Erik wasn’t about to let something like budget get in the way of the comfort of his ass. “Anything new?”

“No,” Summers says, narrowing his eyes briefly in annoyance. “Seriously, what the fuck is that about?”

“What?” Erik asks blankly, and Summers nods at the empty thermos he’s set down on top of a stack of tablets.

“Why do you bring a drink every morning and dump it out?” Summers asks bluntly.

“Because Charles means well but is actually trying to kill me,” Erik says, booting up his desktop holoscreen. He punches in his login password and waits for his programs to load.

“Charles makes you a smoothie for breakfast every morning and you just throw it away,” Summers says flatly, unimpressed.

“Charles makes us a smoothie for breakfast every morning that tastes like radioactive waste,” Erik corrects him as his email opens up and starts pinging softly with message alerts. “I thank him, tell him it’s delicious, and dump it out when I get to work to keep my intestines from shriveling up. Don’t get me wrong, on the rare occasions Charles feels like cooking I’ll eat whatever he puts in front of me, but these smoothies? Possibly a class four biohazard.”

“Sure,” Summers says, but he seems vastly mollified and it’s almost cute, in a way, how transparent the kid is.

“Anyway, you’re chatty this morning,” Erik says, skimming through his inbox. Most of them he’d read on his phone yesterday, but a small handful at the top are new as of this morning, though upon closer inspection they’re all useless department emails on top of one slightly more useful email detailing today’s lunch specials in the cafeteria. “I take it you’ve come to terms with the fact that your idol is, oh no, married and fucking an alpha on the regular.”

“Charles is my mate, and also a telepath,” Erik says wryly, “there’s not much we don’t share between ourselves.” Before Summers can really start to have a cow, Erik continues, “Don’t worry, he didn’t tell me every word of whatever little heart-to-heart you had verbatim, and I don’t want to know anyway. But now that we’ve shared our quota of feelings for the day, let’s talk about our schedule.”

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“Okay, you’re chatty this morning,” Erik says, skimming through his inbox. Most of them he’d read on his phone yesterday, but a small handful at the top are new as of this morning, though upon closer inspection they’re all useless department emails on top of one slightly more useful email detailing today’s lunch specials in the cafeteria. “I take it you’ve come to terms with the fact that your idol is, oh no, married and fucking an alpha on the regular.”

“Summers turns a fascinating shade of pink. “He told you—?”

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“You’re such a damn alpha,” Summers mutters, glowering, but he doesn’t seem as stiff and angry as before.
“Disgusting, isn’t it,” Erik deadpans, and Summers snorts.

“I bet you share feelings with Charles all the time.”

“I married him specifically to share feelings with him,” Erik points out, because of course he shares feelings with his husband. He’d thought that was rather intuitive. “And also because he has a great ass, but that’s neither here nor there.”

Summers had almost been on the verge of a reluctant smile, but now he scowls again. “Ugh, come on.”

“What, it’s the truth. He would agree. Anyway, did anyone come by the station yesterday looking for me?”

“I don’t think so,” Summers says, slightly wary. “I was out at your house most of the day yesterday taking vids for you, but no one said anything when I got back.”

“Hm,” Erik says, tapping the edge of his desk thoughtfully. If Lisa Gieger still hasn’t turned up at the station yet, it might be prudent to pay her another visit, especially if yesterday didn’t give her a little jumpstart. She’s had Erik’s card for over a solid day now, and yesterday his name had been all over the local news along with his exploded house, which should’ve been enough to convince her Erik is worth trusting: his family has come under attack too, even if in a completely different way. It still makes him relatable.

This isn’t a crime novel, though, Erik thinks with some regret, so key persons of interest don’t just show up at the exact right moment to shed just the right amount of light on a case. In a perfect world, Lisa Gieger would knock on the door to his office right now.

“Were you expecting the person who blew up your house to just stroll in and ask for you?” Summers asks dryly after a pause, where only one of the inter-departmental courier droids rolls past Erik’s door.

“In a perfect world, Summers, yes,” Erik sighs, “but actually, I was thinking of our serial case. We can’t do anything more about my house until the CSU finishes compiling all their evidence and files their reports.”

“Yeah,” Summers agrees. He’d done a pretty good job yesterday, scoping out the parts of the house he’d been allowed to reach and weren’t marked off as potentially unstable, but ultimately there’d been jack shit to really look at aside from the obvious wreckage. They’ll have to wait for the fire squad’s chemical analyses and all that shit before they know anything more.

“As much as I hate not being able to track down the bastard that blew my house up,” Erik says, “we’ve got other things that need our attention. You up for a field trip?”

“Yes,” Summers blurts out.

“Great.” Erik scoops his comm up off his desk and pockets it. “I’m driving.”

The attack on their house destroyed a shit ton of important things: half of Charles’ prized library, Erik’s metal workshop with shelves full of his crafting hobbies, a whole set of fine china that had belonged to Charles’ great-great-great-great-grandmother, along with a hundred other small things they hadn’t thought they’d miss until they were gone. But the most grievous loss by far is that of Erik’s beloved car, which was completely wrecked when the whole goddamn ceiling of the garage caved in with the explosion. That was, honestly, almost even more upsetting than the fact that someone had had the fucking audacity to try to murder him in his own home.
Erik feels the loss keenly when he and Summers take the lift down to the station’s shuttle bay. He gazes forlornly at the sleek, uniform TS-4’s sitting neatly in their docks, all of them the newest models money can buy, all of them ugly as shit compared to his old baby.

“It’s just a car,” Summers says, frowning. “Jeez.”

Erik resists the urge to roll his eyes heavenward. God help him, he’s going to murder this kid one day. “Just don’t speak.”

“Really—”

“If you have any sense of self-preservation at all,” Erik growls, “say, ‘I’m sorry about your car, Lehnsherr,’ and then shut up.”

Summers stares at him for a long, tense moment. Then he just snaps his mouth shut and glares off at the row of parked police shuttles.

Good enough, Erik thinks crankily. Reluctantly, he signs out one of the TS-4’s, swipes his ID badge to register it under his name, and waves for Summers to get in.

The seats are auto-shape gel, designed to mold to the passengers’ bodies to make for a more comfortable ride. The console is shiny, practically brand-new, and a glance through its extensive functions list makes it infinitely clear that this shuttle could have run his old baby into the ground.

The engine is a gorgeous, finely-tuned purr to Erik’s senses, but he refuses to be charmed. He reserves the right to be pissed off about his car for as long as he fucking feels like it.

It isn’t until they’ve pulled clear of the station’s bay that Summers opens his mouth again. “So where are we going?”

“Lisa Gieger. I think we’ve given her enough time to come forward. If she’s not coming to us, we’ll go to her.”

“John Doe—Kurt Gieger’s sister?” Summers says, sitting up straighter. “I thought you went to talk to her the other day.”

“She wasn’t in the mood,” Erik says blithely as he navigates up into one of the westbound flyways, ignoring how Summers rechecks his safety belt. “So today you get to do most of the talking, and I’ll observe.”

That shuts Summers up again, but he looks more contemplative and determined than nervous. Here’s to hoping Lisa Gieger might be more willing to speak to an omega cop, Erik thinks as he sets up the autopilot, because why not use a secret weapon if you’ve got one? He looks at the music system for a few long moments sadly. He’d built his last-century CD player in his old car from scratch himself, but now it and all his CDs are destroyed. He’s got backup digital files of the music, of course, but it’s so hard these days to find blank CDs.

They’re about halfway over to Lisa Gieger’s apartment when Charles calls. Erik picks up his comm, kicking back in his seat. “Hi sweetheart.”

“Are you calling me that just to make your partner nauseous,” Charles says without missing a beat.

“He’s glaring at me,” Erik reports, and Summers flips him off. “Now he’s throwing up a gang sign. I just can’t believe The Youths these days, Charles.”

On the other end of the line, Charles laughs. “Okay, I just spoke to the building inspector. The west
“It is completely condemned, but we were expecting that.”

“What about the east wing?” Erik asks, pulling up a mental map of their house in his head. He hasn’t been back over to the house since he left it two nights ago in the back of a med evac shuttle, so he hasn’t been able to feel out the foundation with his powers himself.

“There’s some damage on the end closest to the west, of course,” Charles says, “but the rest of it is structurally sound. That’s the side with the bunker underneath, anyway, so I’m not surprised. It’s pretty heavily reinforced.”

“Good thing your great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather was a paranoid bastard,” Erik agrees.

“Right? But anyway, I sent in the reports to the insurance company to round out our claim, and they should get back to me by the end of today. In the meantime I’m going to call a couple contractors and start getting quotes for getting the east wing sealed up again, and maybe get at least most of the debris cleared away too.”

“I can probably help with clearing some of that shit,” Erik says. Most of what even survived the explosion is probably metal, and whatever isn’t he can grab using the metal pieces anyway.

“We’ll have to see what the contractors say.”

“Alright, alright. You want me to call around too?” Erik offers, knowing Charles has enough on his plate at work already.

“No, it’s alright, the building inspectors gave me a couple names to start with,” Charles assures him, “and I’ll be eating lunch at my desk today anyway as it is. But I’ll forward you the quotes when I have them so you can look them over too.”

“Sure,” Erik says, even though he already knows he’ll just agree with whatever Charles picks.

“Once we get the east wing closed off, it’ll be liveable,” Charles says, “and we can move back in after a little rearranging, if we want.” The way he says if we want suggests he’s already made up his mind, and they’ll be moving back into the house as soon as the last nail is hammered down.

Erik, however, still has two tiny things on his mind called trying to start a family and unknown bomber who knows where we live still at large, which don’t make for a pleasant combination.

“Alright,” Charles says lightly, and Erik can physically feel him digging trenches. “I’m sure I’ll talk to you again sometime before this evening, but have a good day, darling.”

“I love you with all my heart and soul,” Erik says solemnly, and Charles is still laughing when he hangs up.

“There is really no reason to rub it in,” Summers mutters.

“I almost died the day before yesterday, my emotions towards my husband are still raw and cannot be contained,” Erik says, and is treated to an eyeroll.

“I can’t even believe you’re already back at work.” The you fucking psychopath is heavily implied, not spoken.
Neither of us are very good at sitting still for very long,” Erik says cheerfully as the car alerts them they’re close to their destination now. He flicks the autopilot off, grabbing onto the steering platform when it slides back out of the dash and guiding the car down into the ground-level street. There aren’t any open parking spaces and Erik doesn’t feel like driving eight levels down into the building’s garage, so he sets the TS-4 down on the sidewalk and kills the engine—that’s one good thing about the TS-4s, at least; he can park them wherever the hell he wants and no one can complain.

Summers is quiet during their ascent up to Lisa Gieger’s floor, and Erik lets him think. He’s made it clear he doesn’t want or need Erik’s guidance or help, which is more than fine with Erik because it’s less effort he has to expend on his part. There’s little chance for Summers to fuck this up, anyway, so this will be a good test run to see how Summers handles an interview, and if he knows when to be delicate and when to push.

Erik leads the way down the quiet hall, counting off the doors until he’s standing outside the same one from two days ago. He uses his powers to rap the door knocker a solid three times, half-bracing himself to have the door slammed shut in their faces as soon as it opens again.

“She not home?” Summers wonders after a few moments pass and there’s no answer.

“The door is unlocked,” Erik says, feeling out the door with his powers. He knocks again, raising his voice and saying, “Lisa Gieger? This is the VPD.”

“What do we do now,” Summers says when there’s still no answer, “we can’t just walk in there.”

“Suspicious circumstances, Summers,” Erik says grimly. He pushes down on the door handle with his powers and nudges the door open. “Ms. Gieger, we’re coming inside now.”

The apartment is dark and silent, their shadows extending out long and tall down the hall as the light from the hallway outside spills in behind them. Erik steps in first, Summers right on his heels and together they carefully make their way forward.

“Lights,” Erik says, and they flicker on as they emerge into the apartment’s kitchen.

It’s the smell that hits them first. Summers makes a small, involuntary noise of distress mixed with disgust, and even Erik feels his stomach turn as it hits them like a brick wall.

“Go call the station,” Erik says, and Summers doesn’t need to be told twice, turning on his heel and stumbling back out into the main hallway, coughing. Erik stays where he is, breathing deeply through his mouth and fighting down the familiar urge to hurl. He hears Summers talking to dispatch outside, and Erik pulls out his own comm and hits redial.

“Erik?” Charles says with a note of concern when he answers a moment later.

“Hi, honey,” Erik says, eyes tracking across the blood pooled on the white tile floor, “you’re going to want to get your team down to Block 74 pronto.”

“She was killed two days ago,” Ororo says, watching the CSU units from both the FBI and the VPD carefully avoid each other as they document every inch of the apartment. “It’s amazing no
one called in about the smell.”

“What were you two even doing here today?” Charles asks, glancing at Erik and Alex. The four of them stand on the edge of the kitchen, as out of the way as they can be. They’ve been at the scene for an hour now, and even though the body was finally taken away about twenty minutes ago, the thick smell of rotten death still clogs Charles’ nose.

“Trying to see if she’d actually talk to us this time,” Erik answers. “I came here last week and slipped my card under her door after she slammed it in my face, but she hadn’t called or come into the station so I figured we’d try again.”

“This time?”

“She’s Kurt Gieger’s sister,” Erik says, a tad impatiently because he’d already explained this when Charles and Ororo first arrived, “of course I tried to interview her.”

“I thought Moira told you to drop this case.”

“When have I ever listened to MacTaggert? She was a decent lead on her brother, Charles.”

Charles sighs. “Well, at least you found her sooner, rather than one of her neighbors finding her later when she was even further along in the decomp process.”

Lisa Gieger had been murdered in the same fashion as her brother and all of the other omegas in the cases Charles has been keeping track of—slashed open and gutted, left lying on the floor with her entrails falling out of her. There’s a compact blaster resting on the countertop, her bloody fingerprints all over the grip, and a sizeable hole in the wall to the living room presumably from one of the plasma shots.

What’s puzzling, however, is this is the first case of one of the murders taking place inside the victim’s home. All the others had been murdered outside, in back alleyways or in public parks or, in one case on Mahird, on a nature trail a few miles outside the nearest city. Charles doesn’t know if this means the killer is ramping up his game or if it means the Giegers somehow make things personal, because this also marks the first time two of the victims have been related—or admittedly connected in any form at all, other than obviously being omegas.

“Well,” Charles says, glancing at the framed photos on the mantelpiece, “it seems as if Lisa and her brother were close. All these pictures are of them.”

Erik follows his gaze. There’s a photo of Lisa and Kurt at a Halloween party, another of them wearing matching chaloball jerseys, another of them celebrating a birthday. No evidence of any significant others. No pictures with parents or other friends. They must have been very close indeed.

“Besides the plasma shot,” Alex says, nodding at the hole in the wall, “it doesn’t look like she had time to struggle. The unsub must have subdued her quick.”

He’s right. No furniture is overturned or disturbed, and there are no scuff marks or blood that looks inconsistent with how she died. Any blood from her attacker would be easy to miss though—the scene is covered with splatters and stains, on the walls, on the ceiling, dried to a dark reddish-brown across the smooth wood floors. This is definitely the primary crime scene.

“We’ll canvass the neighbors, see if they heard anything,” Charles says. “If we’re lucky, these walls are thin enough that someone heard the plasma shot, or Ms. Gieger screaming.”
“Wouldn’t they have called it in if they had?” Alex points out.

“One would hope,” Charles replies. “That’s not always what happens though.” Breathing shallowly through his mouth, he steps carefully around the living room, eyes trailing over the trophies perched on the closed piano, the several medals hanging from a peg beside the bookcase. “She was an athlete.”

“Swimming,” Erik notes, reading the base of one of the trophies. “And track.” He gestures to one of the medals. “This was last year. Local Visir championship meet.”

“She would’ve been difficult to subdue if she’d been given the chance to fight,” Charles muses. “Alex is right—whoever did this took her by surprise and brought her down quickly.”

The four of them chew on that in silence for a long minute. Charles surveys the room, searching for any other personal items that might clue him in on Lisa Gieger’s personality, her habits, her hobbies. He was originally trained as a profiler, and over time, that’s helped him get into the minds of not only killers but also victims. Building a thorough understanding of who the victim was is usually quite useful in determining means, motive, and opportunity. Just a quick scan around the room tells him that there’s plenty of data to mine here—aside from the photos and the awards, there are dozens of books jam-packed into the bookcase, as well an accordion folder filled to bursting with papers.

“We’ll go through everything,” Charles decides. “We’ll work a profile of Lisa Gieger and then see how she fits in with the other victims.”

“Hang on…” Alex says slowly, eyes wide. “If you’re discussing this with us, does this mean we’re back on the case?”

Erik rolls his eyes. “Way to remind him that we’re technically not supposed to be here, Summers. I can see you’re firing on all cylinders this morning.”

“Hey! I was just—”

“Don’t be so hard on the boy, Erik,” Charles says mildly. “I’m not going to kick you out of the scene anyway. You two found the body, after all. Besides, I think I could use your insight on the case. I’ll asked for the two of you to be brought onto the case as consultants. You’ll help us sort through the Gieger murders, since they’re local. Sound good?”

Erik squints at him suspiciously, which is honestly hurtful because Charles has never done anything to warrant his suspicion. Well. Nothing on the job, at least. “We’ll get access to all the files relevant to the case? All of them, not just the ones that happened on Visir.”

“Yes, darling.” Charles says, resisting the urge to roll his eyes. “You’ll have access to everything we know.” He smiles pleasantly. “Until Moira yanks you off the case officially.”

Scowling, Erik lets out a huff. “She can try.”

“Allerdyce, you done yet?” Ororo calls as John enters the kitchen, coming in from the direction of the living room. He has his datapad in both hands out in front of him, and he snaps a picture of the smear of blood right in the entryway, half on the tile and half on the carpet, before answering.

“With the kitchen and the living room, pretty much,” he says, glancing between the four of them. “There are a couple more rooms towards the back that no one’s looked at yet. Probably the bedroom and stuff.”
“I’ll take a look,” Charles says, because while the crime scene itself appears to be limited to the kitchen, he’s interested to see what else he can find out about Lisa Gieger. Ororo, Erik, and Alex trail after him as he leads the way out of the kitchen and down the hallway, fishing out a pair of latex gloves from his pocket and pulling them on.

“Charles,” Ororo says, nodding at one of the picture frames on the wall. It’s crooked, where all the other frames in the apartment have been meticulously straight.

“Struggle in the hallway, perhaps?” Charles says, coming to a stop outside the first door. “Erik?” Ororo gracefully steps back so Erik can shoulder his way up next to Charles. “It’s not locked.” “I’ve got gloves on but let’s not run the risk of smearing any fingerprints, yes?” “At your service,” Erik says dryly, and twists the doorknob with his powers and pushes the door open.

A second later Erik practically crushes himself up against Charles’ side, nose buried in Charles’ hair and one arm wrapped around Charles’ waist. Ororo takes a sharp breath and then backs off down the hall, waving a hand in front of her nose while Alex blinks, confused.

“What’s wrong?” “Sorry,” Erik says through clenched teeth, still gripping onto Charles tightly as he breathes in deeply, taking in as much of Charles’ scent as he possibly can. Charles reaches up with the arm not pinned to his side by Erik’s body and runs his hand through Erik’s hair affectionately.

“It’s alright,” he says, slightly amused, “you can’t exactly help it.” Lisa Gieger’s bedroom is neatly organized at first glance, save for the disaster zone on the bed, which is a mess of tangled sheets and pillows haphazardly thrown in all directions—she’d been in the middle of her heat. As a fellow omega, Charles is unaffected by the lingering scent of Lisa’s heat, immune to the mating siren’s call of her pheromones no doubt still thick in the air as they’d been trapped in the enclosed bedroom for two days, but as alphas Erik and Ororo aren’t so lucky.

“She was definitely at the peak of her heat,” Erik mutters, sucking in another deep breath of Charles’ scent, trying to clear his nose out, “it’s actually amazing we couldn’t smell it on her out in the kitchen.” “You know her body would stop producing pheromones as soon as she died,” Ororo calls from down the hall in a tight voice. “Plus she was dragged out into the kitchen, one way or another, so it’s not like she was left in the bedroom to marinate.” “Man, this kind of work environment is no place for horny alphas,” Alex says, his voice dripping with innocence.

“Watch it, kid,” Erik growls, and Charles stifles a laugh.

“Think you can let go of me, darling?” he asks, stroking Erik’s hair again.

“No,” Erik says mulishly, loud enough for Alex to overhear, “I want to throw you down to the floor and have my alpha way with you.” He waits for Alex’s predictable noise of disgust before he untangles himself from Charles, stepping back from the door. “I’ll be down the hall breathing in murder air instead of heat air.”
“And they say romance is dead,” Charles calls after him, pressing the sensation of a kiss to Erik’s cheek with his telepathy before he jerks his chin towards the bedroom. “Well, Alex, looks like we’re the specialists now.”

_How do you put up with him_, Alex thinks loudly, but it’s more of an unintentional projection so Charles doesn’t answer, hiding a rueful smile as he follows Alex into the bedroom. Now that they’ve opened the door, Lisa’s pheromones will start to fade and the room will be more approachable for the alphas in time; the scent of an omega in heat is strong in concentration, but fortunately doesn’t disperse very well, or otherwise every unmated omega would have to sequester themselves entirely during every heat or risk attracting dozens of alphas from miles around.

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“Do you smell that?” Alex asks as they look around, wrinkling his nose.

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“Hm?” Charles asks, glancing back at him from where he’d been studying a picture of Lisa standing with her swim teammates in front of a pool.

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“It’s like...a chemical kind of smell,” Alex says uncertainly.

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“No,” Charles answers him truthfully, “but I honestly still have the smell from the kitchen in my nose. Lisa could have been using any number of heat enhancers or regulators, though. They sometimes alter the heat scent a little.” Any of that kind of thing will show up in the toxicology report, so Charles isn’t worried about it just yet.

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“Yeah,” Alex agrees, “I guess so.”

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“If she was attacked during her heat, it may explain why there aren’t any major signs of a struggle,” Charles says, drifting closer to the bed. Depending on the stage of her heat she was in, Lisa might have been too out of it to even realize what was going on. It would have been easy for her killer to burst into the room and drag her out into the kitchen without much resistance, athlete or not.

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“She could have had an alpha companion over for her heat, and they’re the one who killed her,” Alex says darkly, but Charles can tell he doesn’t fully believe it either. There’s no scent of aroused alpha in the room.

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Lisa hadn’t been naked, either, her clothes had been shredded but present. An omega caught up in the peak of her heat isn’t going to still have her clothes on, alpha companion or not; Charles is extensively familiar with the overwhelming burn, and the near-mindless need to have nothing but an alpha touching him. While it’s true Lisa could have been in the mere beginnings of her heat instead, Charles is inclined to trust Erik’s nose. His and Ororo’s strong reactions don’t lie.

“They’re putting together a chain of events that logically make sense, but it feels like not everything is adding up quite right. They’re missing something, but Charles can’t put his finger on what.

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“Dr. Xavier,” Alex says, drawing Charles out of his thoughts. “You’re gonna want to look at this.”

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He’s standing over by the bedside table, so Charles walks over to join him. There’s a business card sitting next to a phone charger cable, innocuous enough at first. But then Charles sees it’s Erik’s card, with his comm line and the address for the VPD listed out in clean font, which still isn’t out of place, since Erik said he’d left his card for her last week.

“But Charles is familiar with Erik’s business card. He keeps one in his desk at work just because Erik is his husband and he can. He’s fairly certain there used to be at least twenty of them scattered around on the floor in the backseat of Erik’s old car. C4 used to collect crumpled up, ruined ones
fished out of Erik’s pockets after his uniform had been through the wash.

None of those had had Erik’s name circled a dozen times with the word NEXT written out across the top in red ink.

“This is bullshit,” Erik snaps. “I can’t believe this.”

“I find it hard to believe you didn’t see this coming,” Moira says. “It’s SOP to remove detectives from cases that turn too personal. Or did you just conveniently forget that?”

Erik paces angrily in front of her desk, crossing the length of her office in just a few strides. “You can’t take me off this case. I don’t care about SOP—this asshole threatened me. He fucking blew up my house! Now you’re telling me that I can’t investigate this?”

From behind her desk, Moira slants a look over to Charles, who’s standing by the doorway with Alex. He’s been watching silently for the last fifteen or so minutes as Erik had raged at Moira’s decision, but now he comes forward, touching Erik’s arm gently to bring him to a stop. “Erik darling,” he says gently, “why don’t you sit down for a minute?”

Erik shrugs him off irritably. “I already know you’re on her side, Charles. You don’t have to say a goddamn thing.”

He’s radiating helpless fury strong enough to make Charles wince, even with his shields. Erik hates feeling out of control. Everything that’s happened in the past week is weighing heavily on him, from the murders in the city to the explosion at their house. He’s scared underneath all that anger, scared for himself and, more importantly, for Charles. And as always, his fear manifests as rage.

Fighting to keep that in mind, Charles forces his tone to remain even and calm as he says, “You can’t be on this case anymore, Erik. Not when you’re apparently the killer’s next target. Besides, we’re not even certain that the bomb at our house is linked with this serial case. It’s premature to assume they’re connected.”

Erik’s mouth twists. “Two people gunning for me in the same week? Come on, Charles, you’re the one who’s always saying there’s no such thing as coincidences.”

“Jumping to conclusions doesn’t do anyone any favors,” Charles argues. “We have to take this step by step, and by ‘we’ I mean the FBI. Lieutenant MacTaggert is right—you’re far too close to this.”

“And you’re not?” Erik demands, rounding on him with a glare. “I’m your fucking husband!”

Charles grimaces. He hasn’t had this discussion with his superiors yet, but he knows a similar argument is coming. Maybe it’s hypocritical of him to fight to stay on the case while also fighting to take Erik off it, but he absolutely refuses to sit on the sidelines while some homicidal maniac has his husband in their sights. Besides, right now, Erik’s far more compromised by the case than he is.

“Maybe,” he concedes. “But I’m staying on.”

The metal of Charles’ wedding ring trembles with Erik’s anger. “Then why the fuck can’t I? And
“don’t give me some bullshit about how the FBI has the ultimate jurisdiction here—you know I don’t give a shit about that.”

“You should,” Moira says dryly. Even in the face of Erik’s anger, she’s completely composed, sitting coolly behind her desk. “Look, Erik, I’m not about to go putting you in the line of fire by keeping you on this case. Whoever the killer is—guy, girl, neither, whatever—they want you. It’s my job to make sure they don’t get you. That means you sitting in a designated safe hotel with a protective detail until we can confirm that the threat’s over. Period.”

“I’m not going to sit in a fucking hotel room twiddling my thumbs watching pay-per-view while there’s a serial killer running around Visir!” Erik snaps. “I can’t believe you’re actually suggesting this!”

“It’s SOP,” Moira says, obviously resisting the urge to rub at the headache forming at her temples.

“Fuck SOP!”

“Alright, enough,” Charles cuts in firmly. He seizes Erik’s arm and clamps down this time so Erik can’t throw him off. “Erik, come on. Let’s take a walk.”

Erik shoots him a murderous look, but when Charles raises an eyebrow at him, he shuts his mouth again and allows Charles to steer him to the door. Alex scrambles to get out of the way, his eyes wide, and Charles spares a moment to hope the kid’s not going to make this any harder than it needs to be. If he’s anything like Erik, which Charles can already tell he is, he’ll be pissed off about getting booted from the case, too. If he knows what’s good for him though, he won’t say a word about it. At least, that’s what Charles hopes.

They make their way through the bullpen, which is largely silent and subdued. Almost everyone has been listening intently to Erik’s screaming, though they cough and pretend to be working as Erik storms past them. At least most of Erik’s fellow detectives respect or fear him, Charles thinks. They understand where he’s coming from, and they won’t give him a hard time for it once he’s calmed down.

When they get into the lift, Erik jabs at the button for the top floor. Charles doesn’t say anything as the lift ferries them swiftly up, floors flashing past. He can feel Erik stewing in his anger, his fear, his rage, turning them over and over again in his mind and allowing them to grow, to fester. Erik’s always been quick to anger, slow to cool down. Part of Charles wants to gather Erik close, but he gets the feeling his scent would rile Erik up more than calm him right now.

Once the lift opens, Erik marches straight up the short flight of stairs to their left and slams open the door to the roof. Charles follows him, tucking his hands into the pockets of his jacket to ward off the slight chill outside.

This high up, they’re treated to an incredible view of the city. Blocks upon blocks sprawl out beneath them, separated by brightly-lit flyways that zip constantly with motion. Charles can see the Chaorizen Opera House from here, its distinctive domed shape dwarfing the smaller restaurants and shops that surround it in Block 98’s massive entertainment district. Far beneath them is the blinding blue of the plasma ocean, rolling with deceptive tranquility.

Charles turns his gaze higher, to the spires of the Visir Central Academy where he and Erik had first met. It seems like a lifetime ago, really. They’d been kids, younger than Alex Summers is now.

Watching sunlight glitter on the spires’ glass, Charles asks, “Do you remember our first fight?”
Erik gives him a narrow-eyed look. “Don’t try to distract me.”

“Do you?” Charles persists.

Frowning, Erik turns to look out over the skyline. “What do you mean?”

“I was mad at you for beating the shit out of that senior, Phillio Jaris. Do you remember that?”

Recognition flickers through Erik’s haze of anger. “Oh, that. He was a condescending jackass. He deserved it.”

“You beat the shit out of him because he said some cruel things about me. Do you remember what I told you after that?”

“That you can fight your own battles and I don’t need to worry about you,” Erik growls. “But this isn’t the same thing. This isn’t anywhere near the same thing.”

“Yes, I said that,” Charles says. “And then I told you to trust me. And then what did you say?”

For a long moment, Erik just stands there with his jaw clenched, gritting his teeth. In the sunlight, his hair gleams bronze, his eyes a fiery green. There’s no trace of the scrape that was on his forehead two days ago, but Charles remembers it vividly. He remembers how close he came to losing Erik.

With obvious reluctance, Erik answers. “I said I did. And I do. I trust you.”

Charles steps toward him and takes his hand, squeezing it gently. “Then I need you to trust my judgment here, even if you hate it. Please, listen to Moira. Take up another case if you have to. Work all you want, but do it in the safety of the safe house. I’ll do everything in my power to resolve this quickly. You know I will.”

“If you’re even still on the case,” Erik says bitterly but he doesn’t pull away, gripping Charles’ hand back. “You might get booted off too.”

“I have a better argument for staying on,” Charles answers grimly. “Ororo and I have been tracking this case for a while now, so we know it better than anyone else. If the killer is starting to escalate, there’s no time for the case to be reassigned. There could be more deaths while the new team is trying to play catch-up.”

“It doesn’t make any sense,” Erik says, frustrated, “all the victims so far have been omegas. I’m an alpha.”

“But I know it,” Charles says with a small smile, but Erik’s in no mood. “This may be the tipping point in this case, Erik, and we can’t afford to screw it up. We have to proceed by the book.”

A tense silence falls between them. Charles waits it out, biting his tongue on anything more he wants to say. He can feel Erik wrestling with both his temper and his alpha instincts, several unpleasant responses Charles knows better than to take as how Erik really feels resentfully at the forefront of his mind. Erik doesn’t say them, though, because like how Charles has always believed, Erik is better than his temper and his instincts, pushing everything down and away until only the steady simmer of resentment at the situation as a whole remains.

“You’re keeping me in the loop,” he says finally. His grip on Charles’ hand has remained gentle throughout, and now he gives Charles’ hand a small squeeze before letting go to fold his arms.
“I’m not parking it in a hotel without any idea what’s going on.”

“I’ll keep you in the loop,” Charles agrees. Erik doesn’t take well to sitting still for very long, and if this is the price to keep him cooperative, Charles will take it. “Just as long as I don’t feel you’re going to run off and do something stupid.”

“Me?” Erik says with a weary laugh. “I’m more worried about you.”

“I know,” Charles says simply. He can’t tell Erik not to worry. Charles knows it has to be killing Erik on a very base level beyond his immediate control, to step back while his omega all but walks headlong into danger. But Erik is staunchly refusing to say it—refusing to act on it when it would be all too easy for him to get Charles yanked off the case in a heartbeat, just by being Charles’ alpha saying no. It means more to Charles than he thinks he could possibly put into words. “You have to trust me.”

“I trust you,” Erik repeats, adding silently, You idiot, of course I do, and this time when Charles smiles, Erik cracks one too.

Before Charles can do something embarrassing like make out with his husband on the roof of the Visir police station, his comm buzzes loudly in his pocket. “Ororo.”

“The director’s coming down in an hour,” she says without pause, “and he wants us to do a formal brief for everyone, both our guys and whoever from the VPD MacTaggert picks out. I’ve already started pulling some files together.”

“I’ll be right down,” Charles assures her.

“Good. Then you’d better prepare yourself, Charles. He’s going to want to take us off because of Erik.”

“He’ll listen to reason,” Charles says. Listening in, Erik gives him a nod. “He knows we’re his best.”

“I’ve got your back, Charles,” Ororo promises, and ends the call.

“I’m coming to the briefing,” Erik says flatly as Charles tucks his comm away, mind already racing. “I don’t care what MacTaggert says.”

“Erik, you need to respect your boss,” Charles says, “but lucky for you, I want you there. You said you and Alex have been doing your own research. Let’s go see how much of yours matches up with ours.”

“We’ve only been looking at it for the past few days,” Erik says, “but you never know. Fresh set of eyes never hurt.”

“Exactly,” Charles agrees, as they head back towards the door together, a united front again just like they should be, “you never know.”

Squeezing past a couple of alphas who have apparently decided stopping right inside the doorway
to hold their conversation is a good idea, Alex pushes his way into the crowded conference room. The big table has been pushed to one side of the room, chairs from all over dragged inside, and even still there are more people standing than sitting, filling in as much space as possible. The hologram projector is set up in the center of the room, right now displaying nothing but the VPD logo rotating slowly on the spot, while everyone hovers in orbit around it waiting for the briefing to start.

Lehnsherr is camped out against the back wall of the room so Alex crosses over to join him, ignoring the eyes of all the alpha cops in the room following him. There’s a low level of muttering throughout the gathered crowd but this time, at least, the topic of discussion is the case and not Alex.

His partner doesn’t say anything when Alex comes to a stop next to him. Lehnsherr leans back against the wall with his arms tightly folded, gaze locked on the hologram unblinkingly. Alex isn’t sure what kind of thoughts are running through Lehnsherr’s head right now, but then again Alex hasn’t ever been singled out as a serial killer’s next target.

“Uh, I got all the packets made.” One of the department interns approaches, a stack of copies in his hands. He’s a full head taller than Alex and his alpha scent is repugnant, thick and aggressive as it clouds Alex’s nose.

“You gonna pass them out, or just stand there?” Alex asks, staring him down.

The intern hesitates, looking from Alex to Lehnsherr, and suddenly Alex gets it—he wants Lehnsherr to back him up, and have the omega do the secretary work even though he’s the intern and Alex is the goddamn full time cop.

“Pass out the packets, Turner, and then get the fuck out of the conference room,” Lehnsherr growls without even lifting his gaze from the projector, and the intern doesn’t need to be told twice, shoving a copy at Alex with a resentful look before turning on his heel to start divvying the rest out to everyone else.

Relaxing by a degree or two, Alex shakes the packet. “Real paper?”

“The FBI is old-fashioned.”

“Oh.” Carefully, Alex leans against the wall next to him, keeping about a foot of space still between them. He’s not sure what to say. What is there to say? Sorry you can’t work on the case anymore because the psychopath we’re hunting down wants to kill you next? Sorry you’re kind of homeless because your mansion got blown the fuck up, possibly by the same deranged psychopath?

“Do you think there’s any Ruffles left in the vending machine?” Lehnsherr wonders aloud, and Alex has to consciously resist the urge to smack his own forehead. So much for that.

Before Alex can figure out how to respond, Xavier arrives with a coffee carrier with three to-go cups. He wends his way through the crowd over to them and hands one of the cups to Lehnsherr. To Alex, he says apologetically, “I don’t know what you like, so I went with black coffee. It’s what Erik likes.”

“It’s perfect,” Alex mutters, trying not to show how pleased he is that Xavier thought to bring him a coffee. It makes him feel much more like he’s part of an actual team, not that he’d ever fucking admit it. Then Lehnsherr might accuse him of having feelings and Alex would have to kill him.
Xavier flashes him an amused look before turning to Lehnsherr. “Are you ready?”

“Yeah.” Lehnsherr sips his coffee and holds up the briefing packet the intern had given him. “This has all the basic details. You and your team will fill in the details, and Summers and I will tack on whatever we’ve got. Easy.”

“Nothing’s ever easy with you,” Xavier sighs, which makes Lehnsherr grin. In his pocket, his comm chirps. “That’ll be Ororo, which means our boss is here. We’ll be back, and then we’ll start.”

Lehnsherr gives him a nod and Xavier winds his way back out of the conference room. Not as many of the alphas stare like they do at Alex, and a few even step politely out of Xavier’s way. Alex tries not to wonder if it’s out of professional respect for an FBI inspector, or if it’s because they know he’s Lehnsherr’s mate.

“You didn’t tell the Lieutenant about me,” Alex blurts out into the silence that’s settled between him and his partner. They’re in their own little pocket of space, so no one around them is paying them any attention or listening in. It’s been bothering Alex for the past few days, and despite all the shit that’s gone down he’s been waiting on tenterhooks for MacTaggert to call him into her office to fire him.

But MacTaggert hasn’t brought it up once, not even with a “after this is over I need to see you in my office” stipulation. The only conclusion Alex can draw is Lehnsherr hasn’t told her at all about how Alex lied on his application, and he isn’t sure why. As soon as he does, Alex will be fired, and Lehnsherr won’t have to deal with an omega partner any longer. It’s what Lehnsherr’s wanted from the start.

Lehnsherr glances up from where he’s skimming the packet. “I’m not going to tell MacTaggert about your little revenge mission, Summers.”

“You’re...not?” Alex asks suspiciously.

Taking a long drink from his coffee cup, Lehnsherr studies him with his intent gaze for a moment, unreadable. Alex refuses to balk, staring back as he waits for an answer. A lot of the things Xavier said yesterday back in their hotel room about Lehnsherr have given Alex pause, and he’s done some reexamination of all of his interactions with Lehnsherr, as well as Lehnsherr’s interactions with the other alphas on the force. He’s come to the somewhat uncomfortable conclusion that maybe Lehnsherr wasn’t always swinging his alpha dick around, and maybe he actually really was sticking up for Alex in his own assholeish way. It’s not a revelation Alex is entirely comfortable with yet.

But one thing’s for certain; the guy is married to Charles Xavier. Alex might not’ve been expecting Xavier to be married, it’s true, but he knows with certainty there’s no way Xavier would’ve married an alpha who would hold him back for being an omega.

“Didn’t I already tell you that?”

“No—well, yes, but I didn’t really have a lot of reason to actually believe you,” Alex says defensively when Lehnsherr raises an eyebrow.

“You know, my mother is a baseline,” Lehnsherr says idly, and Alex blinks at the sudden change of topic. “Unless you count her special ability of Being Number One Mom as her mutant power, I didn’t inherit my own abilities from her.”
“Okay,” Alex says, lost.

“I’m told my father, however, had some minor skills with electricity,” Lehnsherr continues. “I don’t really remember him well. He was a casualty in a convenience store robbery when I was three. The guys who hit up the store were all mutants, according to the police reports, and part of a small-time gang who thought because they had powers, they were entitled to whatever they wanted. When my father tried to stop them from taking 40 credits from the register, they killed him.”

Alex doesn’t say anything. Lehnsherr keeps talking, his voice still calm and measured, nearly clinically detached in a way that suggests old anger, banked and tempered by time but still smoldering nevertheless.

“In a way, his death is the reason I joined the police force. When I was old enough to ask, and old enough for my mother to give real answers, one part of her story always bothered me. I don’t need to recite the statistics for mutant-on-mutant crime to you. You know them. But it’s always treated as expected, like we’re all walking time bombs anyway, liable to go off at any second.” Lehnsherr cuts Alex another glance as he pauses for another sip of coffee. “Something else you’re familiar with, I imagine. But that day when my father was killed, my mother said the police officers on duty wrote him off completely. He was an omega, but the bottom line actually came down to his being a mutant. What did she expect, they all but said to her face, marrying one of their kind? She said it was as if her mate was part of the problem instead of one of the victims.”

“So you joined up to get revenge on the police, or the gang?”

The look Lehnsherr slants him now can only be amused. “Those officers were long retired by the time I was old enough to apply to the police academy after college. I joined the VPD because I had no desire to follow Charles into the FBI, and because I’m more interested in reforming the police work procedure on MOM crimes and mutant criminals in general. It makes much more sense to me to have a mutant task force specifically for dealing with mutant crime instead of a bunch of baselines who were raised to think of mutants as the Other.”

It’s...not a bad idea, Alex thinks. He could’ve used a mutant cop who understood him a little better than all the officers who had to deal with him during his foster home years when he’d been an angry little kid with the power to destroy half a house. He and Scott had been shuffled through a lot of different places because no one knew what to do with two orphaned omegas who had abilities normally coded for alpha mutants.

But he gets the feeling the point Lehnsherr is working towards isn’t his career goals. “And the gang?”

“They were a little more big-time once I got my badge,” Lehnsherr says with a thin, sharp smile. “And by that point Charles and I were married, too, and Charles will preach till he’s blue in the face that revenge isn’t worth it. But I spent the majority of my early career picking them off one by one, bringing them in on charges of theft, drugs, murder, whatever I could pin on them. But it was awhile till I found the original guys who’d done the convenience store. They’d gone up in the ranks over time, sticking to mostly drug running by the time I identified them. When we went to bust them, there was a shootout.”

He stops there. Alex doesn’t have to ask if Lehnsherr killed them or not.

“Was it worth it?” he says, after Lehnsherr’s taken another long sip of coffee.

“Depends on who you ask,” Lehnsherr says calmly. “Charles would still say no.”
“I’m asking you.”

“Yes. It was worth it.” Lehnsherr holds Alex’s gaze steadily. “But it came at a steep price.”

Alex draws in a steady breath. “You trying to tell me to stop?”

“No. I’m trying to tell you there’s always a price. You won’t see it coming. You won’t know what it is. But it’ll be there. So you have to ask yourself,” Lehnsherr says, “will you be able to pay it and live with yourself afterwards?”

Alex opens his mouth, but Erik shakes his head. “No, Summers, don’t answer that now.”

“You’re living with it,” Alex says instead. “The price. Whatever it was.”

Erik gives him another sharp grin. “I’m lucky. I have Charles. But I’ve always told him he’s far too forgiving.” His grin widens, sliding into what Alex has come to recognize as calculated-assholery territory. “Look at that, Summers, we just leveled up. You unlocked my tragic backstory and now we get to share feelings.”

Alex scowls, but before he can come up with a retort the door to the conference room slides open, and some of the murmuring in the room tickers off as a group of FBI agents enter the room, most of them recognizable from Lisa Gieger’s apartment, followed by Agents Munroe and Xavier. At the back of the pack is Lieutenant MacTaggert, walking beside another alpha dressed in a sharp black suit immediately marking him out as another fed. Alex feels every single one of his omega instincts switch to high alert as the alpha’s powerful scent washes over the room, making even the other alpha cops sit up a little straighter: whoever this guy is, he is unquestionably in charge.

“Director Logan Howlett,” Lehnsherr says, following Alex’s gaze. “One of the brass.”

“So this is deep shit if he’s here,” Alex says as the feds settle into place while Xavier and Munroe take up station in the center of the room by the projector.


“Alright, people,” MacTaggert says, and the murmuring in the room cuts out at once. “I’m going to hand the floor over to Munroe and Xavier. Once we’re all sufficiently briefed, we’ll be breaking you all out into task forces. Lehnsherr, why the hell are you here?”

“It was this or drown myself in the bathroom sink,” Lehnsherr says, and some of the room chuckles. “It’s on your conscience, whichever you pick.”

MacTaggert rolls her eyes.

“Lehnsherr’s got some additional info for us, Lieutenant,” Munroe says with a slight grin. “The least we can do is let him impart it before we pack him off to the safehouse for the duration of this case.”

Another few laughs are pulled from the room, and this time Lehnsherr rolls his eyes.

Howlett clears his throat. “I’ll hold Lehnsherr under the faucet myself if it means we can get on with this.”

Bracing himself for an explosion of alpha aggression, Alex is shocked when Lehnsherr merely barks out a laugh. “Then you’d have to answer to my husband.”
“Oh god,” Howlett says, sounding like he’d prefer anything else.

“Thank you, Lieutenant MacTaggert, for the introduction,” Xavier says with a brief smirk, and it’s in this exact moment Alex realizes he’s just as bad as Lehnsherr. “We also appreciate the use of the VPD’s conference room.”

“Take it away, Xavier,” MacTaggert says, sinking down into her chair.

“If someone could get the lights, please,” Xavier says, while Munroe slides a chip into the projector. The rotating VPD logo flickers, and is abruptly replaced by the FBI logo as the lights overhead dim. “Thank you.”

“I’m Senior Special Agent Ororo Munroe,” Munroe says, “and my partner, Senior Special Agent Charles Xavier, and I have been tracking this case for close to six weeks now. We’ll be providing you all with the evidence we’ve gathered, and outline the conclusions we’ve drawn so far. Afterwards we’ll be splitting you up into teams, like Lieutenant MacTaggert said, and each team will be given a specific set of tasks based on what we think we need in order to get this case wrapped up. It’s not going to happen overnight, but with the cooperation of the VPD, I think we can get the ball rolling.”

Someone taps the door of the conference room so it slides shut, sealing them all inside and cutting off any noise from the hallway. Alex is no mind reader, but he feels the focus in the room sharpen, only the soft rustling of paper as a couple people leaf through their packets breaking the silence. Beside him, Lehnsherr takes another sip of coffee but his gaze rests unblinkingly on Xavier, and for a split second Xavier’s eyes flicker over, something silent passing between them.

“Alright,” Xavier says, calling up the first display on the projector, “let’s begin.”

Charles and Ororo have been partners for just over four years, about as long as they’ve each been field agents. Charles thinks they make a good team—he tends to get more excitable about theories and pieces of evidence, whereas Ororo is calm and knows how to reel him back in. They have the art of giving a briefing down to a science now, seamlessly taking turns and picking up where the other left off as they circle slowly around the projector in the center of the room with all eyes on them.

“The victims are all omegas,” Ororo says, gesturing to the current hologram displaying the departed’s mugshots recorded during their autopsy. “So far we’ve had eleven cases—two cases on Mahird, two on Jeor, five on Grelmaines, and now two here on Visir.” The display switches to a hologram of their solar system, the six planets flying around their dual suns and lighting up with pinpoints as Charles continues.

“Chronologically, the two murders on Mahird happened first, followed by the five on Grelmaines. Between Jeor and Visir, however, things get interesting. The first of these last four murders happened on Jeor, two weeks ago. The second was Kurt Gieger here on Visir, a week ago. A day later, the third murder happened back on Jeor, and we finish out with Lisa Gieger here on Visir yesterday.”

*You didn’t tell me there was another murder in between the Giegers,* Erik thinks accusingly from
his position against the back wall.

*You know I couldn’t,* Charles answers dryly. Aloud, he says, “So until they got to Visir, our killer had been taking things one planet at a time, but in the past week alone he’s hopped back and forth between here and Jeor twice.”

“Keeping that in mind, let’s take a look at how the crime scenes are laid out.” Ororo snaps her fingers and the hologram shifts again, now displaying a list. “Each scene happens somewhere remote, where the killer has been able to catch the omega alone. All murders have happened outside except for the case of Lisa Gieger, which happened in her own home. Cause of death for every omega is exsanguination due to massive trauma to the abdomen, always with some form of a blade. Evidence is inconclusive whether we’re dealing with some kind of knife, or if we have a mutant with knife-like appendages instead.”

“Also found at most of the scenes is a blaster,” Charles says, pulling up a render of the one found in Lisa Gieger’s kitchen. “All of different make and model, and all strongly appear to have been fired by the victims shortly before their deaths, even though it’s currently illegal for omegas to possess blaster-class weapons. The only two scenes where we didn’t find any form of weapon were the first two murders, on Mahird.”

“All victims were unmated,” Ororo picks up, “but none of them appear to have been loners—on good terms with family, normal social circles. Age range sits between 25 to 35, with the very first case being an outlier, with a victim at age 47. We’ve gone out on a limb to speculate the first murder, and possibly the second, were perhaps our killer’s practice tests. Aside from being solely omegas, there doesn’t appear to be any gender preference. The count is just about even, with no clear pattern.”

“To throw a wrench in things, as of this morning Detective Lehnsherr has been singled out by the killer as a potential next victim,” Charles says, finding Erik’s gaze in the dim light, “despite the fact that he’s an alpha. The VPD is still making progress on determining the cause behind the attack on Detective Lehnsherr’s house, and once this meeting’s over our people will be looking at it too, to see if there’s any correlation between the explosion and these murder cases. It seems like an obvious connection, but we don’t want to run on assumption.”

*It’s your house,* Erik thinks snidely, but beneath the thought Charles can feel his resignation. Erik isn’t happy about being booted off the case, but he’s also not going to throw a tantrum large enough to get Charles kicked off as well.

Or at least not to get Charles kicked off because of him, Charles thinks as he glances back towards Logan. Logan’s eyebrows have disappeared somewhere into his hairline on the account of being raised so high, and while Logan’s particular mutation muffles his thoughts naturally from Charles’ telepathy, Charles imagines he can still hear Logan loud and clear anyway: *Really, Charles?*

Ororo notices too, because she catches Charles’ eye. *Hope you’re ready to convince him.*

*I am,* Charles assures her. “As of right now, Lehnsherr is off the case and arrangements are being made to transport him to an FBI safe house for his protection until further notice. We’ve already made provisions for his immediate family members too as a precaution.”

*That* hadn’t been a fun vidchat. Charles had only been able to stay for about half of the call before he’d had to rejoin Ororo to finish preparing their presentation for the briefing, but Edie hadn’t been pleased. Erik had decided not to tell her the exact reason why they were sending a couple of plainclothes FBI agents to hover around her at the hospital all day and follow her home at night, but it doesn’t take being a genius surgeon to put two and two together.
She still thinks it’s just because of the house, Erik thinks, reading the thoughts Charles is absently projecting at him along with a mental question mark. I haven’t told her about the serial-killer-who-might-want-to-kill-me thing.

You’re going to have to tell her sooner or later, Charles warns him.

Yeah, as soon as this case is closed and the asshole’s in police custody.

She’s going to be pissed, is all Charles says before he turns his attention back to the presentation.

“Our top priority at the moment is to get ahead of our unsub,” Ororo says. “Media’s having a field day with everything that’s happened in the last few days, and we’ve got to play catch up. We need to shut this down before we’ve got a mass, multiple-planet panic on our hands.”

Charles swipes across the hologram to bring up their next display: a visual of the six planets with the major transportation systems between them highlighted in vivid blue. “Our investigation has so far turned up no unauthorized landings or departures in the timeframes of the murders, so we suspect the unsub is traveling legally. That means they’re documented, which means they must be leaving a digital trail somewhere, somehow. VPD’s Immigration and Customs Unit will be assisting the FBI’s tech team in tracking down and verifying the identities of everyone whose travel history coincides with the timeline of the murders.”

“It’s a long list of names,” Ororo says, “but it has to be narrowed down. We’re hoping it’ll give us a more definitive pool of suspects.”

What? Erik pushes at Charles. You mean you don’t have any suspects yet?

We’re getting there, Charles replies. Be patient.

I’m being patient, Erik grumbles. He looks like a bored schoolboy in the back of the room, leaning against the wall with his arms crossed. Beside him, his partner is his polar opposite: Alex is staring avidly at the hologram display, furiously scribbling down notes on his datapad. He reminds Charles of himself when he’d been fresh out of the Academy, eager to please, determined to prove himself. Well, he thinks ruefully as he watches Alex glare at Erik when Erik leans into his space, perhaps not quite so eager to please.

“As of right now,” Ororo continues, “we’ve formed a general profile for our unsub. Keep in mind that the profile is flexible, so pay attention to it but don’t take it as law.

“From what we know, the unsub is physically fit, capable of subduing and moving their victim, at least for a short distance. They’re also physically unobtrusive or capable of disguising themselves well enough to avoid drawing attention from witnesses or passerby. That rules out any alien species with obvious physical differences that aren’t common to this system, as well as any extreme physical mutation that can’t easily be hidden under clothing.”

So your suspects are everyone in the system, Erik thinks dryly.

Don’t be such a downer, Charles thinks back pleasantly, we have a brand-new angle of the suspect possibly being someone who knows you personally.

Are you the murderer, Charles, Erik thinks, very seriously, and Charles has to keep from snorting.

You have such a low opinion of me, darling, Charles says dryly.

Erik gives the equivalent of a mental shrug. Just covering all my bases.
“Given that the majority of the murders have occurred on Grelmaines, there’s a good chance that the unsub is a Grelmaines native.” At Ororo’s gesture, the hologram narrows in on the planet in question. “We also suspect that they’re middle- to upper-class. Interplanetary travel isn’t cheap, after all, and the unsub’s been hopping planets like a sandjack hops dunes.”

“A good number of the murders have also taken place during normal working hours,” Charles interjects, “so we believe the unsub is either working a job with flexible hours or unemployed and living off their savings. Keep this in mind when digging into any financials.”

Ororo nods. “Finally, the unsub’s personal threat against Detective Lehnsherr opens up the possibility that this is someone either close to the VPD or to Lehnsherr specifically. We’ll be assigning a group to dig into Lehnsherr’s background to see if there’s anyone there that sticks out. Just be aware that we’re working that angle.”

_I hate this_, Erik says, any trace of humor vanishing.

_I know_, Charles replies, running a soothing touch over Erik’s mind. For an intensely private person like Erik, having a whole slew of agents and detectives dissecting his life must be hellishly uncomfortable. Charles has to admit that he’s slightly discomfited by the idea as well—Erik’s his husband, after all, and their lives are intricately tangled together. Delving into Erik’s life means delving into Charles’s own, and while he knows they have nothing to hide, the fact that strangers are going to know intimate details about them is disconcerting, to say the least.

Well, he amends, they won’t be strangers. They’ll be agents that Charles knows, at least as acquaintances, and detectives from the VPD that Erik knows. Still, it feels like a violation, even as necessary as it is.

_They’re not going to find much_, Erik says, arms crossed tightly. _Not much relevant anyway. Do you know how many enemies I’ve made in my career? How many people would love to claim credit for blowing up our fucking house?_

_It still warrants a look_, Charles tells him.

Erik’s mind prickles with annoyance. _I know_.

Charles sends another burst of warmth and reassurance, then adds, _I hope you’re ready to impress, darling_. “Now,” Charles says aloud, “I’d like to invite Detective Lehnsherr up here to fill us in on what the VPD has turned up. They’ve been running a parallel investigation over the last few days focusing specifically on Kurt Gieger’s case that may give us some additional insight.”

As all eyes swing to the back of the room, Erik takes a long, casual swallow of his coffee because he can never resist a bit of showmanship. Charles just barely keeps himself from rolling his eyes as Erik saunters up through the crowd like a Mahirdan dune leopard. Alex hovers behind him for a brief couple of seconds, obviously wondering if he’s invited, too. When Erik turns and shoots him an impatient look, Alex hurries after him, lifting his chin high and staring straight ahead, like he’s afraid making eye contact will invite mockery.

Their briefing is much shorter than Charles and Ororo’s. Alex’s voice is a little shaky at first on the account of nerves, but he evens out once he gets into the swing of things while describing the placement of blaster marks. Erik actually lets him do most of the talking, almost as if he’s allowing Alex to take point on the case, only chiming in here and there, but naturally, never to detract from what Alex is saying. Charles sends him a mental, pleased smile, and has to stifle a laugh when Erik brushes him off with a silent scoff.
Don’t even start accusing me of liking this jumped up little shit, Erik thinks at him warningly as they wrap things up.

I wouldn’t dare, Charles answers in just the right kind of mild tone to cause Erik to narrow his eyes. “Right,” Charles says out loud, “now that we’ve put half of you to sleep—” A gentle ripple of laughter runs through the room. “—let’s get to work. Agent Munroe and I have assembled a list of tasks and objectives. Teams will be integrated with members from both the FBI and the VPD who have applicable experience.” He picks up his datapad and swipes his fingers over the share function. “The team rosters and objectives should be coming to you in a moment. Agent Munroe and I will be running point on this, so any questions and new leads should be directed to one of us. Any questions now?”

He sweeps his eyes over the crowd and finds no uncertainty, no hesitation, only pointed determination and impatience to get started. This is a big case, and everyone knows it. What’s more, one of their own has been attacked and threatened—to any self-respecting member of law enforcement, VPD or FBI, there are few motivators more powerful than that.

“Alright then,” he says, bringing the lights back up with a gesture, “let’s get started.”

Everyone else has their assignments. Even the rookie’s been assigned a team; Summers glances down the list of names on his datapad, gives Erik a half-apologetic look, and detaches himself from the wall to go find his teammates. Only Erik remains still among the flurry of activity. It really fucking sucks.

Charles slips through the crowd and comes to lean against the wall next to him. “I’m sorry, darling,” he murmurs. “Perhaps you should head home. There’s nothing you can do here anyway.”

“There’s plenty I can do here,” he snaps. “You just won’t let me.”

Charles gives him a look but doesn’t rise to the bait. They both know Erik’s not really upset at Charles, not anymore at least. They’ve settled this argument already. Logically, Erik knows it’s a bad idea for him to stay on the investigation. He can’t stay objective when this case has struck so close to home, literally. But still, it grates on him to be sitting on the sidelines in such an important game.

“Look,” Charles says after a moment, “I have to talk to the boss for a minute, but then I’ll take you home, alright?”

Erik shakes his head. “I can take myself home. You have work to do.”

“No, it’s alright, I can spare half an hour or so. I want to check some things in the safe house anyway.”

“You don’t trust me not to slip my leash and run off on my own,” Erik says dryly.

“You can be quite slippery when you want to be,” Charles points out. When Erik directs an annoyed look at him, he just leans against Erik’s shoulder, a comforting weight against his side. “I trust you, darling, but I also want to personally see you settled in the safe house, for my own peace of mind.” Charles gives him that big-eyed, pleading look that works wonders on Erik’s mother,
Erik’s coworkers, suspects, random baristas—hell, pretty much everyone in the known universe. “You’ll give me that, won’t you?”

_You’re a manipulative bastard, do you know that?_ Erik tells him, peeved.

_I’m well aware,_ Charles says with obvious amusement. “Now wait here. I’ll be right—”

“Xavier!”

Both of them straighten. There’s an annoyingly commanding quality to Howlett’s voice that always makes Erik’s spine stiffen. He’s a broad man, tall, with the kind of resting asshole face that you wouldn’t want to throw a punch at in a bar. Erik’s always thought the man belongs more in a zoo than in law enforcement, but evidently grunting, swearing, and glaring gets you far in the FBI.

“Lehnsherr,” Howlett mutters, nodding in acknowledgement.

“Howlett,” Erik returns coolly.

“Gotta talk to you, Xavier,” Howlett says, turning to Charles. “Before you head out.”

“I thought you might, sir.”

Howlett glances pointedly at Erik. There’s a long pause before Erik realizes he’s being dismissed from the conversation. If this has something to do with the case, then Erik’s technically barred from hearing about it. Still, he bristles.

“He can stay,” Charles says. “It’s not directly relevant to the case anyway.”

“I think discussing whether you should even be allowed to stay on this investigation is kinda relevant to the case,” Howlett says dryly.

“I’m staying on,” Charles says firmly. “Ororo and I know this case better than anyone else. We’re the best chance you’ve got at finding this killer before this shitstorm gets any bigger.”

“You’re also married to the killer’s next target. That’s something to consider.”

“I am considering it,” Charles says, his voice even. “It’s another lead we have to follow up on in our investigation.”

After a moment, Howlett glances over at Erik again, this time obviously looking for his input. “Don’t look at me,” Erik says, shrugging. “I’m not allowed to have an opinion on this case anymore, remember?”

Howlett rolls his eyes but doesn’t push. He knows that Erik won’t impose any of his alpha privileges over Charles’ career, even if he might have a legal right to. If there’s one thing he and Howlett have in common, it’s that they know and respect that no one can stop Charles from making his own decisions. It’s one of the few reasons that Erik tolerates the man at all.

“I’m letting you stay on the case,” Howlett says eventually. “For _now_. But if I get a hint that you’re compromised, if we find any evidence the killer might be after you too—”

“You’ll take me off.” Charles nods. “That’s reasonable.”

“That’s what I’m known for,” Howlett grunts. “Being reasonable.”

Erik snorts. When Howlett glares at him, Erik snorts again, louder.
“Alright,” Charles says quickly, before their glaring escalates, “now that we’ve gotten that settled, I’m going to take Erik home. I’ll be back right after.”

Howlett glowers at Erik for another moment before jerking his head in a nod. “Don’t take too long.”

“How do you two have to act like you hate each other every time you meet?” Charles grumbles as he takes Erik’s arm and steers him toward the door.

“We do hate each other.”

“I have at least six holovids that say differently.”

Erik scowls at him. “You said you deleted those.”

“And lose all evidence of my husband and my boss sitting in each other’s laps singing Old Earth songs and crying into their drinks?” Charles smirks. “I think not.”

“I’m never going to another holiday party with you ever again,” Erik mutters, his cheeks reddening. Honestly, he’s not even sure why he goes every time—it’s not like he enjoys socializing.

“You say that every year,” Charles says cheerily.

FBI-issued shuttle ships are generally big, boxy, awkward creations, but Charles, by design or by chance, has managed to snag one of the sleeker, newer models that Erik secretly loves. As he slides into the passenger seat, he runs his powers over the narrow, streamlined pod, admiring the high-tech zeflon alloy of the body, the slimmer and lighter virilla mix of metal and glass in the forward viewscreen. It helps, having something soothing to focus his powers on. He half-suspects this is why Charles insisted on driving him to the safe house.

They turn off the M61 flyway onto a smaller avenue that leads to the east of the city. The buildings around them zip past in a gray, indistinct blur, the monotony broken up by dozens of flashing neon signs—advertisements, shop signs, decorative lights. All around them, hundreds of other shuttles navigate the flyway impatiently, ducking in and out of lanes, horns blaring. It’s lunchtime and everyone’s looking to go somewhere.

“Who else knows about this place?” Erik asks as they start to leave the denser parts of the city behind.

“Just me, Ororo, Logan, and Moira.”

“What about Summers?”

“He wasn’t relevant personnel.”

Erik’s eyes narrow. “He’s my partner,” he says, before he can think better of it.

Charles shoots him a delighted grin. “He’s grown on you, hasn’t he? You like him.”

“No.”

“Well that’s a shame. I like him.”

“You like everyone.”
“He’s a good kid, Erik. I wish you wouldn’t let—” Charles breaks off, glancing away. He makes a show of pretending to be distracted by a wobbling green shuttle speeding by just above them, but Erik knows what he’d been about to say.

“Finish your sentence,” he growls.

Charles sighs and grimaces—they both know his next words will tank Erik’s mood even further. “I wish you wouldn’t let what happened with Sebastian affect how you feel about Alex,” he says quietly. “That’s all.”

Erik grits his teeth to hold back the furious retort that jumps automatically to mind. It’s been years since Shaw, and still, his name sends a frisson of pain and regret through Erik. The memory is like a half-healed wound, just scabbed over enough not to actively hurt anymore but still raw enough to ache when he presses down on it.

“Shaw has nothing to do with how I feel about Summers,” Erik says finally, glowering down at the plasma ocean far below.

“Really?” Charles’ skepticism fills the air between them like a thick, uncomfortable fog. “Because before this, you’ve shot down any attempts from Moira to pair you up with anyone else. You didn’t want a new partner, not because you liked working alone but because of Sebastian. And now that she’s finally forced you together with Summers, you haven’t been very hospitable towards him.”

“It’s not my job to be hospitable towards him,” Erik snaps. “If he joined the VPD expecting to be coddled, then he’s an idiot.”

“He didn’t expect it to be easy.” Charles says. His voice is still calm and steady, a counterpoint to the heat rising under Erik’s skin. “He even expected you to hate him, you know. He couldn’t imagine any alpha cop being pleased with getting saddled with an omega partner. And believe me—I know how that feels. But it might do him good to know that you don’t hate him. You just hate that he’s not Sebastian Shaw.”

Erik clenches his jaw and glares down at Visir’s glimmering blue surface again, annoyed by how easily Charles cuts straight to the heart of the matter. If he’s being honest with himself, he’ll admit Charles is right. Erik hasn’t wanted a partner since Shaw because it’s never felt right. He lost his partner and no one was ever going to be able to replace him. And then along came Summers, and Erik knows he’s been a bigger asshole than necessary but he doesn’t feel like being nice to the kid. He won’t let anyone else bully Summers, but he’s not interested in making friends. He’s been down that road before.

The rest of the ride is filled with prickly silence. Normally when Erik’s in a bleak mood, he throws himself into his work to take his mind off everything else, but since there’s nothing he can get his hands on, he just sits in the passenger seat and stew.

The safe house is tucked into a small, isolated cul-de-sac in a neighborhood Erik doesn’t recognize. It’s the perfect locale: not to upscale, not to shabby, not too conspicuous and not obviously hidden. It’s bland, quiet, and forgettable.

“Home sweet home,” Charles says, gliding into the shuttle pad.

Erik just shoves out of the car without comment, unlocks the front door with a flick of his hand, and steps through.

The inside of the house is as colorless and boring as the outside. It takes Charles all of five minutes
to give Erik the grand tour, as he puts it, and they find themselves standing back in the beige living room before long, the air still somewhat chilly between them as Erik folds his arms and Charles waffles a bit.

“There will be two agents posted on the street, but they’ll be out of sight for the most part,” he says. “I told them it was unnecessary for anyone to sit in the house with you. I figured you would prefer it this way.”

“Thank you,” Erik says stiffly, because he does. Bad enough that he has to park his ass out here in the boondocks; it would be infinitely worse if he had to do it with babysitters.

Charles seems to hold in a sigh. “I should get back. Someone should be over eventually with our things from the hotel. I’ll try to be home for a late dinner, maybe, but don’t feel like you have to wait.”

Before he can turn for the door, Erik drops his arms and steps forward. “Charles. Let’s not...part like this,” he ends lamely, but Charles crooks a faint smile.

“That would be preferable,” he says loftily, but he wraps his arms around Erik tightly when Erik folds him into an embrace.

Erik inhales, taking a deep whiff of Charles’ scent. The house is sterile, at least, with no other traces of scents from other alphas or omegas, but it’s still going to be uncomfortable until it starts smelling like the two of them. Erik doesn’t want to be in residence here long enough for that to happen, though.

“We’ll solve this,” Charles promises, picking up on Erik’s thoughts. “For your sake, and for that of the omegas this coward has murdered.”

_I know you will_, Erik thinks at him, because despite his roiling resentment towards this entire situation, he believes in Charles. Charles is the best of the best.

There’s no one else Erik would want working this case in his stead, that’s for certain.

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**End Notes**

According to gdocs, I wrote this fic between October 2015 and November 2016. Zootopia came out in March 2016, so while there's a very coincidental similar feel between Alex Summers and Judy Hopps if you squint, the fic was actually not originally based on the movie!

Odds are I will never come back and finish this fic. Thank you for both reading this far & understanding! Rest assured, the endgame plan was always a happy, happy ending.

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